

# ○ THE POLITICS OF SACRIFICE

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I place Mark 10:45, one of the most-discussed verses in the gospel of Mark, in intertextual tension with the final episode of the TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Read through this lens, phrases such as 'son of man', 'give his life', and 'ransom for many' acquire significantly different meanings than they do for Christian-canonical readings. This leads to re-evaluation of the control that the canon has over readings of biblical texts, and the prospects for non-canonical reading of the Bible.

## 1. CHOSEN ONE

[B]iblical texts are literally sustained by interpretation, and the volume, ubiquity, and tenacity of interpretation make it impossible to dream that we can take the text back, through some kind of seductive academic striptease, to a pure and naked original state (Sherwood 2000, p. 2).

According to Yvonne Sherwood's brilliant study of the readings and re-readings of the book of Jonah, the afterlives of a text are its interpretations, which include not only its readings in the narrow sense of the term but any way in which the text gets picked up and played with in later texts of many sorts: novels, songs, paintings, TV shows, etc. Sherwood admirably surveys a wide range of Jonah's afterlives, in both the 'mainstream' discourse of Christianity as well as the 'backwaters and underbellies' of Jewish and other non-Christian appropriations of the text. She does not reinforce any single understanding of Jonah; instead, she states that '[r]ather than preserving an established reading, with minor variations, because it is established, perhaps we should be looking for doses of healthy defamiliarization' (Sherwood 2000, p. 181, n. 276). Although afterlives sometimes claim to be definitive renderings or of universal relevance, they are always localised, particular texts, jostling with one another in a contest for acceptance and authority.

Some textual afterlives are quite explicit, overtly rewriting the 'original'. Others are more subtle, and the intertextual replication of a biblical text may be indirect, barely detectable, and evidently unintentional. In these more subtle instances, Sherwood's concept obverts Jorge Luis Borges's concept of textual 'precursors'. Borges lists texts from Zeno, Han Yu, Kierkegaard, Robert Browning, Léon Bloy and Lord Dunsany as precursors of Franz Kafka's writings. 'In each of these texts we find Kafka's idiosyncrasies to a greater or lesser degree, but if Kafka had never written a line, we would not perceive this quality; in other words, it would not exist' (Borges 1964, p. 201). Whether Kafka himself was aware of all (or any) of these precursors is irrelevant.<sup>1</sup> Once one has read Kafka's stories, the meaning of the precursor text is irrevocably changed.

Through a kind of inverted causality, later texts transform earlier ones. As Sherwood says, the afterlives guarantee that we never read the precursor text in ‘a pure and naked original state’.

In the following, I argue that the final episode of the popular television series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, is an afterlife of Jesus’ saying in Mark 10:45: ‘the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’ (Revised Standard Version). First, I present an overview of the Buffy stories, followed by examination of crucial phrases in Mark’s saying: ‘ransom’, ‘son of man’, ‘many’, and ‘life’. Then I argue that although the TV show makes no specific reference to this saying, and indeed makes very few explicit references to the Bible, its final episode nevertheless transforms the gospel of Mark’s text into a precursor. This afterlife highlights the possibility suggested in Mark 3:28 that the ‘son of man’ is not a unique individual, but rather ‘many’. Insofar as Jesus himself is a son of man, he ‘gives his life’ not when he is crucified, but rather when he activates ‘son of man’ potentialities in others.

In the narrative world of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, both the TV series and the movie that preceded it,<sup>2</sup> vampires, demons and other creatures of supernatural evil are quite real. According to Buffy’s story, these evil powers are older than the human species and stronger than most human beings. Vampire slayers, young human women with special ‘demon powers’ that enable them to fight the evil forces, have protected weak humanity since the beginnings of civilisation. By conjuring up these slayers, ancient (male) sorcerers set in operation a supernatural mechanism that transforms certain young women into ‘chosen ones’, warriors whose speed, strength and perception has been enhanced, but who are otherwise quite human. As soon as one slayer is killed, usually in a fight with vampires or other supernatural beings, the mechanism automatically activates a new slayer.

That this mysterious mechanism works is made clear on numerous occasions throughout the TV series, but just how it works is never explained. Early on, Buffy dies but is quickly resuscitated by artificial respiration. A second slayer is automatically activated upon her death, complicating things further, but introducing the possibility of multiple slayers. Many potential slayers exist at any given time, but ordinarily only one slayer has active powers. She fights alone and thus rarely lives very long once she has been activated by the magical mechanism. Each active slayer is accompanied by a ‘watcher’, a sage who helps her adjust to her new status as hero/sacrifice and who serves as her trainer and advisor on supernatural matters.

Buffy Summers, the story’s principal character, is the latest in a long succession of vampire slayers. In the TV series, she lives in present-day Sunnydale, a typical California suburb, which just happens to be a ‘hell mouth’ or portal between the human world and multiple realms of supernatural evil. Buffy comes from a broken home; she is smart but anti-intellectual, an otherwise ordinary ‘valley girl’ who just wants to go on dates and cruise the malls with her friends – in other words, she just wants to be a normal middle-class teenager.<sup>3</sup> Buffy’s all-American aspirations conflict with her newly-acquired superhero responsibilities, and this contributes greatly to the considerable allegorical power of the stories.

