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APPENDIX 8

THE GOSPEL PASSAGES DEALING WITH THE
DISSOLUTION OF MARRIAGE

Memorandum prepared by
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TWO MAJOR points appear to be at issue: (a) the meaning of *porneia* in Matt. 5. 32; 19. 9; and (b) the relative authority of Matt. 5. 31-2; 19. 9; Mark 10, 11-12; and Luke 16. 18 as expressing the teaching of our Lord.

Porneia

1. The normal meaning of the word is "unchastity"—in a general sense, cf. in the N.T., e.g., Col. 3. 5, Rev. 9. 21.
2. This meaning is sometimes made more specific from the context, e.g., 1 Cor. 5. 1, where the "fornication" consists of "having his father's wife", Jude 7, where the allusion appears to be sodomy, and a number of places where "fornication" serves as a good translation. (Cf. also the figurative use of *porneia* for idolatry in the LXX.)
3. The interpretation of *porneia* in the special sense of "unchastity between betrothal and marriage" (as by Selwyn in *Theology*, 1927, p. 98) does not rest on any established use of *porneia* elsewhere in this sense, but on the assumption that "Matthew" was writing for readers who would so interpret it.
4. Opinion is divided as to whether *porneia* in the decree of the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) means "unchastity" in general or specifically "marriage within the degrees prohibited in Lev. 26. 6-26". The evidence adduced for this latter view depends entirely on the interpretation of certain N.T. passages, and is not supported—as far as I know—by the citation of any Greek passage outside the N.T. where a similar use of *porneia* can be demonstrated.
5. While *porneia* is sometimes found as a description of adulterous conduct, there appears to be normally in such passages an additional element of unchastity—e.g., harlotry, Amos 7. 17 (LXX); promiscuity, Hos. 2. 4-7 (LXX); a sin committed by both married and unmarried men, 1 Cor. 10. 8 (cf. Num. 25. 9); continuance in adultery, *Hermas*, *Man.* 4. 1, 5—and *porneia* seems always to be distinguished in some way from the more technical *moicheia*.
6. The following meanings for *porneia* in Matt. 5. 32; 19. 9 are possible, but while each of them has the support of good scholars, they are not to be regarded as equally likely. I have put them in an order corresponding to their nearness to the general usage of *porneia* outside the N.T.:
 - (1) Unchastity (in a general sense)
 - (2) "Aggravated" adultery, e.g., repeated, harlotry, etc.
 - (3) Simple adultery
 - (4) Unchastity between betrothal and marriage
 - (5) Relationship within the prohibited degrees

¹ This memorandum had not been corrected for publication by the Rev. R. G. Heard before his death.

The Relative Authority of Matt. 5. 31-2; 19. 3-9; Mark 10. 11-12, and Luke 16. 18 as expressing the Teaching of Our Lord

1. Most scholars would accept Luke 16. 18 as (a) a Q passage of which Matt. 5. 32 is a variant parallel, (b) a generally faithful reproduction of Q (as opposed to Matt. 5. 32), (c) a faithful reproduction of the sense of a saying of our Lord. The saying brands as adultery the marriage of a man to another woman after divorcing his wife, or the marriage of a man to a divorced woman. This injunction fits the Palestinian conditions of our Lord's time when normally only the man was able to initiate divorce. (Billerbeck has collected rabbinic evidence for a woman being permitted to divorce her husband (a) when certain types of illness contracted by her husband, or certain types of calling (e.g., copper-smelting, tanning) followed by her husband made the continuation of the marriage intolerable, (b) when her husband made her vow to carry out unworthy or impossible conditions, (c) when the wife had been betrothed as a minor (under 12 years of age) after her father's death by her mother or brothers (or even if she had been betrothed by her father in a case where she had already been divorced as a minor).)

2. Mark 10. 11 is generally accepted as giving the sense of a genuine saying of Jesus. It adds to Luke 16. 18a that the adultery is "against his wife".

3. Mark 10. 12, which assumes the possibility of a wife divorcing her husband, is against the Jewish Law (but see above), and perhaps a majority of scholars to-day would hesitate to accept this verse as actually spoken by Jesus. Many scholars would certainly regard it as a "legitimate" extension of Jesus' words in early Christian tradition to suit conditions in Gentile communities; Dr T. W. Manson regards it as a misunderstanding of the Aramaic which underlies Luke 16. 18b.

4. Most scholars regard Matt. 19. 3-9 as based on Mark 10. 1-12 with editorial modifications by "Matthew". A very large majority would consider these modifications as not due to a more precise knowledge of the actual incident but as made by "Matthew" (a) from his knowledge of Jewish custom in the addition of "for every cause" (19. 3) and the omission of Mark 10. 12 (b) from the tradition or practice of his community in the alteration of Mark 10. 11 by the addition of "the exceptive clause". The omission of "against her" after "committeth adultery" is interpreted by some scholars as due to the influence of the Q form (Matt. 5. 32; Luke 16. 18) on "Matthew's" wording here.

5. Matt. 5. 31-2 is widely accepted as a Q passage modified by "Matthew". There are, of course, many views as to the composition of "Matthew's" Sermon on the Mount; some scholars hold that the form of Matt. 5. 31-2 suggests an insertion by "Matthew" into the general series of our Lord's new commandments on Murder, Adultery, Swearing, Retaliation, Love of Neighbour, which "Matthew" may have drawn in the main from some other written source. Certainly 5. 31-2 as a whole, and especially "the exceptive clause", do not fit in well with the general stress on "motive" in the preceding paragraph. The majority view is that "Matthew" in 5. 31-2 has modified a Q saying by the addition of "the exceptive clause", and that this clause is drawn by "Matthew" from the tradition or practice of his community. The further alteration "maketh her to commit adultery" in place of "and marrieth another, committeth adultery" (Luke 16. 18) is generally taken as also editorial, and as implying that if the woman marries again she becomes an adulteress.

There are, in this case, two possibilities. *Either* a practice adopted because of the hardness of our Lord's teaching has been later given his authority, whether by "Matthew" or by a previously existing tradition (the view of the great majority of scholars), *or* the tradition

goes back to our Lord's teaching. This raises in turn the meaning of *porneia* here and in 19, 9; on the usual interpretation of *porneia* there is a clear inconsistency between "Matthew's" teaching and that of Luke 16. 18 and Mark 10. 11, which are generally accepted as the teaching of our Lord.

6. St Paul's teaching, as from the Lord, in 1 Cor. 7. 10-11 is in close agreement with that of Mark 10. 11-12. Opinion is divided as to whether 10-11a, like Mark 10. 12, are to be taken as dependent on a saying of our Lord directly forbidding the woman also to divorce her husband and remarry, or as a "legitimate" extension of our Lord's teaching.

Note: In general, Appendix IV of the Report on *The Church and Marriage* still gives a good summary of the most widely held views of New Testament scholars to-day. Question 3, "Do the words *parektos logou porneias* belong to the original teaching of our Lord?", was answered then and would be answered now with an "almost unanimous" NO.