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The basic gospel texts to be considered are two, the controversy with the Pharisees about divorce and its sequel, given by both Mark and Matthew, and a saying which stems from Q, found in both Matthew and Luke. There is also Paul's treatment of the subject in First Corinthians, but this had better be considered at a later stage than what at least purports to be a saying of Jesus himself.

In the controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees about divorce it is of basic importance to establish which of the two evangelists is prior. It is certainly generally accepted now that Mark is as a whole prior to Matthew, but there also persists a school of thought, of which the Dominican Ecole biblique in Jerusalem is perhaps the spearhead, which holds that this solution of the synoptic problem is too undifferentiated, that there is in fact a very complicated network of interrelationships between the two gospels at different stages of their composition prior to their final form. Nevertheless the argument of this paper will presuppose that, for this pericope at least, our present text of Mark is the basis of that of Matthew.<sup>(1)</sup> Matthew's text is of course considerably more Jewish, but it is illegitimate to infer from this that it is more primitive, for Matthew wrote in a far more Jewish milieu, and for Jewish-Christian readers, whereas Mark was writing for an audience sprung from paganism; one may therefore expect that Matthew will have been accommodated to a Jewish situation. The importance of this question of priority lies, of course, in the consequent decision, whether Matthew's laxer ruling is Jesus' original saying or whether Matthew is interpreting the more absolute saying of Jesus given by Mark.

(1) Even M.E. Boismard, in his latest statement of the Ecole biblique point of view, agrees with this Synopse des quatre Evangelies, II (Paris, 1972) pp. 306-308.

Matthew's text differs from Mark's significantly in three respects. Firstly Matthew has *κατὰ πάσαν αἰτίαν*; the Pharisees ask whether a man is permitted to divorce his wife for any and every cause, whereas in Mark they ask whether a man is permitted to divorce his wife at all. Thus in Matthew they assume that at least some divorce is legitimate, and ask only what causes are sufficient. The context of Matthew's dialogue is thus made the controversy between the two rabbinic schools of interpretation of the Law. Deut 24.1 allowed a man to put away his wife for an 'erwat dabar (shameful thing) and this was interpreted by the school of Shammai as grave sexual misbehaviour, but by the school of Hillel to include such minor matters as the wife burning the dinner or even the husband finding a woman more attractive than his wife (Strack-Billerbeck 1.312-20). Now although these two masters lived at the end of the pre-Christian era we cannot deduce that Matthew's controversy reflects the atmosphere of Jesus' day; for one thing Hillel and Shammai lived 50 years earlier than Jesus, and for another it is in the period of reconstruction of Judaism, when the remaining Pharisees after the Fall of Jerusalem were attempting to forge uniformity of practice, that such controversies seem to date. The atmosphere of the passage thus fits well the date of the composition of Matthew, the quarter-century after 70 AD.<sup>(2)</sup>

The second major change made by Matthew is in the order. He moves the appeal of the Pharisees to Moses' prescription of giving a writ of separation, and Jesus' retort to this, until after Jesus' assertion of the indissolubility of marriage by means of appeal to the creation narrative. The effect of this is twofold: firstly it sharpens the animosity of the controversy: instead of the Pharisees' one statement which in Mark provokes all Jesus' teaching on the subject, in Matthew they object to his absolutism by introducing Moses' ruling in opposition to Jesus' Genesis-based teaching. The second effect is more important for interpretation of the controversy; it enables Matthew to show Jesus perfecting the Law, for he withdraws the tolerance of an abuse which had been conceded by Deuteronomy.

(2) cf. G.D. Kilpatrick in The Church and the Law of Nullity of Marriage (SPCK 1955) Appendix 7, pp. 63-64.

This is a typically Matthean theme, which of course runs through the Sermon on the Mount especially, but its importance here is that it makes it unlikely that Matthew's interpretation will be simply that of any pharisaic school; this will clearly be important for the interpretation of the exceptive clauses. Another indication that Matthew's teaching is not that of any current Pharisaic school is the shocked surprise of the disciples when they exclaim (19.10) that in that case it is better not to marry at all.