The Buffy stories maintain a remarkable and unusual mix of comedy and horror. Although Buffy is young and sexy, she is hardly the stereotypical ‘dumb blonde’. Indeed, the stories regularly reverse gender and other role expectations. Much of the irony and humour of these stories derives from tensions created by the sudden insertion of supernatural and often richly symbolical entities into a world that is otherwise quite banal (‘if the apocalypse comes, beep me [on my pager]!’).

For example, crosses appear in nearly every episode, but the cross is never anything but a weapon to be used against vampires – it has no other (e.g., Christian) meaning to Buffy or her friends. The exception to this occurs when Buffy’s friend, Willow Rosenberg, who is explicitly Jewish, balks at using a cross to ward off vampires. Once Willow sees the practical effectiveness of the cross against vampires (and its lack of theological significance to other characters), she drops her objection.

Apart from recurring conflict between the slayer and her supernatural others, the narrative world of the Buffy stories is similar to the primary world of contemporary middle-class North America. Most people in this world are blissfully unaware of the existence and serious threat to their own welfare posed by the seemingly endless supply of evil supernatural beings. Like ourselves, they don’t believe in vampires or demons. Rupert Giles, Buffy’s watcher, explains that ‘people rationalise what they can and forget the rest’. In this ‘normal’ world, the slayer serves as a metonym for ‘difference’, as do the vampires, demons, werewolves and other monstrosities that she encounters.

Buffy rebels against rigid slayer and watcher traditions that have developed over millennia; she does get the slaying done, but always in her own iconoclastic way. In the movie, Buffy fights alone, as per the slayer tradition, but in the TV show she acquires allies, for the most part human friends, who both help and hinder her through their weakness, self-centredness and stupidity. Yet even in the TV series it is frequently emphasised that the slayer is finally all alone; she bears the entire burden of protecting humanity from these evils.

As the TV series approached its final episode in 2003, Buffy faced her greatest opponent ever, the ‘First Evil’, a primal spiritual wickedness supported by an army of super-vampires. Even with the aid of her loyal friends, Buffy is unable to match the power of the First, who begins to kill watchers and potential slayers around the world in its effort to eliminate all of its enemies. Buffy and Giles gather and attempt to protect whatever remaining potential slayers they can find. Then they discover a great talisman (‘the scythe’, an Excalibur-like sword), which Willow, who has matured over the years into a powerful witch, uses to magically alter the spell that originally created the slayer replacement mechanism. As a result, all of the remaining potential slayers (and apparently many other young women as well) are simultaneously transformed into active slayers. As Buffy says, ‘my power should be our power. Tomorrow Willow will use the essence of this scythe to change our destiny. From now on, every girl in the world who might be a Slayer, will be a Slayer. Every girl who could have the power, will have the power.’ Because of this, an army of pubescent slayers confronts the army of vampires, and the apocalyptic battle is finally won by forces of good. However, due to this transfer of powers, Buffy is no longer the only active slayer and thus she no longer bears full responsibility for saving the world. Once again she has side-stepped the system. She can finally walk off into the sunset and live the normal human life that she has always wanted.

## **2. SON OF MAN, VAMPIRE SLAYER**

If the study of theology tended to stimulate a person’s imagination, perhaps he would be more capable of dealing with new and creative situations, but for the most part theological studies concentrate on proving the given truth, rather than on dealing with multiple hypotheses (Nida et al. 1982, p. 100).

John Donahue and Daniel Harrington describe Mark 10:45 as ‘the key... to Mark’s Gospel as a whole’ (Donahue et al. 2002, p.315). Donahue and Harrington further maintain that Jesus’ saying offers ‘a profound conclusion to the teaching in the Markan journey narrative about christology and discipleship’. Similarly, Francis Moloney describes the verse as ‘the christological foundation for discipleship’ (Moloney 2002, p. 211). These scholars disagree with earlier understandings of the saying that treat it as an extraneous addition to Mark’s story.<sup>4</sup> The crux of this disagreement appears to lie in the phrase ‘ransom for many [*lutron anti pollōn*]’, one of the phrases that play crucial roles in my intertextual juxtaposition of this saying with Buffy’s story.

Mark’s gospel provides little help for the clarification of this phrase. The concept of ransom is not picked up anywhere else in the gospel of Mark, and indeed, this verse and its parallel in Matthew 20:28 are the only New Testament texts in which the Greek word *lutron* (redemption, price of release) appears at all. In contrast, *lutron* appears 20 times in the Septuagint, where it is nearly always in the plural.<sup>5</sup> As in other ancient Greek literature, the LXX usage of the word most commonly denotes a monetary payment and less often connotes a metaphorical or ‘cultic’ ransom (Büchsel 2000). Words that are related to *lutron*, such as *lutroō* (to pay a ransom), *lutrōsis* (ransoming) and *lutrōtēs* (redeemer), as well as other words related to these words, do appear in various other New Testament texts,<sup>6</sup> but not in Mark. Each of these words also appears numerous time in the LXX, but not in the ‘servant song’ of Isaiah 52:13–53:12, a passage that is often associated with Mark 10:45 (see further below).

Mark 10:45 is commonly read through the canonical, intertextual lens provided by these related terms, in New Testament texts such as 1 Timothy 2:5–6 (‘the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all [*antilutron huper pantōn*]’) and Titus 2:13–14 (‘our ... Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem [*lutrōsētai*] us from all iniquity’). Although none of the words noted above appears in the undisputed Pauline writings, many scholars also feel that the concepts involved echo those of Paul.<sup>7</sup> These New Testament texts, including Paul’s, contribute to the Christian interpretation of Mark 10:45 suggested by Moloney, Donahue and Harrington, and other scholars.

