

On Wine and Wineskins in Mark 2:21-22

Ken-jom Ho

Biblical Graduate School of Theology, Singapore

In Mark 2:22, Christ urged that no one ought to pour new wine into old wineskins. This has long been regarded as pointing to the incommensurability and incompatibility of Christianity (which did not yet exist at the time these words were uttered) with its precursor, Judaism. This paper reviews that traditional construal and finds it wanting. Alternatives are explored and an optimal one identified, the implications of which are then drawn out.

Section I below canvasses the traditional understanding of the saying as one of incompatibility between Judaism as "the old" and Christianity as "the new." In Section II, an optimal explanation of what the saying might look like, based on what "wine" might have meant in the contemporary culture, is suggested. Finally, the conclusion is drawn that the saying in question was really more about Christ clarifying what the right type of disciple to teach the Torah through his messianic lens would probably look like.¹

¹ Instead of the translation of *Law*, or *law*, which will be used only when a quoted text uses it in the original, this paper uses *Torah*, without the article for תּוֹרָה or νόμος. The purpose is to de-emphasise the punitive meaning implied by *Law*, or *law*, and emphasise, instead, the meaning of *Torah* as *instruction* or *guidance* in righteousness. Theologians of the Protestant persuasion have frequently portrayed Torah as commandment, with Judaism equated to legalism; see William D. Davies, *Jewish and Pauline Studies* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 235.

Section I

The Pharisees and the followers of John the Baptist were apparently wont to fast quite a bit. Responding to a question as to why his disciples, however, did not do so, Christ replied at Mark 2:22 that: "No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins *as well*; but *one puts* new wine into fresh wineskins."²

Old wineskins could become dry and brittle, given that they were lined with pitch (*mezufaf*) for waterproofing.³ If an old wineskin that had become brittle or friable were used to store new wine, which was grape juice that would ferment, the gas produced in the process was liable to cause it to burst open at some juncture.⁴ Because of this, in the contemporary culture, old wineskins were oiled and rubbed to render them soft and pliable again, so they could be used again and again.

Historically, it was upon this saying that Marcion of Pontus (85 CE–160 CE) thought he had found support for a "total separation between the religion that Jesus and Paul espoused and that of the Hebrew Scriptures."⁵ According to the second century heresiarch: "Jesus did not fulfill the law — he set it aside, and he demands that men should

² All scripture quotations are taken from the *NASB* unless otherwise stated. The parallel verses in Matthew 9 add at v.17 "and both are preserved," after "fresh wineskins," while those in Luke 5 add at vv. 38-39. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one, after drinking old *wine* wishes for new; for he says, "The old is good." The poetic parallelism between verses 21 and 22 is striking. These sayings may well "constitute an authentic vestige of Jesus' teachings," Henderson concluded, for whom the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas provided "possible independent attestation." See Suzanne Watts Henderson, "What Is Old? What Is New? A Reconsideration of Garments and Wineskins," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 34 (2012): 75, 104, 118.

³ Philip Leroy Culbertson, *A Word Fitly Spoken: Context Transmission and Adoption of The Parables of Jesus*, SUNY Series in Religious Studies (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995), 277-76.

⁴ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 300-301; and James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 91-92.

⁵ Joseph B. Tyson, *Marcion and Luke-Acts: A Defining Struggle* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 32.

free themselves entirely from the creator God and all his works." Marcion argued that the saying pointed to how directly opposed the Old Testament god of law and wrath was to the New Testament god of grace and love. Accordingly, Christians were to reject the former and worship the latter only; believers not to mix the Gospel with Judaism.⁶

In *Adversus Marcionem* 3.15, Tertullian of Carthage, a contemporary of Marcion, also took the new wine in Mark 2:22 to stand for the Gospel which, he argued, could not be shoehorned into Jewish categories of the Old Testament. Tertullian asserted: "Everything has been changed from carnal to spiritual by the new grace of God which, with the coming of the gospel, wiped out the old era completely."⁷

Commenting upon the parallel verses in Matthew, the church father Jerome took the old wineskins as proxying for the scribes and Pharisees while the new wine he understood to stand in for the Gospel. Nevertheless, the essence of the parable for Jerome was still that the new and the old were incompatible opposites.⁸

Accordingly, for Kee: "The traditional interpretation... can be summed up in one word, incompatibility. It is supposed to teach that the Old and the New are incompatible, that Judaism is incompatible with Christianity."⁹ Kee cited older literature that proffered the traditional

⁶ As cited in Robert Smith Wilson, *A Study of a Second-Century Heretic* (London: James Clarke, 1933; Repr., London: James Clarke, 1980), 125. For Marcion, "The Old Testament God must not be allowed to appear as the father of Jesus Christ; he is quite another God," *ibid.*

⁷ Tertullian, "On Prayer I," in *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, vol. 40, ed. R. J. Defarrari (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1959), 158; as cited by Henderson, *What is Old? What is New?* 119.