Matthew's third editorial intervention is the addition of the notorious exceptive clause. This brings us to the discussion of the other saying of Jesus on divorce. Already in Mark the saying of 10.11, "Whoever puts away his wife and marries another commits adultery against her", is an addition to the previous narrative, as is shown by the typically Markan phrases of verses 10-11a, phrases often used by Mark when he adds a further saying to an existing narrative. Various versions of this saying are found in Mark and Matthew here, in the Sermon on the Mount, and in Luke 16.18. The most primitive form may well have been<sup>(3)</sup> "Whoever puts away his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery," which is most faithfully preserved by Luke.

To this Mark makes two adjustments, bringing it into line with pagan Roman usage. Firstly he adds that the man who remarries commits adultery against his former wife, whereas in Jewish thought it was possible to commit adultery only against a man. So deep-rooted was the idea that in some sense the wife belonged to her husband that she had no rights in the matter, and an unfaithful husband committed adultery not against his wife but against the husband (if any) of the other woman with whom he slept. Now, in this version of the saying, a wife is granted equal rights - she can at least be sinned against! Secondly Mark adjusts to Roman law by adding verse 12 which envisages a wife divorcing her husband, a process possible in Roman, but not in Jewish, law. For Mark, writing in non-Jewish circles, this is perhaps a necessary corollary to add, and certainly a legitimate extension of Jesus' teaching.

(3) cf. D. W. Shaner, A Christian View of Divorce (Leiden, 1969) pp. 50-57

When we turn to Matthew's version of the saying it is necessary first of all to establish the original text. The only important question raised is about remarriage. H.Cronzel<sup>(4)</sup> argues forcibly that the present text of Matthew 19.9, which envisages remarriage after divorce, is not original. It is unknown to the Eastern Fathers till the mid-5th century and to the Latins before 356. But in the first half of the 4th century, either in Spain (Juvenius) or Gaul (Hilary), under the influence of Mark, the present *καὶ γαμήσῃ* ἄλλῃν replaced an ending similar to that of Matthew 5.32. Therefore, he argues, even if divorce for *παιδεία* (whose meaning is still to be discussed) is permitted by Matthew, no gospel text allows remarriage even in this case. This accords with the discipline of the early Church, which forbade remarriage after divorce for adultery.<sup>(5)</sup> It should, however, be remembered that the early Church forbade all second marriages (Hermas, Justin, Athenagoras), even after the death of one of the partners, and so would in any case be inclined to interpret the text in this way. It is, nevertheless, far from obvious that, if divorce is permitted ἐπὶ *παιδεία*, remarriage is still forbidden. So, even if Cronzel is correct in his reconstruction of the original text and his reading of the patristic evidence of its interpretation, the general early Christian dislike of remarriage (for symbolic reasons) is strong enough to explain the prohibition of remarriage after adultery - this being the sense in which they understood *παιδεία*. We cannot without further examination assume that Matthew meant to forbid remarriage after divorce in a case of *παιδεία*.

(5) This is argued by Cronzel in his book L'église primitive face au divorce (1971). He explicitly, and to my mind successfully, contradicts his colleague J. Moingt, "Le divorce 'pour motif d'impudicité" (Recherches de sciences religieuses 56 (1968), pp.337-384), disposing successfully of the patristic evidence referred to and cited by Moingt.

(4) "Le texte patristique de Matthieu v.32 et XIX.9" (NTS 19 (1972/3), pp.98-119)

The central point of the whole question, in so far as textual exegesis is concerned, is of course Matthew's exceptive clauses. But before we try to determine the meaning of *παρα* we must attempt to make out what Matthew might be trying to do.