The phrase ‘son of man [*huios tou anthrōpou*]’, which also appears in Mark 10:45, does not appear in either 1 Timothy 2:5–6 or Titus 2:13–14. Instead, in those texts it is ‘Christ Jesus’ who is the ransom. However, despite Mark’s incipit (‘Jesus Christ’, 1:1), the relation of Jesus to the Christ in the gospel of Mark is problematic. Peter’s claim that Jesus is the Christ results in an exchange of angry words between them (8:29–33, and especially ‘get behind me, Satan’), and Jesus’ reply to the high priest’s question, ‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?’ (14:61–62), is hardly unequivocal. Jesus’ substitution of ‘the son of man’ for ‘the Christ’ in his responses both to Peter and to the priest does not equate the two phrases, but rather places them in tension with one another. It does not solve the problem of Jesus’ identity.

We cannot assume that the Christ is the son of man, or vice versa, or that either of these terms refers unambiguously to Jesus in the gospel of Mark. Mark’s Jesus never says ‘I am the son of man’ or ‘I am the Christ’, or words to that effect. Nevertheless, Mark’s Jesus does use the phrase ‘son of man’ on numerous occasions, to say several different things.<sup>8</sup> Some of these son of man sayings come true for Jesus himself (suffering and death), but others (coming in clouds or with angels) do not come true – not in Mark’s story, anyway.

The widespread understanding that the phrase ‘son of man’ in Jesus’ words in the gospel of Mark refers uniquely to Jesus himself is mistaken. The son of man is a character in a story told by Jesus. He is a virtual being, a surface or ‘reality effect’ – a phantasm, the ghost of identity (Mark 6:49). On at least one occasion, and perhaps several others, Mark’s Jesus indicates that other persons than himself may be the son of man. In Mark 9:12–13, the son of man, who ‘suffer[s] many things’ and is ‘treated with contempt’, is compared to Elijah, to whom ‘they did... whatever they pleased’. Both Elijah and the son of man are treated harshly, ‘as it is written’. Jesus is identified as Elijah in Mark 8:28, but only indirectly, and in the transfiguration scene he is distinct from Elijah (9:4). However, Mark 6:14–16 brings together Jesus, Elijah and John the Baptist, and 11:27–33 ties the question of Jesus’ authority to that of John. Thus Jesus’ saying in Mark 9:12–13 may connote that Elijah (in the form of John) was the, or a, son of man. Furthermore, if ‘son of man’ refers by way of Elijah to John the Baptist, then perhaps Jesus also says in 10:45 that John the Baptist has given his life as a ‘ransom for many’. The reader has already been told of John’s unpleasant fate (1:14, 6:21–28).

In Mark 2:27–28, the son of man, who is described by Jesus as ‘lord even of the sabbath’, is placed in parallel to ‘man’, for whom ‘the sabbath was made’, and also to David (2:25–26). Although Jesus is identified as the ‘son of David’, he questions whether the Christ could be the son of David (10:47–48, 12:35–37). David and Elijah are great men in the Jewish scriptures, but they are no more than human beings, as is John the Baptist in the gospels. These uses of the phrase ‘son of man’ in the gospel of Mark indicate that at least some of the time, Jesus uses that phrase in its most common Septuagint sense, to connote simply ‘human being’. This must raise a question about how the phrase is used elsewhere in Mark, including the saying in 10:45.

A crucial text appears in Mark 3:28, where the phrase is in the plural and denotes sinful and blasphemous human beings: ‘all sins will be forgiven the sons of men [*huiois tōn anthrōpōn*], and whatever blasphemies they utter.’ Many scholars refuse to consider 3:28 as a ‘son of man’ saying, for evidently theological reasons. It is important to these Christian scholars to maintain the unique connection of the son of man to Jesus. In Mark 3:28, the multiple sons of men appear to be the crowd that is sitting around Jesus, whom he calls his ‘brother, and sister, and mother’ – that is, ‘whoever does the will of God’ (3:35). Brothers and sisters and mothers appear again in Mark 10:29–30: ‘there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands.’ Although not here called sons of men, these ones who ‘have left everything’ and follow Jesus (10:28) anticipate the many potential slayers in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*’s final episode, who leave everything to join Buffy’s apocalyptic army.

These sayings in the gospel of Mark imply that Jesus is merely one among many male and female, thoroughly human, sons of men.<sup>9</sup> They also intensify the perplexing question of the relation between the human sons of men and the more spectacular and possibly supernatural son of man who appears in other sayings of Jesus in Mark. For example, an apocalyptic son of man appears in Mark 13:26–27, ‘then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.’ Both this son of man and the sinful and blasphemous human beings of 3:28 apparently do the will of God. Nevertheless, the relation between them is

puzzling; it cannot be one of simple identity. Buffy's story will help to answer this question in Part 3 below.

The phrase 'sons of men' in Mark 3:28 does not denote either a unique or a supernatural being. Indeed, if these sons of men have something to do with the son of man who appears in other Markan sayings of Jesus, then the prevailing understanding of 10:45 must be reconsidered. The theological implication of the saying would then be considerably different from what Moloney and others suggest, and 'to give one's life as a ransom' would no longer signify a unique sacrifice, the action of a singular, heroic messiah or vicarious saviour. Instead, it would become a statement about the function of humanity in general, or at least of those sons of men who do the will of God. It would be relevant to the purpose of Jesus' life only if Jesus were understood to be one among many sons of men.