⁸ Manlio Simonetti, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Matthew 1-13* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 179, 181.

⁹ Alistair Kee, "The Old Coat and the New Wine: A Parable of Repentance," *NT 12* (1970): 14.

explanation of incompatibility, for example, Jeremias' typical comment that "the old world's age has run out... the New Age has arrived."¹⁰ Many modern commentators reprise the same argument. For instance, according to Carson:¹¹

the new situation introduced by Jesus could not simply be... poured into the old wineskins of Judaism. New forms would have to accompany the kingdom Jesus was now inaugurating; to try to domesticate him and incorporate him into the matrix of established Jewish religion would only succeed in ruining both Judaism and Jesus' teaching.

Updating Kee's citations, Henderson pointed out: "Though they do not always explain the decision, interpreters commonly equate... the new wine with Jesus' gospel message about the coming kingdom of God ... a view found throughout commentaries today."¹² Typical of these newer interpreters would be MacDonald's remark that:¹³

The outmoded forms, ordinances, traditions, and rituals of Judaism were too rigid to hold the joy, the exuberance, and the energy of the

¹⁰ See Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* trans. S. H. Hooke (London: SCM, 1963), 118. Others whom Kee cited included Frederic William Farrar, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 74; B.H. Branscomb, *The Gospel of Mark* (London: MNTC, 1937), 553; D.E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark* (London: Penguin, 1963), 102; and Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 2d ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1966), 213.

¹¹ D. A. Carson, "Matthew," on 9:16–17, in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, JD Douglas, and Walter Kaiser, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 365.

¹² Henderson, *What is Old? What is New?* 119, fn. 1, cited the following scholars as continuing to use the language of "incompatibility," including: John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2002), 109; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary, Hermeneia* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007), 200; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 141; Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, WBC 34a (Dallas, TX: Word, 1989), 115; Bas M. F. van Iersel, *Mark: A Reader-Response Commentary*, trans. W. H. Bisscheroux; JSNTSupp 164 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 156; Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, AB 27A (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 235; Robert H. Stein, *Mark BECNT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 140; Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 86-87; and, Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 126.

¹³ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 202.

new dispensation... [The one who drinks old wine] pictures the natural reluctance of men to abandon the old for the new, Judaism for Christianity, law for grace, shadows for substance!

A typical observation was France's that: "This is what it is like when you try to contain the effervescent life of the kingdom of God within the traditional patterns of Jewish religion."¹⁴ In the same spirit was Liefeld's comment that "Jesus' teaching is like fermenting wine that seems to have inherent vigor and cannot be contained within an old rigid system."¹⁵ In his 2009 book, Mali would find an incompatibility between the Christian gospel – and Christ's authority– on one hand, and the "formalist obligations" of "traditional" or "Pharisaic" Judaism, on the other.¹⁶ For Mali, Christ stressed "not the victory of the new over the old [but that their] incompatibility ... is carefully woven into the fabric of Mark's entire story."¹⁷ That schism between the "old" and "new" would, Mali argued, lead ineluctably to the crucifixion of Christ.

Kee reckoned it was a retrojection of the polemics of Reformation Christianity into the first century that rendered the construal of incompatibility such an evocative one.¹⁸ As Kee pointed out, Luther considered the new wine vis-à-vis the old wineskins as standing for the

¹⁴ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 55.

¹⁵ Walter L. Liefeld, *Luke: The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 67.

¹⁶ Joseph F. Mali, *The Christian Gospel and Its Jewish Roots: A Redaction-Critical Study of Mark 2:21-22 in Context. Studies in Biblical Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 51, 66, 100.

¹⁷ Mali, *The Christian Gospel and Its Jewish Roots*, 12.

¹⁸ Mali, *The Christian Gospel and Its Jewish Roots*, 12.