Here there are two contradictory factors to be considered. On the one hand Matthew alters the order of the controversy so that he can show Jesus perfecting the Law, opposing to the Pharisees' citation of Moses his own "but I say to you". One would therefore expect the saying to be more absolute, more faithful to the will of God as shown in the creation, than the Mosaic dispensation. The same conclusion follows from the shocked reaction of the disciples. Furthermore, if it is correct that the background to which Matthew adapts his pericope is the controversy between the followers of Hillel and Shammai respectively, one would expect Jesus' solution to be stricter than that of either school. Matthew would be making too much fuss if he is merely opting for one of two current interpretations.<sup>(6)</sup> On the other hand Matthew is obviously making some sort of concession or exception to deal with a contemporary problem. Matthew is a careful pedagogue (one might almost say a bit of a pedant), and is very much concerned to bring Jesus' sweeping statements of principle down to the hard tacks of daily life. This is especially so in the Sermon on the Mount; he fills out the great antitheses between the Old Law and Jesus' teaching with detailed instructions: leave your gift at the altar and go and be reconciled with your brother; do not swear by heaven, nor by the earth, nor by Jerusalem, nor by your own head. Elsewhere, too, he gives detailed instructions about how to set about reconciliation with a brother, which are almost certainly his own addition and expansion to the saying of Jesus (18.15-17; the original saying, given also by Luke 17.3, comprises only the first of these three verses). Here too, then

(6) Hence it is difficult to accept Bishop Hugh Montefiore's verdict "It therefore seems most probable that this phrase has been inserted by St. Matthew in order to adapt the Church's law to that of the Jewish community where the Gospel was written" (in Marriage, Divorce and the Church (SPCK 1971) p.87).

we may see Matthew's modification as a reference to some contemporary problem or as bringing down a sweeping principle to careful detail.

The difficulty is to discern what the situation is to which Matthew is applying this saying of Jesus, that is, what is the meaning of *πρηνεία*. There are two main views to be considered. The classical and normal interpretation of *πρηνεία* for centuries was adultery. For this reason the Eastern Churches generally allow divorce and remarriage after adultery. Bishop Montefiore in the Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on the Christian Doctrine of Marriage<sup>(7)</sup> still accepts sexual immorality as the most probably meaning of *πρηνεία* in these verses: "some sexual indocency or immorality (including of course adultery and premarital fornication)". This would be surprisingly and dangerously wide concession, certainly wider than Shammai's. It does not, however, seem possible linguistically to narrow it down specifically to adultery. The correct and exact term for this is *μοιχεία*<sup>(8)</sup>, and *πρηνεία* never clearly has this meaning in the Bible or in the intertestamental literature without further overtones<sup>(9)</sup>; the most frequent overtones are those derived from the adultery of Israel, whoring after other gods and unfaithful to Yahweh.

In 1948 however J. Bonsirven<sup>(10)</sup> renewed a suggestion made by Cornely in 1890, and others before him, that *πρηνεία* means an incestuous marriage, or marriage within the degrees of consanguinity forbidden by Jewish Law. It is not claimed that this is the only possible meaning of *πρηνεία*, but that this is the meaning which fits best here. Linguistically it is attractive, for it has this sense

(10) Le divorce dans le N.T. Some indication of the neglect this book has suffered in England is provided by the fact that in November 1972 I found the pages of the Bodleian copy still uncut.

(9) Aloysius M. Ambrozič, Indissolubility of Marriage in the NT: Law or Ideal? (paper read in Canada, October 1972, and privately circulated), p.5, referring to the evidence given by A. Isaksson, Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple (Lund, 1965), pp.131-135.