In Mark 10:45, the son of man gives his life 'for many', *anti pollōn*. *Anti* means 'over against', 'on behalf of', 'in return for', or 'instead of'. Some scholars insist that the meaning of the phrase in 10:45 must be limited to the son of man offering his life as a substitute, instead of the many, but the reasons for this restriction of meaning are again theological. They derive from the ideological needs of Christian readers, and from the canonical control of meaning. For example, Friedrich Büchsel asserts dogmatically that Mark's Jesus is the unique son of man, that the saying in 10:45 'is thus expounding the Messianic work of Jesus', and further that 'in this context it can apply only to the death of Jesus', as a result of which many ('all', according to Büchsel 2000) are freed from sin.<sup>10</sup>

Just as it is commonly supposed that Jesus refers to himself alone with the phrase 'son of man' in Mark 10:45, and that to 'give his life as a ransom' has to do with the supernatural, vicarious redemption of sinful souls, so it is often further supposed that the word 'many' (*polus*) in this saying refers to those who are 'saved' by the vicarious death of Christ, namely, those who have faith in Jesus as the Christ. According to this view, the 'many' are comparable to the 'we' who speak in Isaiah 53:4–5:

Surely he has borne our griefs  
and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken,  
smitten by God, and afflicted.  
But he was wounded for our transgressions,  
he was bruised for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that made us whole,  
and with his stripes we are healed.

This would provide Moloney's 'christological foundation for discipleship'.

Isaiah 53:12 ('he bore the sin of many [*pollōn*']) is frequently cited in support of such readings of Mark 10:45. In this way, salvation from sin for 'many' is tied to the sacrifice of the son of man's life through understandings of 'ransom' brought in from New Testament texts such as 1 Timothy 2:5–6 or Titus 2:13–14 (noted above). Nevertheless, although *polus* appears numerous times in the LXX version of the 'servant song' in Isaiah 52:13–53:12, neither *lutron* nor any related words appear in that text. Indeed, Peter Quinn-Miscall (2001, p. 199) claims that the interpretation of this song in Wisdom of Solomon 4:20–5:23 contains 'no hint of the vicarious suffering of the righteous', and he describes the servant of Isaiah 53 as 'anonymous' and 'enigmatic' (p.

203). Furthermore, '[w]hat is not stated is how and why this group [the 'we' of Isaiah 53] experienced the change... from misery to glory' (pp. 196–197). Indeed, it is not clear that the servant has died. Quinn-Miscall also emphasises connections between this song and the paradox of understanding and salvation in Isaiah 6:9–10, which also plays a significant role in Mark 4:11–12.

Although it is considerably shorter than the other canonical gospels, the gospel of Mark uses the word *polus* more often than any of them. Included among the various ways that Mark uses the word are numerous references to groups of human beings.<sup>11</sup> Often the term denotes specific groups such as tax collectors or diseased people, but at other points the denoted group is more vague. In every case, however, the 'many' appear to be some group of people who are around Jesus at the time. For example:

- for he had healed *many*, so that all who (*hosoi*, 'however many') had diseases pressed upon him to touch him (3:10).
- And on the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue; and *many* who heard him were astonished (6:2).
- For *many* were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat (6:31).
- And *many* spread their garments on the road (11:8).
- For *many* bore false witness against him (14:56).

There is no reason to think that 'many' denotes the same group of people every time that it occurs in Mark. However, the term is never used to refer unequivocally to a Christian community after the death of Jesus (Isaiah's 'we'), and it is never equivalent to 'all'.

*Polus* appears in four sayings of Jesus, in addition to Mark 10:45, that denote some group of human beings:

1. But *many* that are first will be last, and the last first (10:31).
2. And he sent another, and him they killed; and so with *many* others, some they beat and some they killed (12:5).
3. *Many* will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead *many* astray (13:6, used twice).
4. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for *many* (14:24).

The first and third of these sayings indicate that the 'many' may not always be followers of Jesus. The fourth instance, Mark 14:24, will be discussed in Part 3, below.

If Jesus is the 'beloved son' of the vineyard parable (Mark 12:1–9), then the 'many others' in the second instance, Mark 12:5, may allude to the 'brothers and sisters and mothers' of Jesus from 3:34–35, the sons of men. *Polus* does not appear in Mark 3:19b–35, the larger passage in which Jesus' plural 'sons of men' saying occurs. However, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* invites Mark's reader to identify the multiple sons of men of 3:28 with the 'many' for whom the son of man gives his life in 10:45. Like the potential slayers who gather around Buffy before the final battle, the many ransomed ones are not all people or even all Christians. They are the brothers

and sisters and mothers of Jesus – that is, sons of men such as the crowd seated around him in Mark 3:32–35. The many sons of men, like the potential slayers, need only to be activated, or in other words, ransomed. The gospel of Mark eventually tells us that Jesus is one who loses his life/takes up his cross (8:34–35) and who obeys the will of God (his ‘father’, 14:36), like the other sons of men, his ‘mothers and sisters and brothers’. Thus among the many possibilities of ‘many’ in Mark 10:45 is this: that the son of man gives his life as a ransom for the sons of men.

### 3. THE SIMULATION OF SACRIFICE

Where religions once demanded the sacrifice of bodies, knowledge now calls for experimentation on ourselves, calls us to the sacrifice of the subject of knowledge...