Gospel in opposition to the Law.¹⁹ By Stern's reckoning also, the new wine was Christianity while the old wineskins stood for "traditional Judaism."²⁰ Arguing that the "new" (*kainos*) in "new wineskins" suggested a newness in quality, not in time, so only a qualitative renewal was in view, Stern argued that the idea was that Judaism itself had to be "renewed" or "reconditioned" so it could accommodate the new wine of Christianity. In his view, Christianity itself was that "renewed" Judaism or, more precisely, the messianic Judaism of the *Nazarenes* in the first century.²¹ The problem with Stern's viewpoint is that the old wine was called "good" in the Lukan parallel at Luke 5:39, which would have meant that, if the old wine were Judaism, then any argument that Judaism had to be "renewed" would seem wrongheaded.

Moreover, the traditional reading of incompatibility between the two soteriological systems requires Christ to posit Christianity as being opposed to Judaism, when there was no Christianity as such "till at least Pentecost; probably not for several years after that. [Thus i]t is an anachronism to project such a distinction back into the life of Jesus."²²

¹⁹ Commenting on the parallel verses in Mt 9:16-17, Luther explained that the ancient fathers "want to retain a part of the old Law of Moses, namely, to pay heed to the full moon of March - that is the old garment. Then [as Christians] they do not wish to be subject to that same day of the full moon, but, instead want to take the following Sunday - that is the new patch on the old garment... How much better it would have been if they had let Moses' Law regarding Easter die altogether and had retained nothing of the old garment [for] Christ, to whom this law applied, has annulled it completely." See Martin Luther, "On the Councils and the Church (1539)" in Theodore G. Tappert ed., *Selected Writings of Martin Luther* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007), 3:195-370, here 255.

²⁰ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament, 1992), 36.

²¹ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 37. The Greek word rendered as *Nazarene* here may be spelled also as *Nazorene*, *Nazorean*, or *Nazarean*. This paper will use *Nazarene*, unless context demands one of the other spellings. Schaefer mistakenly regards *Ναζαρηνός* and *Ναζωραίος* as being no different. Actually, while one is nominal, the other is adjectival. See H.H. Schaefer, "Ναζαρηνός, Ναζωραίος," in *Theological Dictionary of the NT*, book 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 875. Likewise, Balz and Schneider also mistakenly see these as "simply two morphologically variant forms of the same word with the same meaning." See Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 2.455. These writers seemingly want both terms to mean "someone from Nazareth," which Mt 2:23 seems to imply.

²² Kee, "The Old Coat and the New Wine," 16.

In addition, how could Christ be setting out to transform Judaism, after also declaring that he had come not to destroy but to fulfil the Torah, as Matthew 5:17-19 would have it. It would be "a strange use of the verb to fulfil [the Torah]," Kee noted, if Christ were to then teach that his ministry was opposed to and incompatible with Judaism.²³

All this suggests a fundamental problem with the incompatibility thesis. Still, Stern's nod to the *Nazarenes*, an appellation applied to both Christ and the first in-Christ disciples, bears commenting. Jerome testified that the Gospel of Matthew was originally composed in Hebrew, so there might well have been a specific Hebrew term behind Ναζωραῖος.²⁴ What it was may be suggested in the Cairo Genizah manuscripts, that included some fragments with the *Amidah*, prayers that observant Jews recited thrice daily, which included a curse at the twelfth of its eighteen Benedictions that pronounced, *inter alia*: "May there be no hope for the apostates ... May the *Nazarenes* and the *Minim* perish in an instant."²⁵ While *Minim* was spelled מינים meaning "heretics," *Nazarenes* was spelled as either נוצרים or נוצרים, the root word of which was נצר which can mean *branch*.

When accused of heresy in leading τῶν Ναζωραίων, Paul's offered the defense that the sect's philosophy was τὴν Ὁδὸν the Way

²³ The root word of πληρῶσαι is πληρῶ meaning "I fulfil," or "I complete," or "I make complete," at Matt 5:17 arguably means "I preach fully," given its parallel use at Rom 15:18-19 where Paul says: "For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have πεπληρωκένα fully preached/ proclaimed the gospel of Christ." The root word of πεπληρωκένα is, of course, also πληρῶ.