(8) The presence of both words in N.T. lists suggests that a clear distinction was made between them (Mk 7.22; Mt 15.19; Mk 10.19)

(7) op.cit., pp.85-87

in practically the only New Testament passage where its exact meaning can be ascertained (1 Cor 5.1), referring to marriage of a man to his father's wife. That *πορνεία* was the subject of some special concern in Judaeo-Christian circles such as those in which Matthew was written is clear from Acts 15.29, in which it is forbidden to Christian converts from paganism in the letter from Jerusalem. It is unlikely to mean simply sexual immorality here, since this would go without saying, and because the other prohibitions touch matters where there was particular legislation in Judaism. Thus *πορνεία* could well mean in Acts 15 marriage within the Jewish forbidden degrees. The probability is strengthened by the fact that the culinary restrictions which are mentioned just before *πορνεία* in Acts are prescribed in Leviticus 17 immediately before the promulgation of the forbidden degrees in Leviticus 18. There would thus be reason for Matthew to include this provision, concerned as he is with Judaeo-Christian communities, where the other synoptics see no necessity to do so. The word *πορνεία*, of which "prostitution" is the general sense was used to convey this because in contemporary Judaism illegitimate and invalid marriages were referred to by the Hebrew word *zenut* (זנות) which also has this general sense. It would be unwise to build too much on the exact use of prepositions in Matthew's awkward Greek; but it is perhaps worth mentioning that *μη ἐπὶ πορνεία* does not well express a cause which is an action such as adultery, but expresses quite naturally a state. Similarly in 5.32 (*παρεκτὸς λόγου πορνείας; λόγου* stands for *ἡ* and it translates "apart from the case of *πορνεία*".

It has been objected to this solution for the Matthew passages that such marriages were in any case null and void, so that no further legislation would have been necessary, and that "it is not credible that such incestuous unions were sufficiently common to warrant a special exceptive clause about them" (Montefiore, *op.cit.* p.85). They were, however, pretty frequent in the contemporary non-Jewish world;

H. Baltensweiler<sup>(11)</sup> cites several cases in Dura-Europos (uncle to niece and even brother to sister in 32/33 A.D.) and Egypt; the letter of Acts 15 shows that Judaeo-Christians were fussed about them. It is not true that

(11) Die Ehe im NT (1967)

they were in any case null and void, for in paganism they had been genuine enough. What was to be done about them certainly needed legislation, for it is in any case not clear what should be done in situations like this, and especially in this case difficulty is caused from the legislation of similar cases in Judaism: for converts to Judaism marriage within the forbidden degrees was permitted because by conversion the new proselyte was deemed to be like a new-born child and therefore to be sundered from his old kith and kin. Such marriages were therefore<sup>(12)</sup> valid for converts to Judaism, and if there was any different legislation for converts to Christianity, this would need to be stated. Matthew's exceptive clauses do not in themselves answer the question whether they must be dissolved (pace Baltensweiler, who thinks that they do prescribe that they must be dissolved<sup>(13)</sup>), but only excepts them from the general prohibition of divorce.

It will be seen, therefore, that Matthew 19.9 and 5.32 are not to be construed as taking up a position within the Hillel-Shammai debate, in spite of the attractiveness of this Sitz im Leben. At most this debate is alluded to by the initial κατὰ πᾶσαν αἰών; but the answer to their debate is already given in Jesus' reply before the additional logion of verse 9.<sup>(14)</sup>

A further exception to the general prohibition of divorce comes in 1 Corinthians 7.12-16. Paul is dealing with the question of a Christian - presumably a convert - with a pagan partner. He has just (verse 10) reiterated the Lord's prohibition of divorce,

(14) A third interpretation of πρωεὐλα may be relegated to a footnote. J. Dupont, Mariage et divorce dans l'Évangile (Bruges, 1959) sought to interpret πρωεὐλα as separatio a mensa et thoro, thus prescribing exactly what the traditional Roman Catholic practice allows. But Dupont's interpretation has found virtually no acceptance among scholars, the principle objection being that separatio a mensa et thoro was totally unknown in the Jewish world (cf. review by M.-E. Boismard in Revue biblique 67 (1960) pp.463-464)