One must give rise to thought as intensive irregularity – disintegration of the subject (Foucault 1977, pp. 63, 183).

The ‘son of man’ is connected to ‘many’ in Mark 10:45 by a ‘ransom’ which is the giving of life. ‘Life’ in this saying is not *zōē*, which in Mark is eternal life, or the kingdom of God, as opposed to hellish ‘Gehenna’. *Zōē* is something which you seek to receive or enter into, something wonderful. Nor is ‘life’ *bios*, the manner or means of living. Instead, ‘life’ in Mark 10:45 is *psuchē*, the soul or self, or as Michel Foucault says (in the quotes above), the subject of knowledge. *Psuchē* is something to be saved or lost, or in this case given (*didōmi*) – that is, something that you already possess, not what you seek.<sup>12</sup> The great commandment is to love God with all of your *psuchē* (12:30), and in Gethsemane, Jesus’ *psuchē* is ‘very sorrowful, even to death’ (14:34). The tension between these concepts surfaces in Mark 10:17–22. The rich man wants to receive *zōē*, and Jesus tells him to give away (*didōmi*) all that he has (his *psuchē*, although that word is not used).

In a crucial saying at Mark 8:35–37, the word *psuchē* appears four times (half of the Markan total) in a paradoxical formulation:

For whoever would save his *life* will lose it; and whoever loses his *life* for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his *life*? For what can a man give (*didōmi*) in return for his *life*?

Your *psuchē* is what you are, your person, so that if you wreck or waste (*apollumi*, lose) it, there is no ‘you’ left, nothing to give. This destruction is not temporary, but absolute. And yet, says Jesus, you can only preserve (*sōzō*, save) this life of yours when you have destroyed it. Your life is only yours when you lose or give it.

Perhaps the one who gives her life as a ransom for many, saves it as a son of man. The phrase, ‘son of man’, does not appear in Mark 8:35–37, but ‘man’ (*anthrōpos*) does. However, the one who denies herself and takes up her cross and follows Jesus (according to 8:34), thereby utterly destroying her life, sounds very much like the son of man who comes ‘not to be served but to serve’. Indeed, if the son of man is not necessarily a unique or supernatural being, then what distinction can there be? If the son of man gives his life for others, then those who lose their lives



‘for my sake and the gospel’s’ are the sons of men from Mark 3:28, the mothers and brothers and sisters of Jesus who do the will of God. In other words, they are the ‘many’.

In Mark 14:24, Jesus tells the disciples, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many (*huper pollōn*).’ The repetition of ‘for many’ in Mark 10:45 and 14:24 suggests that Jesus is indeed a son of man who gives his life for many.<sup>13</sup> In Exodus 24:5–9, Moses pours out the blood of sacrificed oxen to seal the covenant between God and the people of Israel. In the gospel of Mark, Jesus’ Passover cup of wine, poured out for himself and the twelve disciples, simulates the Mosaic sacrifice and becomes ‘my blood of the covenant’. Just as Buffy’s final episode creates Mark 10:45 as a precursor, so 14:24 creates Exodus 24:5–9 as a precursor.

As ‘blood of the covenant’, Jesus’ wine simulates a sacrifice, the sacrifice that is the son of man, who pours out his life/*psuchē* for many. The blood of Moses’s oxen is yet another simulacrum that belongs to this signifying chain, a simulation of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel. As Gilles Deleuze says, ‘[t]he simulacrum is not a degraded copy. ... The simulacrum functions in such a way that a certain resemblance is necessarily thrown back onto its basic series and a certain identity projected on the forced movement’ (Deleuze 1990, pp. 262, 265).<sup>14</sup> The simulacrum is the copy that precedes its model, the translation that produces its original; it is the afterlife that creates its precursor. The ‘basic series’ here includes not only the blood of oxen and Jesus’ wine, but also Passover blood and Jesus’ bloody crucifixion. At both ends of this signifying chain there is a promise that has not been fulfilled: to drink wine new in the kingdom of God (Mark 14:25).

A son of man named Jesus awakens many sons of men to the kingdom of God, a kingdom that is ‘at hand’ (Mark 1:15), to be received or entered into by the one ‘who has ears to hear’ (4:9). Like the son of man, the kingdom is a potentiality, dormant within many. It is *zōē*, not a life that is given but a seed that grows secretly every day (4:26–29). Much of the gospel of Mark’s ‘journey narrative about christology and discipleship’ in Mark 9 and 10, which ‘concludes’ in 10:45 (Donahue et al. 2002, p. 315), centres on the kingdom of God and the radical lifestyle that this kingdom requires, including absolute poverty, the abolition of divorce and the mutilation of sinful body parts. Nevertheless, Mark’s gospel is cagey about telling the reader much about the kingdom of God – it is, after all, a ‘secret’, to which the implied reader, like ‘those outside’, has not been admitted (4:11–12). The ‘kingdom of God’ is thus yet another simulacrum.

In this series of symbols, Mark’s reader encounters the ‘vertigo of the simulacrum’ (Deleuze 1990, p. 262), the limitlessness of semiosis. As Jacques Derrida says, ‘[o]ne can play with the secret as with a simulacrum, with a lure or yet another strategy. One can cite it as an impregnable resource... But this very simulacrum still bears witness to a possibility which exceeds it’ (Derrida 1995, p. 30). The phrase, ‘give his life’, in Mark 10:45 need not connote the death of a unique son of man. Indeed, it only does so when connotation is severely restricted by ideology, that is, by the christological interests of Christian readers. The series of simulacra instead suggests that the miraculous powers associated with Jesus – analogous to Buffy’s slayer powers – are not some characteristic that he alone possesses, but are instead powers that flow back and forth between himself and others.

