

1. An Alternative Gospel: Mark and Imperial Propaganda

1. The Origins of Mark's Gospel in Rome

2. Mark as 'Gospel'

3. The Gospel of Augustine

Papias gives also in his own work other accounts of the words of the Lord on the authority of Aristion who was mentioned above, and traditions as handed down by the presbyter John; to which we refer those who are fond of learning. But now we must add to the words of his which we have already quoted **the tradition which he gives in regard to Mark**, the author of the Gospel. It is in the following words: "This also the presbyter said: Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not indeed in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things done or said by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter, who adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers, but with no intention of giving a connected account of the Lord's discourses, so that Mark committed no error while he thus wrote some things as he remembered them. For he was careful of one thing, not to omit any of the things which he had heard, and not to state any of them falsely." These things are related by Papias concerning Mark. But **concerning Matthew he writes** as follows: "So then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew language, and every one interpreted them as he was able." And the same writer uses testimonies from the first Epistle of John and from that of Peter likewise. And he relates another story of a woman, who was accused of many sins before the Lord, which is contained in the Gospel according to the Hebrews. These things we have thought it necessary to observe in addition to what has already been stated. Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.14-17)

Papias (pre-70 to c. 155 AD), Bishop of Hieropolis, recounts hearing traditions from the presbyters who themselves heard the apostles.

Eusebius of Caesarea, c. 263–339 AD, called *Eusebius Pamphili*, became the Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine about the year 314. Eusebius was a supporter of Arias, and as such, fell out of favour.

And thus when the divine word had made its home among them [the Christians in Rome], the power of Simon [the magician] was quenched and immediately destroyed, together with the man himself. And so greatly did the splendor of piety illumine the minds of Peter's hearers that they were not satisfied with hearing once only, and were not content with the unwritten teaching of the divine Gospel, but with all sorts of entreaties they besought Mark, a follower of Peter, and the one whose Gospel is extant, that he would leave them a written monument of the doctrine which had been orally communicated to them. Nor did they cease until they had prevailed with the man, and had thus become the occasion of the written Gospel which bears the name of Mark. And they say that Peter when he had learned, through a revelation of the Spirit, of that which had been done, was pleased with the zeal of the men, and that the work obtained the sanction of his authority for the purpose of being used in the churches. Clement in the eighth book of his Hypotyposes gives this account, and with him agrees the bishop of Hierapolis named Papias. And Peter makes mention of Mark in his first epistle which they say that he wrote in Rome itself, as is indicated by him, when he calls the city, by a figure, Babylon, as he does in the following words: "The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son" (1 Peter 5:13). And they say that this Mark was the first that was sent to Egypt, and that he proclaimed the Gospel which he had written, and first established churches in Alexandria. (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.15.1-2, 2.16.1)

Clement of Alexandria (150–215 AD), Bishop of Alexandria, teacher of Origen, wrote many works, here he is being quoted from Hypotyposes. He introduced Platonism to Christianity.

Again, in the same books [the *Hypotyposes*], Clement gives the tradition of the earliest presbyters, as to the order of the Gospels, in the following manner: "The Gospels containing the genealogies [i.e. Matthew and Luke], he says, were written first. **The Gospel according to Mark had this occasion.** As Peter had preached the Word publicly at **Rome**, and declared the Gospel by the Spirit, many who were present requested that Mark, who had followed him for a long time and remembered his sayings, should write them out. And having composed the Gospel he gave it to those who had requested it. When Peter learned of this, he neither directly forbade nor encouraged it. But, last of all, John, perceiving that the external facts had been made plain in the Gospel, being urged by his friends, and inspired by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel." This is the account of Clement. (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.5-7).

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [υἱοῦ θεοῦ].

‘The Beginning’:

- (1) the story of John the Baptist is the beginning of the good news;
- (2) the Gospel as a whole is the beginning.

‘The good news’:

- (1) the gospel - often viewed as the means of salvation
- (2) something else?

‘The good news of Jesus Christ’:

- (1) the good news of/about Jesus Christ;
- (2) Jesus Christ’s good news, i.e., his message.

