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WILL DEMING

**MARK 9. 42–10. 12, MATTHEW 5. 27–32, AND *b. Nid.* 13b:
A FIRST CENTURY DISCUSSION OF MALE SEXUALITY**

Matt 5. 27–32, from the Sermon on the Mount, and Mark 9. 42–10. 12 are passages that contain similar material, although neither is directly dependent on the other. Both have sayings that deal with ‘offences’ caused by certain body members (the verb used is $\sigma\kappa\alpha\nu\delta\alpha\lambda\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$), and both contain a version of Jesus’ prohibition of divorce. Between these two passages and a third, *b. Nid.* 13b, from the Babylonian Talmud, there also exist several similarities. Despite this intriguing configuration of materials, which might indicate that all three passages are dependent on a common set of traditions, scholars have approached these texts from a very different perspective. Those who posit a connection between the synoptic and the rabbinic materials do so only with respect to Matt 5, never Mark 9;¹ and several scholars have instead sought parallels to the synoptic passages in Hellenistic gnostic literature, disregarding or ignoring the rabbinic material altogether.² In the present study I intend to challenge the validity of these approaches and propose that there is indeed a common set of traditions to which all three of these texts are indebted. I will begin my investigation by highlighting three peculiarities of Mark 9. 42–48, and then posit a relation between this passage and *b. Nid.* 13b. Following this I will bring the material from Matt 5. 27–32 and Mark 9. 49–10. 12 into consideration. One of the results of this study, as I shall explain more thoroughly in the conclusion, will be the identification of a discussion on male sexuality that took place in Jewish and Christian circles sometime in the middle of the first century C.E.

¹ George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950) 2: 268–9; Herbert Braun, *Spätjüdisch-häretischer und frühchristlicher Radikalismus* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1967) 2: 110, n. 7; Ernst Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus* (MeyerK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1957) 196, cf. idem, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus* (MeyerK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1956) 127.

² Hildebrecht Hommel, ‘Herrnworte im Lichte sokratischer Überlieferung’, in his *Sebasmata; Studien zur antiken Religionsgeschichte und zum frühen Christentum* (WUNT; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1984) 2: 56–8, 63–73; Johannes Schattenmann, ‘Jesus und Pythagoras’, *Kairos* 21 (1979) 215–20; Helmut Koester, ‘Mark 9. 43–47 and Quintilian 8.3.75’, *HTR* 71 (1978) 151–3.

MARK 9. 42-48 AND B. NID. 13b

Regarding Mark 9. 42-48, the first thing I would like to draw attention to is the rather odd combination of 'one of these little ones' in v. 42 with the triad of body members, hand, foot, and eye, in vv. 43-48. One possible explanation for this grouping of seemingly disparate elements is that it is actually secondary, based not on the content of these sayings but on catchwords. Thus, two originally distinct traditions, one dealing with offending 'little ones' and one dealing with offences caused by the hand, foot, and eye, were linked together, most likely for mnemonic purposes, because they both contained the word σκανδαλίζω ('to offend'), as well as καλόν ἐστιν ('it is good') and βάλλομαι ('to be thrown').³ In favour of this explanation, we may note that the three sayings involving the hand, foot, and eye in vv. 43-48 are fairly uniform with respect to one another, while the saying about the 'little ones' in v. 42 differs from them in several ways: it uses the third person rather than the second; it describes this third party as the offender rather than as the offended; it offers no possibility of avoiding the consequences of the offence once it has been committed; and it compares these consequences to drowning in the sea rather than burning in hell.⁴ We may also draw attention to the fact that the entire section 9. 33-50 seems to owe its structure to the principle of catchwords. Vv. 36-41 are linked by the words 'child' and 'name', and vv. 48-50 are linked by the words 'fire' and 'salt'.⁵ Quite reasonably, then, we could conclude that the saying about the 'little ones' comes from a different context and was attached to the three sayings that follow by virtue of certain key words. Be that as it may, for reasons I will make clear below, I would like to keep open the possibility that a more intimate connection exists between these sayings than simple catchwords.

The second aspect of Mark 9. 42-48 I want to note is the curious way in which the catchword σκανδαλίζω is used. It is difficult, both in the case of 'these little ones' and in the case of the triad hand, foot, and eye, to saddle the word σκανδαλίζω with any clear meaning. If we assume, with most scholars, that ἓνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων ('one of

³ See, e.g., Rudolph Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (HTKNT; Freiburg: Herder, 1977) 2: 112-13.