Jesus is not the only one who gives his life. He tells the haemorrhaging woman that ‘your faith has made you well’ (Mark 5:34) after she touches him, without his permission. She ‘gives her life’ in order to release the flow of Jesus’ healing power. Jesus also responds to the Syrophen-

ician woman's reversal of his own words by saying, 'for this saying you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter' (7:29) – implying that her powerful words have ransomed her demon-possessed daughter, not anything that he has done. Boundaries between male and female, clean and unclean, Jew and Gentile, dogs and children are blurred and nothing is merely itself. The 'subject' disintegrates.

Jesus tells the father of an epileptic boy that 'all things are possible to him who believes' (Mark 9:23). He also tells his disciples that 'no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me' (9:39) and that 'whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours' (11:24).<sup>15</sup> Each of these sayings suggests a giving of self/*psuchē*. As we have already seen, Mark 8:34–35 suggests that anyone may give his life: 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.' The giving of the son of man's life is not a unique event.

This connection between Jesus and other sons of men is made explicit when the final episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is read as an afterlife of Mark 10:45. Unlike Buffy's story, the gospel of Mark says nothing about the mysterious mechanism through which the awakening of son of man powers happens. Mark merely implies that Jesus is not the only son of man, and that there are 'many' who already have within them the power to cast out demons, to heal, to utter amazing and impenetrable words and to do even more remarkable things, such as casting mountains into the sea. Thus although the son of man is a human being, she is a human being with remarkable potentialities, not unlike the dormant slayers. Not every human being becomes a son of man, just as not every woman becomes a vampire slayer. Mark suggests that these sons of men are let loose – like the slayers, their power is magically triggered – when a son of man 'gives his life' for them. That is redemption.

The simulation that is *psuchē* in Mark 10:45 also contaminates the son of man. In Mark, the son of man is a simulacrum of Jesus, but also of his 'brothers and sisters and mothers' who do the will of God – that is, a simulacrum of the many. The son of man in the gospel of Mark is always both singular and plural, but never unique, and never merely itself. 'The same and the similar no longer have an essence except as *simulated*, that is as expressing the functioning of the simulacrum. There is no longer any possible selection' (Deleuze 1990, p. 262, Deleuze's emphasis).

That the son of man is a simulacrum is made most clear in the phrase from Daniel 7:13, a verse that echoes in Jesus' apocalyptic son of man sayings. In this verse, the phrase is not merely 'son of man,' but 'one like a son of man'.<sup>16</sup> Daniel's 'one like' (*hōs*) disappears from Jesus' sayings in the gospel of Mark, not because simulation has ended, but because simulation has become ubiquitous. The son of man in Mark 8:38, the verse that follows immediately after the paradox of *psuchē* in 8:35–37, is not one who loses or gives his life, and not one who serves. This apocalyptic son of man 'comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels'. He is ashamed of those who are ashamed of Jesus, the ones who abjure 'me and my words' in order to save their lives – like Peter, whom Jesus himself rebukes in 8:32–33. Mark 8:34–37 does not refer explicitly to the son of man, but 8:31 does. Mark 8:31–38 displays the puzzling range of connotations associated with the son of man, and Jesus' puzzling relation to the son of man – puzzles that surface frequently in the gospel of Mark.

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* illuminates these puzzles, making sense of Jesus' son of man story. Buffy's confrontation with the First Evil is every bit as apocalyptic as Jesus' saying in Mark 8:38, and through it she once again prevents the world from ending, but she does so not by being served, but by serving, and by giving her life/*psuchē* as a ransom for many. Buffy is an apocalyptic hero ('I am the thing that monsters have nightmares about') who is also a suffering and very human servant. She gives her life to activate her followers as slayers, just as Mark's Jesus transforms his followers into sons of men.

#### 4. BUFFY READS THE BIBLE

What we hear, therefore, is the *displaced* voice which the reader lends, by proxy, to the discourse: the discourse is speaking according to the reader's interests. Whereby we see that writing is not the communication of a message which starts from the author and proceeds to the reader; it is specifically the voice of reading itself: *in the text, only the reader speaks* (Barthes 1974, p. 151; Barthes's emphases).

Our reading of biblical texts is governed by theological interests. This is true even for those readers who no longer have (or never had) any conscious connection to synagogue or church, and who would quickly reject any such interests if they were made conscious of them. Biblical studies still owes much to belief that concepts of sin and salvation define the relation between God and human beings, and to the notion that the canon of scriptures forms a coherent and complete whole that provides an essential context for correct understanding of the component texts. Indeed, study of the Bible may be impossible apart from theologically loaded concepts such as these.

Bringing such interests to light is one reason for continuing study of the Bible, and challenging such interests is another. Extra-canonical reading of biblical texts may lead us to rethink salvation as something other than a 'spiritual' recovery of sinful souls, as conventional Christian dogma (and the canonical matrix) would have it, but as a material and even 'political' process. It may lead to reevaluation of salvation as a flow of power, as immanent deterritorialisation of the body and decomposition of the self. So reconsidered, salvation would not reverse the mind/body opposition, but rather would deconstruct that binarism and the theological concepts that accompany it.