'Gospel' in the LXX

2Sam. 18:20 Joab said to him, "You are not to carry tidings (*euangelias*) today; you may carry tidings another day, but today you shall not do so, because the king's son is dead." (cf. vv. 22, 25, 27)

2 Kings 7:9 Then they said to one another, "What we are doing is wrong. This is a day of good news (*euangelias*); if we are silent and wait until the morning light, we will be found guilty; therefore let us go and tell the king's household."

Gospel in the LXX repeatedly refers to tidings of military victory.

'Gospel' of Augustus

... the most divine Caesar's birthday, which we might justly consider equal to the beginning of all things.

... He has given a different appearance to the whole world, which would happily have gone to utter ruin, had not Caesar been born to the common good fortune of mankind. Therefore each of us would justly reckon [his birthday, 23 Sept] to be the beginning of his own life, since that day was the end of regretting that we had been born.

The assembly welcomes the proposal as 'good tidings' (*euangelia*) - 'the beginning of good tidings for the world was the birthday of the god' - and thanks Providence for the benefit to mankind in sending him, 'as a saviour for us and our descendants, to bring war to an end and set all things in order.'

Decree of the the assembly of the province of Asia (c. 9 B.C.)
Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Augustan Rome*, p. 93.

Note that the good tidings of the Battle of Actium has now been pushed back to the birthday of Octavian.

The Pax Augusta

- The First Unofficial Triumvirate (60 BC approx-49 BC): Julius Caesar (popular choice), Pompey the Great (the senator's party), and Marcus Lucinus Crassus (extremely wealthy businessman).
- Upon the murder of Julius Caesar, Octavian took on the title Divi filius, son of the god (as against 'son of the divine Julius).
- The Second Triumvirate (43-33 BE): Mark Antony, Octavian, and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus.

- The First Unofficial Triumvirate (60 BC approx-49 BC): Julius Caesar (popular choice), Pompey the Great (the senator's party), and Marcus Lucinus Crassus (extremely wealthy businessman). Following the death of Crassus, close friend and supporter of Caesar, civil war broke out between Caesar and Pompey, leading to the death of Pompey and Caesar establishing himself as perpetual dictator.
- The Second Triumvirate (43-33 BE): The second triumvirate included the two main holders of power, Mark Antony and Octavian (Caesar's great nephew), and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus. Lepidus was sidelined early on and Mark Antony, who controlled the east, was defeated by Octavian, who controlled the west, leaving him as emperor. Mark Antony committed suicide with Cleopatra in Alexandria following defeat at the Battle of Actium in Greece (31 BC) and being chased to Egypt in 30 BC.



Fig. 1 Coin issued by Octavian c. 40 BC. Octavian describes himself as CAESAR DIVI F (son of god), and portrays Julius Caesar on the other face as DIVOS IULIUS (God Julius).

- Civil war (The Age of Civil War, to be followed by the Age of Peace).
- The Battle of Actium (2 Sept, 31 BC, Octavian's fleet of 400 warships against Antony's fleet of 230 warships), up until then the largest naval battle, was rebranded as the struggle of freedom against the eastern hordes and their gods.
- The Battle of Actium was a spiritual battle between Apollo, who 'calls upon Augustus as saviour of the world to free his country from fear' (A. Wallace-Hadrill, Augustan Rome, p. 7.)

'The assassination of Caesar in 44 BC had left Rome in chaos. Two main contestants rapidly emerged for the control of the Caesarian cause: Caesar's second in command, one of the consuls of that year, Marcus Antonius (Antony), and Caesar's great-nephew and heir, Gaius Octavius, who promptly renamed himself Caesar, adding for good measure, when his 'father' was declared a god, the title Divi Filius, son of the god.

For the myth-making required that Actium should be seen as far more than a battle between individuals for supremacy. It was a battle for Roman values, to save the Roman world from a frontal assault on its gods, its ideals, its moral fabric. The threat was not of a tipsy Antony, but the evil incarnate in Cleopatra; the victory was one of Roman decency over barbarism and corruption. Antony was an (almost) innocent victim: a man unmanned, and a Roman un-Romanned.' (Augustan Rome, p. 7)



Fig. 30 Agate ring stone. Octavian in the guise of Neptune (note trident) rides over the waves. The head of an opponent, probably Sextus Pompey rather than Antony, is seen under the sea-horses' hooves.