⁴ In addition Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 2:113 contrasts the present tense apodosis of v. 42 to the imperative apodosis of vv. 43-47.

⁵ See, e.g., C. S. Mann, *Mark* (ABC; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1986) 380-1.

these little ones') in v. 42 originally referred to small children, and that the τῶν πιστευόντων [εἰς ἐμέ] ('who believe [in me]') is a later attempt to interpret this phrase as referring to Jesus' disciples,⁶ then what could it mean to 'offend little children'? In the case of the hand, foot, and eye, Rudolf Pesch suggests that in a Jewish context these members could represent the location of sinful impulses in a person.⁷ If this is also true for our passage, it might be possible to imagine one's hand, etc. 'leading one into sin', or 'causing one to fall' in some general sense. Even so, the expression remains a bit odd, and I know of no exact parallel to this usage, apart from synoptic parallels.

The final aspect of Mark 9. 42–48 I want to mention is the expression in v. 42, ἓνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων, 'one of these little ones'. As just noted, scholars generally hold that this expression originally referred to little children. What is curious about Mark 9. 42, then, is that the little child referred to as ἓνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων is masculine. Comparing this usage to Matt 10. 42, we see that Matthew has the expression ἓνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων in the saying, 'whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward'. Since the 'little ones' here evidently refer to something like 'lowly disciples', we could infer from this that when the 'little ones' in Mark 9. 42 were understood to be followers of Jesus rather than little children, they took on a masculine form. In support of this theory, we may cite Matt 18. 14 as an example of the possibly more original neuter form. Here we find ἓν τῶν μικρῶν τούτων in the saying, 'it is not the will of your father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish'. That this theory is not necessarily correct, however, may be indicated by Luke 17. 2 (probably from Q),⁸ which has τῶν μικρῶν τούτων ἓνα, but which lacks the Markan τῶν πιστευόντων [εἰς ἐμέ], making it unclear from the context whether the masculine ἓνα refers to disciples or, somehow, to children.

Thus far I have noted three aspects of Mark 9. 42–48 which, though not generally regarded as subjects of major concern for the exegete, are at least matters not wholly settled. With these in mind let us proceed to the material found in the rabbinic tractate *Niddah* ('The Menstruant' or 'Menstruation'), from the Babylonian

⁶ See, e.g., Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963) 144–5, 148; O. Michel, 'μικρός (ἐλάττω, ἐλάχιστος)', *TDNT* 4: 650–4; and S. Légasse, 'μικρός, 3', *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* 2: 1051–2.

⁷ Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 115; see, e.g., Prov 6. 16–18 and b. *Ta'an.* 21a (Nahum of Gimzo, fl. 100 C.E.).

⁸ See John S. Kloppenborg, *Q Parallels* (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1988) 182.

Talmud. Page 13a of this tractate begins by citing the first line of *m. Nid.* 2:1,

Every hand which frequently makes examinations, in the case of women is praiseworthy, and in the case of men is to be cut off.

This is followed by a rather lengthy discussion of the sin of masturbation, which, shortly after the beginning of page 13b, proceeds thus:

R. Eleazar said, 'What does Scripture mean in saying, "Your hands are full of blood" [Isa 1.15]? – These are they who commit adultery (עֲוֹנוֹתָם) with the hand.'

It was taught in the school of R. Ishmael, "You shall not commit adultery (לֹא תִזְנֶה)" [Exod 20.14] means there shall be in you no adultery (עֲוֹנוֹתָם), neither with the hand nor with the foot.'

Our masters taught, 'The proselytes and those who play with children delay the messiah.' Granted, 'proselytes', as is the opinion of R. Helbo, for R. Helbo said: 'Proselytes are as hard for Israel as a sore'; but 'those who play with children', what does it mean? If we say homosexuality – they were punished by stoning [cf. Lev 20.13]; if we say sexual activity involving the limbs – they were punished by the Flood;⁹ thus we must say, those who marry young girls who have not yet reached the age of childbearing. These are those of whom R. Jose said, 'The son of David does not come until the completion of all the souls which are in the region of the unborn', for it was said, 'for the spirit is clothed before me, and I myself have made living creatures' [Isa 57.16].