Mark 10:45 is commonly understood to express Christian belief that Jesus Christ, as the son of man, offers the ultimate degree of service. Jesus exemplifies the behaviour that he requires of his followers in 10:42–44: 'You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.' Yet Christian belief also maintains that Jesus remains exceptional, the unique ransom. So read, Mark 10:45 conforms to the idea developed elsewhere in the New Testament, and especially in the writings of Paul, that the death of a unique being, here called the 'son of man' but elsewhere referred to as 'Jesus Christ', has served as payment for the sins of all those who believe in him and follow him in the Christian way of service – that is, the 'we' of Isaiah 53, redefined as the church.<sup>17</sup> Jesus dies to save the (Christian) world.

The canon of the Christian Bible, as supplemented by numerous creeds, commentaries, and other theological statements, authorises this Christian ‘dynamic equivalence’ between Mark’s ‘son of man’ and Jesus (and the Christ), between the phrase ‘give his life as a ransom’ and Jesus’ death on the cross, and even between the words ‘many’ and ‘all’. In other words, the ransom payment has been made. Apart from the canon and its theological reinforcements, these equivalencies would be far less compelling in the reading of Mark 10:45. This same ideological mechanism assures the Christian that Christ was raised from the dead and reigns forever with God. This raises the further question, which will not be pursued here, of what exactly Jesus has ‘given’ in his time of ‘service’ on the cross. A few hours of pain and humiliation in exchange for an infinite reward is not much of a sacrifice.

In contrast, reading Mark 10:45 as a precursor to Buffy’s awakening of many vampire slayers in the conclusion of the TV series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, deprives Jesus’ crucifixion of any special spiritual significance.<sup>18</sup> Jesus does not die to pay for our sins, not in the gospel of Mark – instead, he dies for much simpler and more ordinary reasons: because he has angered the wrong people. The execution of Jesus is nothing more than a secular political action taken by powerful interests, who retaliate against and neutralise a putative threat to the Temple establishment and to the Roman Empire. It has nothing to do with giving a life as a ransom for many.

To be sure, Jesus does announce that the son of man will suffer and be killed (not ‘give his life’) and rise again, three times in the gospel of Mark (8:31, 9:31, 10:33–34). However, there is no hint of ransom in these announcements. In Mark’s story as it actually unfolds, Jesus is crucified as a result of betrayal and the conflict of power, not in an act of voluntary death. Jesus fulfils the three son of man predictions as one son of man among many, and not as a vicarious offering (in contrast to Moses’s oxen). In Gethsemane, despite his eventual acquiescence, Jesus is unwilling to die (‘remove this cup from me... not what I will’, Mark 14:36). The series of simulations comes to an end. He is abandoned both by his followers and by God (14:34–42, 15:34), and he dies alone and in despair on the cross, in contrast especially to the passion stories in the gospels of Luke and John, where Jesus does explicitly offer himself as a sacrifice.

Over the course of one movie and many dozens of television episodes, Buffy Summers dies twice, and rises again twice. She too saves the world – indeed, after Buffy dies the second time (in a voluntary and vicarious self-sacrifice), the inscription on her tombstone reads, ‘she saved the world, a lot’. However, she does not ‘give her life’ until she lets loose the other slayers. In the gospel of Mark, Jesus sacrifices his *psuchē*, his life, many times to ransom various of his many brothers and sisters and mothers, before he is killed. As in Buffy’s story, Jesus’ sacrifice, the gift of his *psuchē*, remains both politically and spiritually powerful, even though it becomes something quite different than the ticket to other-worldly paradise for his followers that it is in the orthodox Christian view.<sup>19</sup> Jesus still saves the world (‘a lot’), but in a different way.

Removed from the semiotic control provided by the canon, and from the apparatus of Christian orthodox ideology, the gospel of Mark becomes what Roland Barthes called a writerly text. The writerly text ‘make[s] the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text’ (Barthes 1974, p. 4). Despite the parenthesis at Mark 13:14 (‘let the reader understand’), the reader’s task is not to understand (consume) the writerly text, but to produce it, much as the afterlife produces its precursor. When Mark is no longer restricted to a canonical reading, then *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* can be recognised as one of many possible afterlives. Through this af-

terlife the reader may touch the precursor text and the son of man that it describes, much as the haemorrhaging woman touches the hem of Jesus' garment (Mark 5:25–34). Then that son of man gives his life for the reader, too, awakening the son of man in her. She becomes one of the 'many'.

Thus Buffy herself serves as a simulacrum (both resurrection and afterlife) of the son of man, who is himself the simulacrum of humanity. Buffy's story rewrites the gospel of Mark, not at the level of the signifier, but at the level of the signified. The chosen one is not a ruler but a servant, and she sacrifices her uniqueness in order to ransom others – that is, to activate many other sons of men. Buffy does not die – not in her last episode, anyway – when she 'gives her life' to awaken many young women to active slayer-hood. Indeed, her own slayer powers are not at all diminished by this act of redemption, although she must (gratefully) relinquish her unique status. The afterlife provided to the gospel of Mark by *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* suggests that insofar as Jesus is the son of man, he gives his life not when he is crucified, but rather when he gives away his uniqueness.<sup>20</sup>