Hi military victory was due to his help from the gods.

- 'The outgoing saeculum was the Age of Civil War, of breakdown of state and family, a true Age of Iron.'
- 'The new era was the Age of Peace, of order in the state and purity in the family.' (WA, p. 70)

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'(6) When in the consulship of Tiberius Nero and P. Quintilius I returned to Rome from Spain and Gaul after settling the affairs of those provinces with success, the Senate, to commemorate my return, ordered an altar to **Pax Augusta** to be consecrated in the Campus Martius, at which it decreed that the magistrates, priests, and Vestal Virgins should celebrate an anniversary sacrifice. Whereas our ancestors have willed that the gateway of Janus Quirinus should be shut, whenever **victorious peace is secured** by sea and by land throughout the empire of the Roman people, and whereas before my birth twice only in all is it on record that the gateway has been shut, three times under my principate has the Senate decreed that it should be shut..... (6-17).'

Res Gestae Divi Augustici 12f., 24-27, 34

Res Gestae Divi Augustici 12f., 24-27, 34, in C. K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents* (London: SPCK, 1956), 2-4, in which Augustus recounts his achievements regarding the establishment of world peace:

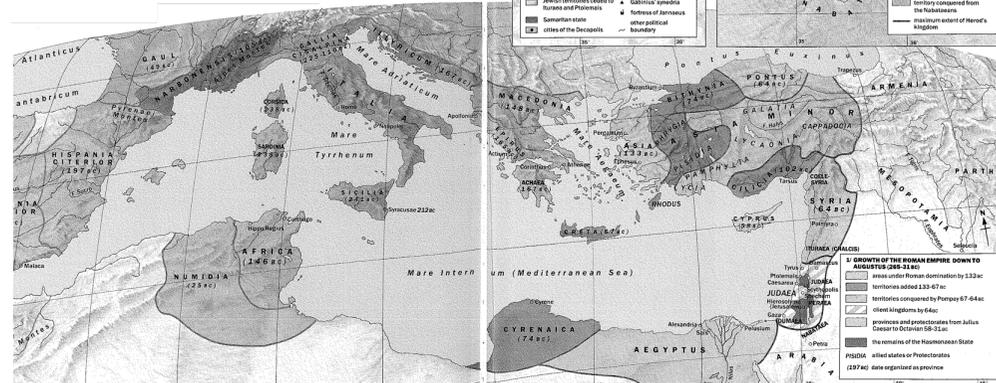
'I conquered the pirates and gave **peace** to the sea' (27-28).

'I restored **peace** to all the provinces of Gaul and Spain and to Germany, to all that region washed by the Ocean from Gades to the mouth of the Elbe.

Peace too I caused to be established in the alps from the region nearest to the Hadriatic as far as the Tuscan sea, while no tribe was wantonly attacked by war' (41-46).

'In my sixth and seventh consulships, after I had extinguished the civil wars, having been put in supreme possession of the whole empire by the universal consent of all, I transferred the republic from my own power into the free control of the Senate and Roman people.' (79)

Pax Augusta (27 BC-180 AD)



The period of peace extended from the rise to power of Caesar Augustus to the death of Marcus Aurelius (180 AD), after which his son Commodus' excesses and failure to deal with Germanic tribes led to the destabilising of the Roman Empire.

More than a Dictator/King

Following the civil war he transferred power back to the Senate, who conferred upon him the honorific title of Augustus as *princeps senatus*, rather than that of *Rex* (king):

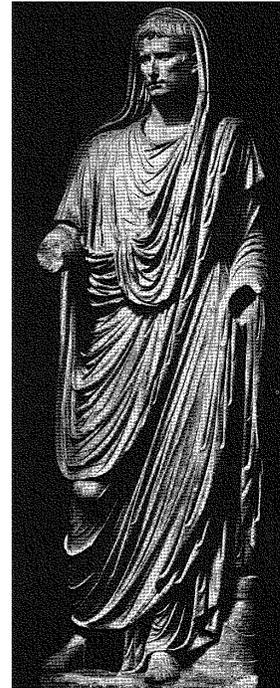
'to commemorate my **virtue**, **clemency**, **justice**, and **piety**. After that time I stood before all others in **dignity**, but of actual **power** I possessed no more than my colleagues in each several magistracy.' (86-89)

Augustus restored the republic. 'This honorific title expressed the "unofficial" but sacred and dignified position of Octavian. *Rex*, and even *Romulus* (which Octavian would probably have liked), were titles too repugnant to Roman feeling. Octavian was *princeps senatus*.' (Barrett, *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents*, p. 5).