Here, then, we find three of the four things that appear in Mark 9. 42–48: the hand, the foot, and the little children. This could, of course, be coincidence; but I think the passage that immediately follows suggests otherwise. Returning to the Mishnah text that began 13a, *b. Nid.* 13b continues:

'In the case of men it is to be cut off' [*m. Nid.* 2:1]. It was asked, 'Have we learned here a law or have we learned a curse? Have we learned a law, as when R. Huna cut off someone's hand, or have we learned a curse?' . . . R. Tarfon said, 'A hand touching his genitals is to be cut off, his hand upon his stomach!' . . . 'It is good that his stomach will be split and he will not go down to the pit of destruction (מוֹטֵב חֲבֵקֶע כְּרִיסוֹ וְאֵל יִרְדּוּ לְבֵאֵר סוּתָה).'

Here we should take note of two things. First, there is an obvious similarity, both in content and in form, between R. Tarfon's second statement and Mark 9. 43, 'It is good that you enter into life maimed than having both hands depart into hell' (καλόν ἐστίν σε κυλλὸν εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν ζωὴν ἢ τὰς δύο χεῖρας ἔχοντα ἀπελθεῖν εἰς τὴν γέενναν). And second, as the Markan syntax καλὸν . . . ἢ indicates, 9. 43 shows every sign of being semiticizing, translation

⁹ The reference is unclear.

Greek, and thus stemming from a Hebrew or Aramaic original¹⁰ – a hypothesis further supported by the fact that the verb σκανδαλίζω does not occur prior to the NT except in translations of Semitic texts (LXX, Pss Sol, and A and Σ).¹¹

Taken as a whole, the similarities between *b. Nid.* 13b and Mark 9. 42–48 suggest that these texts may depend on a set of common traditions that existed prior to both. Beyond these similarities, however, I am further attracted to this conclusion because the *Niddah* passage seems to throw light on the three peculiarities of the Markan passage to which I drew attention earlier. On the one hand, we may be able to define more closely the verb σκανδαλίζω. In light of the rabbinic passage, it would appear that the offence against the ‘little ones’ (v. 42), and that caused by the hand and foot (vv. 43, 45) are sexual sins. Thus, the offence of the hand, like the rabbinic ‘adultery with the hand’, would be masturbation, a sin treated at length in *b. Nid.* 13 and one for which the recommended punishment is amputation of the hand, which corresponds to the Markan passage. Likewise, the offence of the foot would correspond to the rabbinic ‘adultery with the foot’. If I understand *b. Nid.* 13b correctly, this is adultery in the strict sense, since ‘feet’ can be used as a euphemism in Hebrew for the male genitals,¹² and since this explanation seems to make the best sense of the position put forth by R. Ishmael’s school, namely, that the biblical commandment against adultery encompasses not only adultery in the conventional sense, but also masturbation. The offence against the ‘little ones’, in turn, appears to be either pederasty or some other form of child molestation, equivalent to the rabbinic ‘playing with children’. This leaves the Markan saying about the offence of the eye, which has no counterpart in *b. Nid.* 13b. Yet given the sexual context of the *Niddah* passage and the fact that sexual offences committed with the eyes is a topic otherwise well

¹⁰ On the use of καλὸν . . . ἢ in translations see Klaus Beyer, *Semitische Syntax im Neuen Testament* (SUNT; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1962) vol. 1, pt. 1: 78–81, n. 1 (esp. 80). Cf. R. Tarfon’s words as preserved in the Jerusalem Talmud (*j. Nid.* 2:1): ‘Of such a one, his destruction is pretty [i.e., prettier] to him than his life’ (וְכַדּוּם שֶׁל לֵהּ יִפְיָן לוֹ).

¹¹ Gustav Stählin, ‘σκάνδαλον, σκανδαλίζω’, *TDNT* 7: 340–4.