(13) op. cit., pp.98-101

(12) J.B. Bauer, "Die matthäische Ehescheidungsklausel", Bibel u. Liturgie 38 (1964/5), pp.101-106.



and now proceeds to give his own authoritative ("for I think that I too have the Spirit of God", verse 40) ruling in this particular case. He encourages the Christian partner by the thought that the pagan partner is sanctified through the union, and by the hope that the pagan will be saved through it. But there is nothing to be done if the pagan is not willing to stay: "if he wants to be separated let him be separated, for the brother or sister is not held bound in such cases; the Lord called us in peace." The initiative for the separation comes from the pagan: it is simply that the Christian is not bound to follow and chase after the departing spouse. The expression *δεδούλωται* does not in itself make clear that the Christian is free to remarry, meaning as it does "is not enslaved"; but here we are helped by the context: this instruction is put in sharp contrast to the general prohibition of separation, in which comes the parenthesis "but if she does separate let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband"; clearly at least a residuary link remains. But in the treatment of the mixed marriage there are two major differences: firstly Paul retracts his strong prohibition of separation, whose strength was the reason for the prohibition of remarriage, and secondly he does not repeat the prohibition of remarriage or the exhortation to be reconciled; it looks as though he gives this up as a bad job. Therefore it does seem that the normal opinion of commentators, that remarriage is implied to be legitimate, may be accepted.

Can one go further? Paul gives as a reason "the Lord called us in peace", and peace is certainly a pregnant term in the early Church, denoting the eschatological peace brought by Christ, the fulfilment of long-standing hopes. There could perhaps be an argument that this peace, a "higher Christian value"<sup>(15)</sup>, might be used as a reason for divorce in other cases too, where there is strife between the two parties. But this is certainly not Paul's application of the principle, at least so far as concerns remarriage after divorce.

(15) cf. T.L. Thompson, "A Catholic View on Divorce", Journal of Ecumenical Studies 6 (1969) pp.53-67.

Both the exceptions in the New Testament to Jesus' prohibition of divorce concern, then, cases where conversion to Christianity has occurred. In the non-pluralistic society of the time there were naturally a few ends to be tidied up in cases like these. But there does not seem to be any way of analogy by which these exceptions can be extended, any principle in these cases which would apply to other cases within the Christian Church to legitimise divorce and remarriage for the many reasons for which some Christian bodies do allow it, or even for adultery. A number of attempts have, however, been made to show that Jesus' saying is not to be taken as a law to be followed. Several of these are listed by Ambrozič<sup>(16)</sup>: "We may speak of a general consensus among exegetes today in regard to the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew did not intend it to be a guide for chosen souls within the community, neither did he see it as an impossible ideal designed to bring us to a recognition of our invincible sinfulness, nor did he intend to use it as a means of inculcating proper attitudes, nor are the rules contained in it meant to be valid merely for the short period of intense expectation of the return of the Lord, nor is it a collection of examples designed merely to stress the necessity of radical obedience to God's inherently intelligible will." Some recent attempts to remove the legislative force of Jesus' words are worth more detailed attention.

Appeal is made to the context of Jesus' saying in the six corrections of the Old Law in the Sermon on the Mount: "the other sayings in the passage are not generally understood to be taken literally. 'If thy right eye offend thee pluck it out' (Matt.5.29) is not to be literally obeyed. Similarly, 'Swear not at all' (Matt.5.34) has not been taken by the Church down the ages as a veto on all oaths. 'Resist not evil' (Matt.5.39) has not been generally understood to mean that all Christians must always be pacifists; and similarly 'Give to him that asketh thee' (Matt.5.42) has not been taken as an absolute command to Christians to give away whatever is asked regardless of their own commitments and responsibilities. Matt.5.32 is the only saying in this whole passage that is taken as halakah"

(16) op.cit.p.9.

