Our Lord’s image is revealed in the Gospel of Mark with singular clarity and power, according to His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios Trakatellis in his 1987 book *Authority and Passion: Christological Aspects of the Gospel According to Mark*. This image is held forth as “the irreplaceable criterion of every Christology.”¹ This strong statement is supported by a complete exposition of the Gospel of Mark which brings forth key details and much reflection in regard to the two overarching Christological aspects, authority and passion. Authority is the divine Christological aspect, expressions of Christ’s power and glory; passion is the human aspect, the various forms of suffering Christ experienced. These two aspects are woven together in Mark’s narrative to enable the hearer to take both to heart together, avoiding both triumphalism and despair.

His Eminence cites many scholars in the notes of this exposition, yet lends to the study a decidedly worshipful tone. It is fitting that a scholarly bishop should bring forth a work with the many and various Markan expressions of authority that reveal the scope of this divine aspect and gift, exemplified in Christ, passed on to the Apostles and their successors, and also exercised by others (Mark 9:38-40) through Christ’s name. And the ever-present passion which accompanies this authority, the various sufferings which culminate in the Cross and death, is also delineated in terms of its implications for the disciples who would eventually become Apostles, and for all who follow Christ.

After a short introduction, four expository chapters follow. The first covers Mark 1:1–8:26, the beginning of Christ’s ministry, in which he is often found exercising his authority to heal, exorcise, and tame the elements, with great crowds following. As the religious leaders plot against him, his disciples are slow of heart causing him to suffer. Expressions of authority are the major focus, yet, here in Mark, the

passion is also present throughout. Evidence of Christ’s authority and passion receive equal attention in the second chapter, which covers Mark 8:27–10:52. In the third chapter, the passion predominates, but never without expressions of authority. Of course, death is not the final word. The account of the resurrection in Mark 16 contains sources of suffering for Christ, such as the unbelief of the disciples. His Eminence lists specific aspects of authority and passion in the fourth chapter, along with key examples and concluding delineation and analysis. With frequent expressions of reverential wonder in regard to these things, his Eminence Archbishop Demetrios touches on the implications of these revelations for Christ’s people.

Notable is the fact that the most striking revelations of authority and passion often come in the parts of the Gospel in which the other aspect predominates. At Jesus’ trial before the Sanhedrin, when asked if he is the Son of the Blessed, the divine words proceed out of silence, like lightning: “I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven (14:62).” This, the Archbishop writes, is a declaration of “singular eminence.”

Individuals other than the disciples are found casting out demons in Christ’s name, and the Lord sanctions it. This reveals that the glory and power are located in his Name. Authority in Christ’s Kingdom and in the Church is emphatically tied, Christ declared to his disciples, to the motive of service to all— in Christ’s image, who gave “his life a ransom for many.’ (10:45) In another exemplar, the poor widow, who in giving one coin, gave “everything she had . . . her whole living,” Jesus brought forth “a new criterion, a new canon for evaluating a close relationship with God . . . The offering of ‘whole living’ . . . can also mean sacrificing one’s own life for God’s sake,” according to his Eminence. These are passion motifs, which are aimed, in the narrative, toward authority figures, future apostles and the religious leaders of Israel. “Jesus’ declaration, ‘if anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all’ (9:35) . . . shows that the Passion is not an isolated Christological event, but the perfect and absolute archetype of the zenith of human development.” Thus, for Christians, authority is never to be exercised without a cognizance of the standard of service shown forth in Christ’s Passion.

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2 Trakatellis, 100.
3 Trakatellis, 62.
4 Trakatellis, 82.
5 Trakatellis, 62.
The three-part movement of emphasis in the Gospel of Mark from authority to passion is based on the events of the narrative. One could argue that Mark 16 could stand alone as a fourth part, in that the resurrection of Christ is central; death is conquered. It is true, as His Eminence states, that there are passion elements in these pericopes— the intention of anointing the body, the hardness of heart displayed by the disciples. And the one pericope to which the most ancient manuscripts attest, the first one, in which this great victory, in comparison with the other Gospel accounts, is understated (by design, it would seem) in itself does not warrant this. Yet the very fact that death does not have the final word is a most powerful statement of authority. The resurrection is the climax of this Gospel, indeed, of all four Gospels. Life and victory is the final word!

The ancient Church hymn in St. Paul’s letter to the Philippians provides a contrasting trajectory. Christ is our example, the eternally begotten Son of the Father who humbles himself to become a man—a servant— and obediently makes the ultimate sacrifice, a shameful and agonizing death on the cross. And for this his name is exalted above all others, so that all should bow the knee before Jesus. Passion leads to authority; authority follows from this great sacrifice.

His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios, though, is faithfully rendering the Gospel of Mark as it is written. It is not a Church hymn, meant simply for the praise of God the Son; it is an image of Christ, indeed, the defining basis for our understanding of both him and the way of salvation in Him. Passion will attend the narrow and hard way of walking with Christ and in Christ to the very end. As St. Antony says, we are to expect temptation to the very end of our lives. And whether or not we are called to be martyrs, we are called to sacrificial living, and to pass through death to life, a death which will, for most, involve relinquishment, decrepitude, and pain. And our Lord Jesus Christ, depicted with great vividness in Mark’s Gospel, has shown us, through all these sacrifices and sufferings—through the Cross—the Way to joy. Glory be to Him!

WILLIAM EPHREMM GALL

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6 Phil. 2.5-11