¹² E.g., Is 7. 20. See also: Exod 4. 25; Deut 28. 57; Judg 3. 24; 1 Sam 24. 4 (ET = 24. 3); 2 Kgs 18. 27 (Qr); Isa 6. 2; 36. 12 (Qr); Ezek 16. 25; and perhaps Ruth 3. 4, 7, 8, 14; cf. Deut 25. 9–10. The euphemism in these passages is always the plural רגלים. The singular רגל in the *Niddah* passage seems to be accounted for by the fact that it stands parallel to the singular ‘hand’ in the expression ‘adultery with the hand or with the foot’. It is this pair ‘hand/foot’ which supplies the essential hermeneutical bridge that allows the rabbinic exegesis to appeal to Exod 20. 14/Deut 5. 18 as a prohibition against masturbation.

known in Jewish literature,¹³ I think it not unreasonable to conclude that the offence of the eye refers to something like lustful glances.

If, on the basis of the *Niddah* passage, it is tenable to assume that the verb σκανδαλίζω has a sexual connotation in Mark 9, then *b. Nid.* 13b also appears to explain the juxtaposition in Mark 9. 42–48 of the saying about the ‘little ones’ to those about the hand, foot, and eye: all four have to do with sexual offences. In further support of this whole line of argumentation we may add that the only occurrence of the verb σκανδαλίζω in the active form prior to the NT also represents a sexual usage. This is Pss Sol 16. 7, which in the true spirit of Jewish wisdom literature appeals for protection ‘from every evil woman who seduces the fool’ (ἀπὸ πάσης γυναικὸς πονηρᾶς σκανδαλιζούσης ἄφρονα).

Finally, *b. Nid.* 13b may explain the masculine ἕνα in Mark 9. 42. The word used for children in *b. Nid.* 13b is רַיָּה. While it is true that the rabbinic exegesis here ultimately sides with R. Jose, who defines these children as preadolescent girls, this exegetical decision comes from a fairly late period and rests on an understanding of the traditional punishments assigned to the various sexual crimes, not on a historical investigation as to the original meaning of the saying. Furthermore, the usual meaning for רַיָּה in rabbinic literature is ‘child’ or ‘boy’, not ‘preadolescent girl’. Drawing these observations together, we may speculate that the masculine ἕνα in the Markan phrase ‘one of these little ones’ originally designated a young boy, and thus had reference to the sin of pederasty, as I suggested above.

At this point there still remains the difficult task of establishing a relatively early date for the rabbinic material. The problem is this: if my hypothesis is correct, that Mark 9. 42–48 and *b. Nid.* 13b depend on a common set of traditions that existed prior to both, then this set of traditions must have been in existence by about the middle of the first century C.E., since the usual date assigned to Mark is ca. 65–70 C.E. But is it conceivable that the Talmudic traditions extend back this far? While the nature of the Babylonian Talmud precludes, as it often does, any chronological certainty, it is surely more than a coincidence that the four authorities in *b. Nid.* 13b relevant to my conclusion carry an early date: Rabbis Eleazar, Ishmael, and Tarfon all lived at the end of the first century or earlier, and the expression ‘our masters’ (רַבָּנֵינוּ) refers to rabbis of the tannaitic period (70–200 C.E.). Other rabbis mentioned in this

¹³ See, e.g., the material cited in Moore, *Judaism*, 2: 267–8; Wilhelm Michaelis, ‘ὄφθαλμός’, *TDNT* 5: 376; and Str-B 1:298–301.

passage are Tarfon's student, R. Jose (b. Halafta, fl. mid 2nd cent. C.E.), R. Huna (d. 297) and his student R. Helbo (fl. late 3rd–early 4th). This would indicate that the statements on which I have based my argument reflect a discussion on various sexual sins from the end of the first century. If, moreover, this was the culmination of earlier discussions, it is quite possible that we are dealing here with materials from around the middle of the first century.

THE EVIDENCE OF MATTHEW 5. 27–32 AND MARK 9. 49–10. 12

The sort of relationship I am maintaining exists between *b. Nid.* 13b and Mark 9. 42–48 is even more in evidence in the case of Matt 5. 27–30. Here we not only find the sayings about the offending eye and hand, and the phrase 'it is of benefit to you that one of your members should perish and that your whole body should not be thrown into hell (vv. 29, 30)', the syntax of which – συμφέρει . . . καὶ μὴ – is even closer to its rabbinic counterpart וְאֵל . . . מִיִּסָּב than the Markan καλὸν . . . ἦ;¹⁴ but now the saying about the offending eye follows immediately on an antithesis that equates lustful glances with adultery (vv. 27–28). In other words, the saying about the eye now appears explicitly in the type of sexual context that I postulated for the σκανδαλίζω sayings in Mark 9. This antithesis, moreover, is important in its own right, for it too comes remarkably close to material in *b. Nid.* 13b. It opens with a citation of the seventh commandment against adultery, and then proceeds with a midrash on this commandment, the purpose of which is to broaden its meaning so as to include lustful glances under the rubric 'adultery'. This is precisely the structure of the passage in *b. Nid.* 13b that recounts the view held by R. Ishmael's school:

It was taught in the school of R. Ishmael, "You shall not commit adultery" means there shall be in you no adultery, neither with the hand nor with the foot.'

Given this striking set of correspondences between Matt 5. 27–30 and *b. Nid.* 13b, we might even be tempted to postulate only a relationship between these two passages, leaving the Markan passage to one side. I mention this possibility because, as I noted at the beginning of this study, it is an option that several scholars have

¹⁴ Cf. Beyer, *Syntax*, cited above in n. 10.

taken.¹⁵ Yet this would require us not only to discount, over-hastily I think, the comparison between Mark 9. 42–48 and *b. Nid.* 13b I presented earlier, but it would also require us to overlook one final aspect of the *σκανδαλίζω* sayings in Mark and Matthew – one whose importance has gone unnoticed by past studies. This is the fact that both in Mark and in Matthew the *σκανδαλίζω* sayings are followed by Jesus' prohibition of divorce. In Mark they are separated by only three verses, 9. 49–10. 1, which I suggest are secondary, and in Matt 5 they follow immediately one on the other. Since Matt 5. 29–32 is not dependent on the Markan passage, this means that the likeliest explanation for this sequence of materials is that both passages derive from an earlier tradition in which the *σκανδαλίζω* sayings and the prohibition of divorce were already juxtaposed. Thus, the relationship that this sequence of materials implies makes it very difficult to see parallels between Matt 5. 27–30 and *b. Nid.* 13b but exclude them in the case of Mark 9. 42–48.

Beyond this, however, the observation that the *σκανδαλίζω* sayings in Mark and Matthew are followed by Jesus' prohibition of divorce allows me to make two further points. First, this juxtaposition of materials lends additional support to my contention that these *σκανδαλίζω* sayings originally belonged in a sexual context. And second, we have here yet another link with the *Niddah* material, for just as Matt 5. 27–28 and *b. Nid.* 13b refer to an extended definition of adultery, so does Jesus' prohibition of divorce in Mark 9. 11–12 and Matt 5. 32: something which is not in a strict sense adultery – namely, divorce and remarriage – is here redefined as 'adultery'.

(I realize that in saying the *σκανδαλίζω* sayings in Mark 9 are followed by Jesus' prohibition of divorce, I have simplified this matter somewhat, for it is generally recognized that Mark 10. 2–12 contains two distinct Jesus traditions on divorce. But I believe this simplification is justified. The usual explanation given for the Markan passage is that an editor augmented Jesus' dialogue with the Pharisees in Mark 10. 2–9 by adding vv. 10–12, a private conversation between Jesus and his disciples.¹⁶ Yet given the relationship we have just established between Mark 9. 42–10. 12 and Matt 5. 29–32, and given the fact that Mark 10. 2–3, 5–10 finds no counterpart in Matt 5. 31–2, this theory would seem to be in error. It is Jesus' dialogue with the Pharisees in Mark 10. 2–9, which makes no reference to an extended definition of adultery,

¹⁵ See n. 1 above.

¹⁶ E.g., Bultmann, *Synoptic Tradition*, 26.

that actually appears to be the newcomer in this complex, having been inserted between the σκανδαλίζω sayings in Mark 9. 42–48 and Jesus' prohibition of divorce in 10. 11–12 by means of the transition at 10. 10.)¹⁷

CONCLUSION

In the preceding study I have compared Mark 9. 42–10. 12, Matt 5. 27–32, and *b. Nid.* 13b to one another from several angles. This comparison has revealed that *each* of these texts displays pronounced similarities to *both* the other two, not only in terms of what they discuss but also in the manner in which they discuss it, even though none of them is directly dependent on one of the others. From this I have concluded that all three must derive from a common set of traditions, dated around the middle of the first century C.E., and that the σκανδαλίζω sayings in Mark 9. 42–48 and Matt 5. 29–30 originally had a sexual connotation, much like the material in *b. Nid.* 13b.