Kingship was viewed as Hellenistic, foreign, and a form of rulership that would put the free Roman people into bondage - so very unpopular.

Augustus as Priest

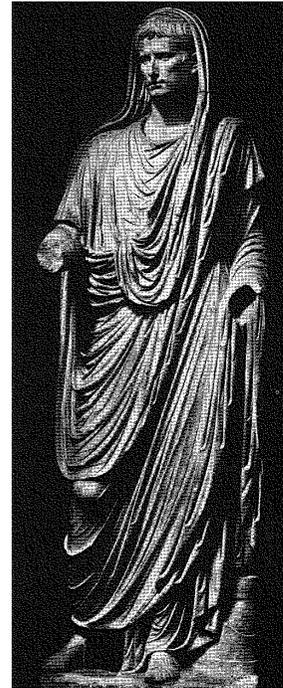
- Following the death of Lepidus, Augustus took on the role of priest.



Suetonius, *Tiberius* 36: **Foreign religions, the Egyptian and Jewish religious rites, he suppressed**, and compelled those who were engaged in that superstition to burn their religious vestments with all their apparatus. The Jewish youth he dispersed, under pretence of military service, into provinces of unhealthy climate; the rest of that race, and those who adopted similar opinions, he expelled from the city, on pain of perpetual slavery if they did not obey. He also **banished the astrologers**; but when they petitioned him, and promised that they would forsake their art, he pardoned them.

Augustus as Priest

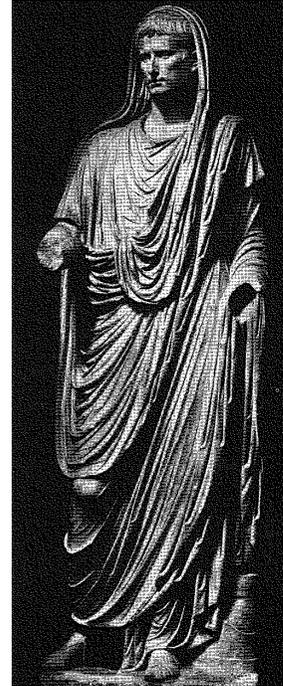
- Augustus and his family were the supreme examples of piety and correct moral behaviour.



Augustus as Priest

For Virgil, Augustus 'rescued a corrupt human race from the wrath of heaven' (Odes 1.2)

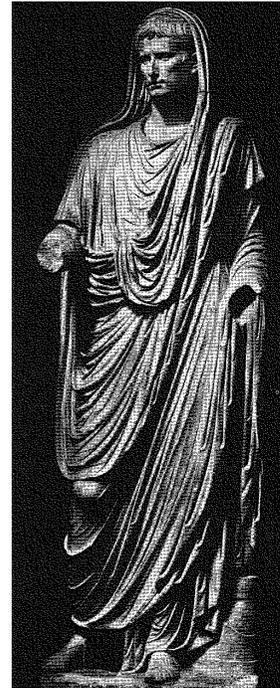
'Rome had risked destruction by the folly of civil war, and the source of that war was the pollution of the family and marriage' (WA, p. 65)



Augustus as Priest

Marriage fell victim to a fault-fertile Age
Pollutant stain spread out from house to race,
This fountainhead of our disgrace,
flooded folk and fatherland.
(Virgil, Odes, 3.6.17-29)

Whoever would erase
The Godless killings, internecine folly,
Whoever wants the praise
Of statues to the country's father, he must dare
Curb promiscuity.
(Virgil, Odes, 3.24.25-29)



- The civil war was portrayed as resulting from Rome's moral breakdown.