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> I am perhaps exceeding Sherwood's concept, at least as she develops it in her book. However, see her reading of Jonah in relation to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (2000, p. 260). She could as well have mentioned Kafka. Borges on precursors is quoted in an epigraph to Foucault (1977).
- <sup>2</sup> *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* first appeared as a 1992 movie, starring Kristy Swanson as Buffy and Donald Sutherland as her watcher. It was then reincarnated into the television series of the same title, which ran from 1997 to 2003 on the WB and UPN networks and starred Sarah Michelle Geller as Buffy and Anthony Stewart Head as her watcher. The TV series picks up where the movie ends, forming a more or less continuous narrative. Joss Whedon and Kaz and Fran Rubel Kuzui have been closely involved with the story, as creator, writer, director, and producer, from its beginning.
- <sup>3</sup> In this regard, Buffy is reminiscent of another modern American superhero, Clark Kent (Superman). See Aichele (1997).
- <sup>4</sup> See Taylor (1953:445–446).
- <sup>5</sup> Exodus 21:30, 30:12, Leviticus 19:20, 25:24, 26, 51–52, 27:31, Numbers 3:12, 46, 48–49, 51, 18:15, 35:31–32, Proverbs 6:35, 13:8, Isaiah 45:13.
- <sup>6</sup> *Lutroō*: Luke 24:21, Titus 2:14, 1 Peter 1:18. *Lutrōsis*: Luke 1:68, 2:38, Hebrews 9:12. *Lutrōtēs*: Acts 7:35. Another related word, *apolutrōsis* (redemption), appears in Luke 21:28.
- <sup>7</sup> *Apolutrōsis* appears in Romans 3:24, 8:23, and 1 Corinthians 1:30 (as well as in Ephesians, Colossians, and Hebrews). An unrelated word with similar meaning, *exagorazō* (buy up, redeem), appears in Galatians 3:13 and 4:5 (and again in Ephesians and Colossians). See Taylor (1953, p. 445) and Nineham (1963, p. 180), re Romans 3:24–25, 1 Corinthians 7:23, Galatians 3:13, etc.; see also Donahue et al. (2002, p. 315).
- <sup>8</sup> For a review of 'son of man' language in the Bible, with special reference to the gospel of Mark, see Aichele (2001, pp. 151–172).
- <sup>9</sup> I make no apology for the evident sexism of Mark's language. Recent translations, such as the New Revised Standard Version, turn 'sons of men' in Mark 3:28 into 'people' or similar gender-inclusive terms but retain the gender-specific phrase, 'son of man', when it occurs in the singular and in Jesus' words, and thus they concur with the prevalent belief that the male Jesus alone is the son of man that he describes. They conceal from the reader the possibility of many male and female sons of men.

10 Büchsel (2000). See also Moloney (2002, pp. 212–214), Taylor (1953, p. 444–445), Donahue et al.  
 (2002, pp. 313–316), and Jeremias (2000). For a slightly different view, see Nineham (1963, p. 285).

11 *Polus* appears 61 times in the gospel of Mark, 60 times each in Matthew and Luke, and 41 times in  
 John. In Mark, *polus* denotes human groups at 1:34, 2:2, 15, 3:10, 6:2, 13, 31, 33–34, 9:26, 10:31,  
 45, 48, 11:8, 12:37, 41, 13:6, 14:24, 56. Not included in this list are instances of *polus* that describe  
 the size of the crowds.

12 *Zōē*: Mark 9:43, 45, 10:17, 30. *Psuchē*: Mark 3:4, 8:35–7, 10:45, 12:30, 14:34. In the only instance  
 of *bios* in Mark (12:44), it too is given away (or more literally, ‘thrown away’).

13 The juxtaposition of these phrases suggests an equivalence between *anti* and *huper*, which will not  
 be pursued here except to note that this could also question the substitution reading of these passages.

14 ‘Abolish the possibility of the simulacrum and of external repetition, and you abolish the possibility  
 both of the law and of duty themselves, that is, of their recurrence’ (Derrida 1995, p. 142). The best-  
 known analyst of the simulacrum is probably Baudrillard, but Deleuze and Derrida are each more  
 important, in my opinion. On the relation between Deleuze’s and Derrida’s theories and critical  
 readings of the simulacrum, see Lawlor (2003) and Alliez (2003). For more on Deleuze’s theory, see  
 Foucault (1977, pp. 165–196).

15 A similar thought is suggested by a parallel saying (106) in the gospel of Thomas: ‘When you make  
 the two one, you will become the *sons of man*, and when you say, ‘Mountain, move away,’ it will  
 move away’ (emphasis added). One could also compare the son of man in Mark 10:45 to a vampire  
 who gives his ‘life’ to ‘release’ many into the power and delight of the undead, by letting them suck  
 his own blood, but my argument here is that the son of man, like the vampire slayer, is a good guy,  
 not a villain. See also Kreitzer (1997).

16 See also Revelation 1:13, 14:14. Daniel’s *bōs huiois anthrōpou* becomes Revelation’s *homoion huion  
 anthrōpou*.

17 Pauline soteriology is more complex than this, but not insofar as it influences the reading of Mark  
 10:45.

18 For a different way to bring together Jesus and vampire slaying, see the movie, *Jesus Christ Vampire  
 Hunter* (Demarbre 2001).

19 The shorter added ending to Mark may reflect a desire to ‘correct’ (among other things) Mark’s un-  
 orthodox presentation of redemption in 10:45 and elsewhere by emphasizing ‘the sacred and imper-  
 ishable proclamation of eternal salvation [*sōtērias*, only here in Mark]’.

20 I am indebted to Peter Quinn-Miscall, Jason Grinnell, Melissa Stewart, and the readers for *The Bible  
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