²⁴ As Jerome testified: "That [the New Testament] is Greek is not to be doubted, with the exception of the Apostle Matthew, who first in Judea published the Gospel of Christ in Hebrew letters." See Hier., *Praefatio in quatuor Evangelia* (FL 29, 559 = NFNF, 2nd ser. 6, 488), as quoted in Eric Laupot, "Tacitus' Fragment 2: The Anti-Roman Movement of the Christians and the Nazoreans," *Vigiliae Christianae* 54:3 (2000): 234. Chrysostom also noted: "Matthew... composed a gospel of Christ at first published in Judea in Hebrew letters and words... for the sake of those of the circumcision who believed, but this was afterwards translated into Greek though by what author is uncertain." See Hier. Vir. III. (PL 23, 643-646), noted in Laupot, *Tacitus' Fragment 2*, 238.

²⁵ Jacob Mann, "Genizah Fragments of the Palestinian Order of Service," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 2 (1925): 306.

in which I serve the ancestral God of our fathers, believing everything in accordance with the Law and written in the Prophets." (Acts 24:14) Thus, the Way of the *Nazarenes* would have involved walking in or observing/keeping/guarding the Torah. In short, the *Nazarenes* would have been Torah-observant.²⁶ At 24:6, Paul added: "I myself also practice my best [everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets] to always maintain a blameless conscience before God and before men."

In fact, in his *Commentary on Isaiah*, Jerome said that the *Nazarenes*, "though they receive Christ, do not omit the observations of the Old Law."²⁷ So, in contrast to Christians today, the *Nazarenes* were apparently Torah-observant disciples of Christ. Jerome also attested that the *Nazarenes* recognized Paul's authority wholeheartedly, calling him "the last of all the apostles [through whom] the Gospel of Christ shone to the most distant tribes."²⁸ They were extremely critical, however, of the *halakha* הלכה of the Pharisees, or its Way of Walking – how they observed the Torah – which they sought to impose upon the populace.²⁹ In the same tenor, Pritz noted that the *Nazarenes* "rejected *halakha* as it was developing in rabbinic Judaism."³⁰

²⁶ Caneday argues that Romans 2 may picture Gentile Christians keeping the Torah by the Spirit; see A.B. Caneday, "Judgment, Behavior, and Justification according to Paul's Gospel in Romans 2," *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* 1 (2011): 153-92.

²⁷ *Nazarenes*, in turn, were wont to call the Pharisees apostates like "the devil and his angels... who do everything for the love of the belly and hiss during the incantations in the way of magicians in order to deceive... who earlier deceived the people with very vicious traditions." In fact, the *Nazarenes* claimed that "God has given us the Law." See Jerome, *Comm. Isa.* 29.20-21; 8:20-21; 9.1-4.

²⁸ Jerome, *Comm. Isa.* 9.1-4.

²⁹ Jerome, *Comm. Isa.* 8.14; 20-21; 9.1-4; 29.20-21.

³⁰ Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*, 110.

Section II

Arguing that the disputation was an intramural affair involving religious Jews and given that the saying appeared at the conclusion of the pericope on fasting, Young proposed that the Pharisees and John the Baptist's disciples may well have added a number of fast days to their regimens. These were what constituted the "new wine," Young reckoned. As such, in urging people return to "old wine," Christ was really advocating a return to the Torah of Moses, a system without extraneous or adventitious teachings like these additional fasts, Young reasoned. The Torah of Moses (Lev 16:29, 23:27) commanded only one fast day, that of *יום הכיפורים* Yom Kippurim, or the Day of Atonements. Those who were willing to return to the Torah of Moses, Young argued, were the "new wineskins ... a revitalized people [in a] spiritual renewal ... linked more to Jesus and his disciples ... than to the new innovative fasts being called for by John the Baptist and the Pharisees."³¹ However, Young's proposal would require that *old* wineskins to be reconditioned so that they became able to hold *old* wine. By contrast, in Mark 2:22, Christ proposed *new* wineskins for *new* wine.

To reiterate, the traditional explanation holds that the new wine was Christianity, and the new wineskins Christian structures, while the old wine was Judaism and the old wineskins were Jewish institutions. According to this thesis, the following permutations would have presented themselves as possibilities:

- a) Storing new wine in new wineskins. The wine ferments nicely and the new pliable wineskins do not burst and the wine is preserved.
- b) Storing new wine in old wineskins. The wine ferments, which causes the wineskins to burst, so the wine is spilled and lost.
- c) Storing old wine in old wineskins. The wine no longer ferments, so the wineskins do not burst, and the wine is preserved.
- d) Storing old wine in new wineskins. The wine no longer ferments, so the wineskins do not burst, and the wine is preserved.