Augustus as Pattern

- Augustus instituted moral reforms (outlawing adultery, certain forms of sexual abuse - only between equals, i.e., Roman citizens!)



Fig. 9 Gold coin of Antony, early 30s BC, showing Octavia. She wears her hair in a bun, a sign of feminine modesty.

Octavia was the sister of Octavian.

Augustus as Wonder Child

Now the last age by Cumae's Sibyl sung
Has come and gone, and the majestic roll
Of circling centuries begins anew:
Justice returns, returns old Saturn's reign,
With a new breed of men sent down from heaven.
Only do thou, at the boy's birth in whom
The iron shall cease, the golden age arise,

(Virgil, *Eclogue* IV.10-22; Barrett, *Documents*, 8-9)

This prophecy is dated to 40 BC, and revolves around the return of a gold age when, through the newly born wonder child (miracle child born when the senate had decreed no births, his mother Atia 'dreamed during a visit to the temple of Apollo that the god had visited his favour on her in the form of a snake; Augustus was born nine months later' (WA, p. 86).

Augustus as Wonder Child

Befriend him, chaste Luciana; 'tis thine own
Apollo reigns. And in they consulate,
This glorious age, O Pollio, shall begin.
And the months enter on their mighty march.
Under thy guidance, whatso tracks remain
Of our old wickedness, once done away,
Shall free the earth from never-ceasing fear
He shall receive the life of gods, and see
Heroes with gods commingling, and himself
Be seen of them, and with his father's worth
Reign o're a world at peace.

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Augustus as Wonder Child

The goats will come home by themselves with milk-filled
udders,
Nor will the cattle be in fear of great lions...
The serpent will perish, and the treacherous herb of poison
Will perish....

(Virgil, *Eclogue* IV.21-25; Wallace-Hadrill, *Augustan Rome*, 91)

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Augustus as god-made-man



Fig. 11 Gemma Augustea. The cameo shows Augustus as Jupiter, crowned by the World, beside Rome; note his astral sign of Capricorn above his head. He holds the augur's crook (*lituus*) to indicate his power of taking auspices as supreme commander. Tiberius descends from a triumphal chariot. Captives below include a German and a Gallic Celt (with torque).

He portrayed himself as Jupiter-on-earth, not as an earthly king (a humiliation for Romans). 'For in representing Augustus as a god-made-man, the Romans were not simply adding Augustus alongside their other gods, but were placing him as a new intervening layer between gods and men. Human peace and prosperity could no longer be achieved by direct appeal from man to god; the overall structure of peace was dependent on the god-made-man. Piety to the gods was no longer enough: a precondition of the gods' support was now piety to Augustus.' (WA, pp. 90-91)



(a)



(b)



Fig. 31 Two denarii of Octavian, around the time of Actium. (a) To the left, Octavian is shown on the head (top), a herm of Jupiter on the tail (bottom). (b) To the right, the head of the herm of Jupiter on the head has the features of Octavian (top); on the tail (bottom), Octavian sits on a consul's throne holding a statue of victory.

Augustus	Jesus in Mark
the gospel of Augustus	the gospel of Jesus Christ (1:1)
son of god	Son of God (15:39)
Jupiter-made-man	Yahweh-made-man (6:50; 9:3)
Saviour of the World	Preacher of the Kingdom of God (1:15)

27 BCE -14 CE	Augustus (Luke 2:1)
14-37	Tiberius (Luke 3:1)
37-41	Gaius (Caligula)
41-54	Claudius
54-68	Nero
68-69	Galba, Ortho, Vitellius
69-79	Vespasian
79-81	Titus
81-96	Domitian
96-98	Nerva
98-117	Trajan
117-138	Hadrian

1. How would Mark's audience have experienced Augustus' Age of Peace?
2. What did the alternative Kingdom of God have to offer?
3. What is the nature of my Gospel?
4. Does the Gospel I believe/share complement or contrast with the gospels of this age?

When was Mark written? If early, then the show is still partly on the road, a later date, and some of the shine is beginning to wear off.

In NT was have varying positions towards Rome – Revelation is hostile (written by someone who had lived through Palestinian troubles), to a more positive stance in some of Paul's epistles (Rom 13), positive stance in Luke–Acts.