(Montefiore, op.cit., pp.93-94). By the term halakah Montefiore is invoking the distinction between two types of Jewish exegesis. Halakah (derived from the word for "walk"; "go", so meaning "the way", "custom", "rule") is the exegesis which draws maxims and rules for behaviour from scripture, whereas haggadah (from the word "narrate", so "narration") is more edifying stories; it "contains history, fable, allegory, meditations, prayers, reflections, philosophical and religious discussions, and a large number of moral sayings"<sup>(17)</sup>. Montefiore quotes Sherman E. Johnson<sup>(18)</sup>, that Jesus' teaching is "predominantly haggadic". But it is hard to see in what way Jesus' statement on divorce could be haggadah, since it is couched directly in terms of a rule; so also, for that matter, is Paul's. It is not that halakah is binding whereas haggadah is merely hortatory; by making the distinction one is only deciding on a literary form, almost like deciding between statement and command, for haggadah tends to be answers to questions such as "Whence does one deduce that God will vivify the dead?" or "Why was Silo destroyed?"<sup>(19)</sup>, drawn with more or less fantasy from various scriptural passages. It seems obvious that, whether they are to be obeyed or not, Jesus' words are in the form of commands. The appeal to technical Jewish terms is simply mystification.

Another attempt to whittle away the force of the prohibition is the claim that Jesus is giving radical norms, prophetic pronouncements which are not to be taken as laws. Charles Curran suggests that the intricate Catholic legalistic system obscures these radical

(19) a useful little collection of haggadoth may be found in J. Bonsirven, Exégèse rabbinique et exégèse paulinienne (Paris, 1938) pp.62-68.

(18) in one of the Five Essays on Marriage (Louisville, 1946), written at the request of the Joint Commission on Holy Matrimony of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the U.S.A., p.36 ff.

(17) M. Friedländer, The Jewish Religion (London, 1891), p.138; cf. H. Danby The Mishnah Oxford 1933 pp.793-794.

norms, which are not always attainable; no Christian can ever be content to take life, but it may sometimes be necessary. The ideal nevertheless remains because of the radical demands of the kingdom; it "involves a creative tension between the present and final stages of the reign of God"<sup>(20)</sup>. Schnackenburg agrees that "many of the demands made by the Sermon on the Mount need interpreting and delimiting", though elsewhere he is content to "let the words of Jesus stand in all their severity and ruggedness"<sup>(21)</sup>. Others argue that to treat Jesus' pronouncement as a hard and fast law is to create a new Pharisaism, precisely what Jesus wished to abolish.

It is a mistake to be misled into treating all the corrections of the Old Law in the Sermon on the Mount as being on the same level. Practically all they have in common is that they set out to perfect the Old Law. The first two (on anger towards a brother and adultery in the heart) are to show that an attitude is as important as the action about which the Old Law legislated. The fourth is a prophetic utterance about truthfulness, in which the actual prohibition of swearing is obviously less important than the positive teaching that firm statement should suffice. The last two (prohibition of vengeance and neighbourly love extending to all men) are about limitless generosity - something about which it is impossible of its nature to legislate. Into this company fits somewhat strangely the cancellation of provision for divorce, in which all the terms are precise legal terms, ἀπολύω, παρνεία, μοιχεύω. Both the matter and the terminology are quite different to those of the other five perfectings of the Old Law, but we cannot blame Matthew for that; all he set out to do, and all he tells us that he is doing, is collect instances where Jesus perfects the Law: he did not promise that Jesus would be perfecting it in the same way. Thus the appeal to the context of the Sermon on the Mount falls to the ground.

Doubtless there are ethical demands of Jesus which are exaggerated and were not meant to be taken literally. Shaner<sup>(22)</sup>

(22) op.cit. in note 3, pp.84-85

(21) R.Schnackenburg, Moral Teaching of the NT (London 1964), pp.82,88.