³¹ Brad H. Young, *Jesus the Jewish Theologian* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 158.

All these possible permutations would then translate into Christ recommending the new wine called Christianity for the church, and the old wine called Judaism for the synagogue. That is, Christ would have had to mean that religious Jews ought never to receive the Gospel, for they would self-destruct if they did so. This meant that Christ would have urged the Jews to remain within the bounds of Judaism, not accept his Gospel.

This counterintuitive result suggests that the identifications listed above must have missed the mark. Given that the various permutations do not work, one might have to cast aside both the presumption of the wine being proxies for Judaism or Christianity as well as the thesis of incompatibility between the two religious systems.

Kee argued incorrectly that "The old is good," as a conclusion, "destroys the meaning of the parable on any interpretation... the sentence is out of place here." Still, Kee noted correctly that, as logic would have it, "it is a bad thing to lose the new wine, but apparently it is a bad thing also to lose the skins" too.³² Here, Kee's very own insight suffices to explain "The old is good" for, as Henderson observed, given the fact of Christ's "interest in the preservation of the old... the widely assumed interpretive preference for the new, over and against the old, seems to stand on shaky textual ground."³³

That is, instead of valorizing the new over the old, the new wine story points to the disastrous results of using the old to hold the new. The old had intrinsic value, so its loss was to be regretted, suggesting that the old does not stand for Judaism *per se*.³⁴ Kee drew the obvious lesson that "[t]he point is... not old versus new but ... that through ill-considered action, through being unprepared, a man may suffer loss."³⁵

³² Kee, "The Old Coat and the New Wine," 19.

³³ Henderson, *What Is Old? What Is New?* 123.

³⁴ Henderson, *What Is Old? What Is New?* 126, 127.

³⁵ Kee, "The Old Coat and the New Wine," 20.

It should then be asked if Christ spoke generically about just any ill-considered action or if he meant some *sui generis* activity that was especially ill-considered within a specific context. Regarding the context, Henderson argued that the "narrative setting in Mark suggests ... questions of discipleship [rather] than to opposing salvation-historical eras [of Judaism v. Christianity]." ³⁶

The literary context was immediately preceded by the fasting controversy and immediately followed by the grain-plucking-on-the-Sabbath controversy. Both scenarios had more to do with the disciples' conduct than Christ's actions, or lack thereof, although Christ was also involved as their teacher, of course. ³⁷ The disciples' behavior ought to be seen not in a vacuum but in the context of the contemporary culture of the Second Temple era. What *mores* or norms or customs or conventions obtained, what tropes were commonplace in that culture, and so on, mattered. For example, as to customs or conventions, fasting was an important practice, which Christ did not reject for he even said that his disciples were indeed going to fast but only when he, the Bridegroom, was no longer with them. (Mk 2:19; Mt 9:15; Lk 5:35)

In the culture, the rabbis resorted to parables to bring out certain truths that they wanted the people to grasp, usually using not abstractions but concrete examples to flesh out abstract concepts so as to render them easier to cognize. ³⁸ Such parables often employed certain tropes that would be natural to the native.

If so, what Christ said may not have been as cryptic to the scribes and Pharisees as it is to the modern reader. Speaking as a native and as an insider who knew exactly what tropes his interlocutors were familiar with, the question then would be what "wine" might have connoted in the context of rabbinic disputation.

³⁶ Henderson, *What Is Old? What Is New?* 118.

³⁷ David Daube, "Responsibilities of Master and Disciple in the Gospels," *NTS* 19 (1972):115, noting that a master and his disciple were mutually responsible for each other's behaviors.