In coming to this conclusion I must at the same time reject the opinion held by several scholars that these σκανδαλίζω sayings find their closest parallels in Greek or Latin gnomic literature. By this I do not mean to say, however, that this gnomic literature is irrelevant for the interpretation of Mark 9. 42–48 and Matt 5. 29–30. To the contrary, it seems to me quite reasonable to assume that the common traditions on which these texts and *b. Nid.* 13b depend owe their initial inspiration precisely to the 'Socratic tradition' that Hildebrecht Hommel has so painstakingly mapped out.¹⁸ Further, given the present form of the synoptic passages, it also makes sense to assume that early Christian authors attempted to assimilate the σκανδαλίζω sayings back into this larger gnomic tradition. As noted earlier, Mark seems to understand the 'little ones' in 9. 42 as Jesus' disciples, thus ruling out the idea that this verse now refers to pederasty; and both Matthew and Mark seem to understand the body members in these sayings in their usual sense: the person losing a foot in Mark 9. 45 is described as 'lame' (χωλός), and Matt 5. 30 speaks of the *right* hand (just as Matt 5. 39 speaks of the right cheek),¹⁹ indicating that Matthew and Mark understand these in

¹⁷ Cf. n. 28 below.

¹⁸ Cited above in n. 2.

¹⁹ On the idea that the right hand is the more important of the two hands see Lohmeyer, *Matthäus*, 128 n. 1. The first century Latin epigrammatist Martial, in any case, speaks of masturbation as done with the left hand: Martial, *Epigrams*, 9. 41; 11. 73.

their general function as hand and foot, not more narrowly as a source of sexual offence. Thus the specifically sexual connotation of these sayings has been partially obscured, to some extent bringing them back into line with the gnostic literature from which they probably arose.

At the same time, however, I do not feel that Hommel and others are justified in discounting the relevance of *b. Nid.* 13b. Hommel, for example, asserts that this material is 'not particularly encouraging' because it is only in Matt 5, where they have been 'forcefully enough inserted' between vv. 28 and 31, that the *σκανδαλίζω* sayings can be understood sexually.²⁰ Yet this sort of analysis does not take into account the comparisons I have made above, nor the connection that I have shown exists between the *σκανδαλίζω* sayings and Jesus' prohibition on divorce, both in Matthew and in Mark. Beyond this, I also feel that the proposed Greek and Latin parallels cannot adequately explain all the details and peculiarities of Mark 9. 42–10. 12 and Matt 5. 29–32. Thus, even in Helmut Koester's careful study, which proposes a parallel between Mark 9. 43–47 and Quintilian *Institutio oratoria* 8.3.75, the central thesis that 'the image of the body as a communal metaphor is so widespread that one must assume that the saying of Mark 9. 43–47 was originally designed to serve as a rule for the community'²¹ is not supported by anything in the Markan text, as Koester himself, at least in part, seems to realize.²² As a result, Koester is obliged to argue his thesis on the basis of *Matthew's* use of Mark at Matt 18. 8–9, and *Paul's* use of the image of the human body in 1 Cor.²³ On the other end of the spectrum, Cam von Wahlde's statement that 'the inherent ambiguity of the three exhortations [in Mark 9. 43–47] makes them suitable for exhorting avoidance of temptation in a variety of situations' is so general that the attempt to group the *σκανδαλίζω* sayings with the gnostic literature carries with it the implicit assumption that close exegesis of these sayings is not possible.²⁴

²⁰ Hommel, 'Herrnworte' 57; similarly Koester, 'Quintilian' 151–2, 153.

²¹ Koester, 'Quintilian' 152.

²² See *ibid.*, 152–3.

²³ *Ibid.* It is true that Koester also appeals to the Markan context itself, maintaining that 'Mark 9. 42, the command not to offend the little ones, is a rule for the community' (153). But since his purpose is to establish the original meaning of Mark 9. 43–47, and since he began his investigation by stating that 'the context in Mark does not give any clue, because the connection with the preceding saying about "not offending little ones" (Mark 9. 42) is secondary' (151), this is a non sequitur.