(20) "The Ethical Teaching of Jesus", Commonweal, 24th November 1967, p.257.

gives a list of eighteen examples, many of which, though staggering in the demands they make, do seem to me to be meant just as they are said; of none of them would I like to stand before the judgement seat and say Jesus could never have meant it - unless it be the last "if any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother etc... he cannot be my disciple"; but this was already too strong for Matthew, who writes "he who loves father or mother more than me..." (Luke 14.26 and Mt 10.37). Other such statements of Jesus which are hard to take literally are "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 19.24), and the notorious "if your right eye is a cause of your falling, tear it out and cast it away" (Mt 5.29). But with all these others it is possible to see what they mean; they have another non-literal meaning expressed in them with vigour. Matthew interprets the saying about hating one's family for love of Christ; in the case of the saying about scandal one can interpret Jesus' word as meaning "it is worth plucking out your eye to avoid giving scandal". But in the case of the saying on divorce, especially with its precise legal terms, there is no way of interpreting it into a less uncompromising meaning. All one can say is that Jesus forgot to mention the exceptions. But if he meant some uncompromising statements, which are always understood as without exceptions, why not this one? It is in the same form as "If you do not forgive other men, your father will not forgive your transgressions" (Mt 6.15).

One other avenue of exegesis has been attempted which is just worth mentioning, although I do not think that it is successful. In the dispute with the Pharisees, Jesus' answer is based on the dictum "What God has joined together let no man put asunder". But what if the bond has already been broken? "If the notion of an alliance is the best model for understanding marriage, and it is one that comes up directly in Mal 2:14, then perhaps the conditions which break alliances may also pertain in the case of marriage. Does that continue to exist in itself, as joined by God, even when the partners involved are now irrevocably separated?"<sup>(23)</sup> There is

(23) Richard J. Taylor. "Divorce in Matthew". Clergy Review 55 (1970), p.798  
(13)

an occasional hint in the early fathers (Origen, Theodoret of Cyr) that adultery does dissolve the marriage bond<sup>(24)</sup>. It might be argued on such a basis that once this has occurred there is no longer anything which God has joined together for man to put asunder. But even those fathers who do suggest that the bond is dissolved by adultery do not conclude that even the injured party is free to remarry.

In terms, then, of strict exegesis there seems to be no way of detracting from the force of the gospel prohibitions of divorce. We cannot say that Matthew and Paul lead the way to allowing some exceptions, for their limitations of the absolute force apply only in cases where there has been a conversion to Christianity leaving loose ends to be tidied up, either a case of marriage within the forbidden degrees or a pagan spouse unwilling to continue in wedlock. We cannot appeal to the context of one of the passages among other sayings which are essentially unfit for legislation, because this is not the characteristic which led Matthew to place it among them. We cannot claim that it is among those pronouncements of Jesus whose vigorous, prophetic terms and imaged language convey at face value a striking ideal which needs to be translated into less extreme terms. It seems to me that there remains only one way to accommodate the commands of the Lord to this agonising pastoral problem of remarriage after divorce. There are certain instructions in the New Testament which we disregard without qualms or accept to be inapplicable because of changed circumstances. Paul's statements on women and slaves spring to mind immediately. One might add Jesus' instructions to missionaries to go out without staff, purse, etc; we may disregard the details of this partly because the instructions presuppose an atmosphere where the eschatological cataclysm was considered to be very close, and partly because it is no longer the custom, as it then was, of itinerant preachers of other tenets. It seems to me just possible to see the corner of an argument of this type for the impermanent nature of marriage in the much greater mobility of contemporary society; the world is no longer so stable and fixed as it was; people change job and

(24) H. Crouzel, L'Église primitive face au divorce (1971)

home with much greater ease and much more radically than in previous centuries. Yet it would be hard to find a world more mobile than that of the Roman empire, or a situation where change and flux were more the normal stuff of daily life. Change of partners in marriage was one of the features of that world, both within and without Judaism, and it was against this that Jesus firmly set his face, to the dismay of his disciples.