³⁸ Rabbi Bokser Ben Zion, *The Wisdom of the Talmud: A Thousand Years of Jewish Thought* (New York: Citadel, 2001):164

As Culbertson noted: "Well before the time of Jesus, wine had become a parabolic symbol for Torah or doctrine."³⁹ Not only was wine used as a metaphor for Torah at Isaiah 55:1 and Proverbs 9:2, but it was also similarly used in the Mishnah.⁴⁰ The rabbis quoted here lived about a hundred years after Christ but the tropes they used in *Pirke Avot* (*Ethics of the Fathers*) come from an oral tradition that was known for two centuries before Christ. For instance, at *m. Avot* 4:20 it is noted that:⁴¹

Rabbi Yose ben Rabbi Judah of Kefar Hebevli said: *He* who learns when a *child* – what is *he* like? *One who eats sour grapes and drinks fresh wine.* And *he* who learns from an old man – what is *he* like? *He who eats ripe grapes and drinks vintage wine.*" Then adds Rabbi Meir: "Do not look at the bottle but at what is in it. You can have a new bottle full of old wine, and an old bottle which has got not even new wine."

Likewise, *Sifrei Devarim* 48:2 noted that:⁴²

Just as wine rejoices, so words of Torah rejoice, as it is written (Ps 18:9) "The statutes of the L-rd are just, rejoicing the heart." And just as with wine, you taste the flavor of the wine from the beginning but the more it ages in the bottle, the more the flavor is enhanced so, words of Torah—the older they grow in the body. The more their "flavor" is enhanced, viz. (Jib 12:12) "With the aged there is wisdom, and with length of days, understanding.

When all that is in a bottle is merely unfermented grape juice ("new wine"), there is no taste of wine at all. But the longer the juice stays in a sealed bottle, the longer it has undergone fermentation, the more alcohol there will be. This "old wine" naturally tastes better. So also with the

³⁹ Culbertson, *A Word Fitly Spoken*, 276.

⁴⁰ Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 309.

⁴¹ *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of The Fathers) is a tractate of the Mishnah that discusses ethics and interpersonal relationships. See Jacob Neusner, *Torah from our Sages. Pirke Avot. A New American Translation and Explanation* (Chappaqua NY: Rossel, 1984), 146.

⁴² <https://www.sefaria.org/Sifrei_Devarim.48.6?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en> (accessed 07 Apr 2019).

words of the Torah: the longer one has studied and taken them to heart, and embodied them, the better they become. The scribes and Pharisees desired for the populace to grow spiritually. This would require getting the people to know, believe, and obey the Torah more thoroughly. Likewise, Christ had also come to bring about spiritual renewal. He would do so by instantiating the kingdom of heaven by fulfilling – or preaching fully, as argued above – the Torah of Moses, as he declared at Matthew 5:17-19.⁴³ But he would teach the Torah of Moses in messianic terms.

If wine represented the Torah, as Lancaster suggested, then the wineskins for storing wine may plausibly have represented Torah students, instead of Judaism or Christianity, as such. If wineskins stood for Torah-students, then new wineskins were "new" students, by which could have meant those without significant previous instruction in the Torah. In that case, the new wine would have been instruction in the Torah that the new student was imbibing for the first time. Conversely, old wineskins would have represented students with significant previous instruction in the Torah, while old wine would have represented that previous instruction in the Torah of theirs. Lancaster paraphrased the parallel verses in Luke 5:36-39 as follows:⁴⁴

No one takes a lesson meant for a new student and tries to teach it to an old (already educated) student. If he does, he will fail to teach the new student, and the lesson meant for the new student will be rejected by the old student... No one teaches new Torah-teaching to old (previously educated) students. If he does, the new teaching will be rejected, the student will be lost. No. Instead new Torah-teaching must be taught to new students. And no one after receiving old teaching (previous education) wants the new, for he says, "The old teaching is better."

In this decidedly non-anachronistic, appropriately -contextualized construal, Christ would have meant that a person already in receipt

⁴³ Young, *Jesus the Jewish Theologian*, 156.

⁴⁴ D. Thomas Lancaster, *Chronicles of the Messiah, Book 2*, 2d ed. (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2014), 381-86.

of a Torah education from the scribes and Pharisees, or from John the Baptist, would have found it particularly difficult to accept his messianic spin on the Torah of Moses. Conversely, his mainly fishermen disciples who were unschooled in the Torah, as attested to serendipitously at Acts 4:13, where the religious authorities "observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men. They were amazed and recognized that they had been with Jesus." That was so for Christ's disciples were the kind of people that the sages would not have accepted as students, unlike a Paul who was "taught at the feet of Gamaliel," a top Torah teacher of his day. (Acts 22:3). It was because they were the exact antitheses of a Paul that Christ's first disciples were able to receive his messianic teaching of the Torah. Paul was arguably an exception – given the Damascene epiphany – that proved the rule.