²⁴ Urban C. von Wahlde, 'Mark 9. 33–50: Discipleship: The Authority that Serves', *BZ* 29 (1985) 59.

In the final analysis, I contend that my comparison with *b. Nid.* 13b offers the closest parallels to Mark 9. 42–10. 13 and Matt 5. 27–32, and makes the most sense of all the evidence, giving a plausible explanation for these texts as we now have them. If I am correct, then this study not only contributes to our understanding of how the gospel traditions developed, but it also identifies a very interesting discussion on sexuality that took place among Jews and Christians in the mid-first century C.E. It is to a consideration of this discussion that I now turn in closing.

If, in an attempt to reconstruct this discussion on sexuality, we read back from the common elements in Mark 9. 42–10. 12, Matt 5. 27–32, and *b. Nid.* 13b, the following picture emerges. The nexus of the discussion appears to have been the concept of adultery, which was being used as a rubric for several different types of sexual sins. These included: adultery proper (Mark 9. 45, *b. Nid.* 13b), masturbation (Mark 9. 43, Matt 5. 30, *b. Nid.* 13b), looking at or thinking about a woman lustfully (Matt 5. 27–29, and by implication Mark 9. 47),²⁵ and divorce and remarriage (Matt 5. 32, Mark 10. 11–12).²⁶ Pederasty may also have been classified in this manner (Mark 9. 42, *b. Nid.* 13b). What we may conclude from this, I suggest, is that the purpose of this discussion was to define these acts of sexual misconduct specifically over against marriage – that is, as a violation of marriage, or ‘adultery’. In other words, we have here an attempt by certain Jews and Christians in the first century to understand human sexuality as having meaning and legitimacy solely within the confines of marriage.²⁷

If this analysis is correct, then something very new and radical is taking place here which should not be overlooked. The idea that sexuality is legitimate only within marriage had always been true

²⁵ For the concept, ‘adultery with the eye’, cf. Sir 9. 8, 2 Pet 2. 14, Str-B 1:299, and the next note.

²⁶ Cf. the *Mekhilta of R. Simeon ben Yohai* on Exod 20. 14 (5th cent. C.E.): “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” Neither with hand nor foot nor eye nor mind . . .’ (cited and trans. in Moore, *Judaism*, 2: 268, n. 1). The text is somewhat problematic, however, being reconstructed by David Hoffmann from later medieval sources (D. Hoffmann, *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Simon b. Jochai: Ein halachischer und haggadischer Midrasch zu Exodus* [Frankfurt: J. Kauffmann, 1950] 111). These words are not found on any of the actual fragments of the *Mekhilta* from the Cairo Geniza, although these fragments are incomplete – see J. N. Epstein and E. Z. Melamed, eds., *Mekhilta d’Rabbi Sim’on b. Jochai* (Jerusalem: Sump-tibus Hillel Press [1955]) 153–4. On the linguistic aspects of associating divorce and remarriage with adultery, see J. B. Schaller, ‘Die Sprüche über Ehescheidung und Wieder-heirat in der synoptischen Überlieferung’, in *Der Ruf Jesu und die Antwort der Gemeinde*, ed. Eduard Lohse (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1970) 226–46.

²⁷ For an example of this idea among contemporary Greco-Roman authors, see Musonius Rufus *frag.* 12, ‘On Sexual Relations’.

for one category of human beings, namely, women. Now, however, *male* sexuality is at issue.²⁸ In turn, the concept of adultery, which formerly referred to a breach of marriage caused or incurred by a married woman but not necessarily by a married man, is now applied with a vengeance to several forms of male sexual activity outside of marriage, including, by extension, even divorce and remarriage. While this reconstruction, in the absence of further information, must remain a hypothesis, in its favour I would like to point out that it offers a workable solution to another very old problem, namely, why does the husband's action of divorcing his wife in Matt 5. 32 implicate *her* in adultery? It is because this verse originated in the context of a discussion on male sexual sins, and consequently the point here is not that the wife sins, but that adultery has occurred and the husband is guilty of it, *too*. It was never intended to be understood as a separate logion or general principle apart from this specific context.

²⁸ The only reference to female sexual ethics in these passages is Mark 10. 12. Here I am in agreement with the usual opinion that this verse is a later development of the prohibition in 10. 11; see, e.g., Bultmann, *Synoptic Tradition*, 132.