Such an interpretation is redolent of the first part of *m. Avot* 4:20, the second and third parts of which were mentioned earlier: "He who studies Torah as a child, to what can he be compared? To ink written upon a fresh paper. But he who studies Torah as an old man, to what can he be compared? To ink written on paper that has been erased."

This culturally appropriate explanation resorts to schemas of thought, metaphors, and tropes that were not foreign to the world of *Pirkei Avot*. In trying to forge a band of merry men into a messianic community that would be closely identified with him, perhaps this was really what Christ intended to say in the context of explaining why his students were not fasting like the students of the Pharisees or John the Baptist.⁴⁵ They were the kind of new Torah students who would be receptive to and accepting of his new Torah teaching without imploding, as it were. Conversely, students who were already in possession of

⁴⁵ "The community of the Markan Jesus fit neither the nationalistic, revolutionary outlook often associated with first-century messianic expectation, nor the scrupulous observance of Torah designed to distinguish them from the nations... Jesus deploys analogies of... wineskins to promote... both adhesion to Jesus' own messianic purposes and its resulting cohesion within a socio-religious group just beginning to forge its identity." See Henderson, *What Is Old? What Is New?* 137, 138.

significant previous instruction in the Torah whether their teachers had been the Pharisees or John the Baptist, would have been hard put to receive his new Torah teaching, which was refracted through the lens of himself as Messiah.

Conclusion

Relying on the fact that Christ's metaphors were akin to some Mishnaic ones, this final explanation is culturally appropriate in its *Sitz im Leben*. The saying is then seen to really be about the inherent difficulties that Christ would have had in conveying his messianic interpretation of the Torah to individuals who had been previously taught the Torah by the Pharisees or by John the Baptist. It would have been considerably easier for Christ to teach the Torah to people who had not be so taught.

The rabbinic teachers took in only talented students who already had had a Torah education from childhood. By contrast, Christ's motley crew were untutored fishermen, tax collectors, and "sinners" who had not had an education in the Torah. They were thus like a clean slate for him to write upon. Christ had picked them precisely because he wanted to be the first to teach them the Torah without having to undo whatever mistaken teachings they might have imbibed from some previous instructor.

The scribes and the Pharisees were befuddled that Christ would choose such "sinners" for students, ones who did not fast conscientiously as their own disciples. Christ's answer was essentially that it was much easier to write on a clean slate than one that had been written upon before, whose writing had to be erased first but this would leave a smudged slate in the process. His untutored disciples who did not know the Torah and the Pharisees' halakha were much easier to teach. It might be a little unkind and too dismissive but, in the vernacular, one might have said: "Old dogs can't learn new tricks." More politely, those who

had had instruction from the Pharisees, or from John the Baptist, would likely have refracted Christ's new teachings through the lenses they had already acquired. These lenses were their old wine which, by their own lights, would have been, assuredly, superior.

Christ chose untutored men as new wineskins to be filled with his new wine, the messianic teaching of the Torah, that was not admixed with old wine. In time to come, his disciples would presumably also become old wineskins, but these ones would hopefully be full of good old wine, with no place for new wine, or any new gospel that is not the Gospel. (Gal 1:6) If this reading is correct, then the traditional understanding of the saying as an implacable incompatibility between Christianity and Judaism would have been the farthest thing from Christ's mind.

ABSTRACT

In Mark 2:22, Christ urged that no one ought to pour new wine into old wineskins. This has long been regarded as pointing to the incommensurability and incompatibility of Christianity with its precursor, Judaism, although the former did not yet exist at the time these words were uttered. This paper reviews that traditional construal and finds it wanting. Alternatives are explored and an optimal explanation based on what "wine" might have meant in the contemporary culture, is suggested. It is suggested that the saying was more about Christ picking the right disciples to whom he wanted to teach the Torah through his messianic lens.

撮 要

根據馬可福音二章22節，基督敦促不要將新酒倒入舊酒皮中。長期以來，這一直被認為是基督教與猶太教的不可通約性和不相容性。本文回顧了這種傳統的詮釋，並發現了它的不足。探索替代方法，並根據「葡萄酒」在當代文化中的含義提出了最佳解釋。因此，馬可福音二章22節的更多內容是基督挑選合適的門徒，他想通過自己的彌賽亞理解向他們教導律法。