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Edited by Barnabas Lindars and Stephen S. Smalley

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PART ONE

CHRIST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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I

Is there a Markan Christology?

E. TROCMÉ

There was a time when the Gospel of Mark was considered by a majority among New Testament scholars as a naïve and straightforward Life of Jesus, which for the most part remained undistorted by 'later' christological ideas. No sensible person would dream to-day of going back to a non-christological interpretation of this fascinating little book. But it may be doubted whether enough thought has been given to the relationship between the evangelist's own christology and that (or those, as we shall see) of the various layers of tradition used by him. Did 'Mark', as W. Wrede and his followers claim, emphasize strongly a christological trend which had only begun to appear in an originally non-christological, Palestinian tradition? Or did he write with a view to reconciling the diverging christologies which he found in the various strands of tradition he brought together? Did he perhaps also tone down some of the wildest christological claims made on behalf of Jesus in these traditions and try to call the attention of his readers to what really mattered – their own attitude towards the Master and his call to follow him? There are some good reasons to opt for the latter hypothesis.

But before I go into that, a few basic assumptions of this essay may be simply stated, as space forbids any discussion on those points:¹

(1) The Markan Gospel, as we have it to-day, may not be the earliest of the canonical Gospels; Luke could be slightly earlier (A.D. 80?). But there was an 'Urmarkus', which differed only slightly from the canonical Gospel except for its ending and was a good deal older than any other Gospel. In fact, it was with this *Urmarkus* that the literary *genre* had its origin.

(2) The raw material which went into the making of Mark, both in its original and in its canonical forms, consisted mostly of Palestinian traditions about Jesus, many of which had grown in the early Church,

¹ I stated my reasons to opt for these views in E. Trocmé, *La formation de l'Évangile selon Marc* (Paris, 1963).

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while others came from other Palestinian circles where an interest in Jesus had developed at an early date.

(3) The writer of the original Gospel of Mark must have been strongly motivated to write such a book as his in spite of his very limited literary abilities. His motives and his purpose, as well as his own ideas on a number of topics, can certainly be detected if we look carefully at the selection and arrangement of traditions he achieved, and also at the editorial additions he made, whenever these can be traced.

There is no denying that the person of Jesus stands at the centre of the whole Markan Gospel. The narratives in which others play the main part are few and far apart: John the Baptist in 1: 1–8 and 6: 14–29; Peter in 14: 66–72; some women in 16: 1–8. The summaries which the evangelist uses as connecting links between small groups of anecdotes all report about Jesus or the reaction of other people to his teaching or his actions.

It is equally evident that the person of Jesus as he appears in the Gospel is quite out of the usual. As a teacher, as a healer, as a debater, as a leader of men, Jesus is described as radically different from the man in the street and greatly superior to the most prominent people (1: 7–8, 22, 27; 2: 12, 27–8; 3: 11, 27). These facts provide a wide and firm basis for a far-reaching christology.

But this striking emphasis on the person of Jesus was not the evangelist's own creation. It is almost universally accepted that early *Christian* tradition, in all its forms, was centred around Jesus and depicted him as having been vastly superior to any man. In the other stories used by Mark – miracle stories, for instance – Jesus usually played the main part and behaved in a most extraordinary way. In other words, the evangelist cannot be credited with the intention to turn an average rabbi or healer into a supernatural being. He started from Jesus-centred sayings and narratives and, even if he altered the image of the Master he found there, wrote an equally Jesus-centred book.

Many scholars belonging to various schools of thought accept this, but insist that Mark's own contribution was to superimpose a new conception of the person of Jesus on traditions which had so far made use of other categories when speaking about him. A very common brand of this approach is the assertion that the evangelist tried to build the christology of the Hellenistic church into a Palestinian tradition

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which had so far nothing to do with the kerygma of Greek-speaking Christians. By so doing, this writer wanted – so we are told – to re-interpret the life of the Jesus of history as a Christ-event. This well-known theory is often taken for granted. It is based mostly on the penetrating exegetical remarks made by W. Wrede at the beginning of the century and has been carefully restated by well-known scholars on a number of occasions since then.² In other words, it cannot be treated lightly.

It is nonetheless difficult to avoid having second thoughts about it. Wrede's theory looks rather too much like an over-simplification to be wholly convincing. The traditions used in Mark were in part Hellenistic and quite a few, as for instance many of the miracle stories, had christological features from the start. As for Palestinian, Semitic traditions, it would be bold indeed to claim that they were utterly non-christological. The Son-of-Man sayings cannot all be struck out as late outgrowths, *pace* Ph. Vielhauer,³ nor can every single saying about the Kingdom of God in which Jesus' ministry plays a part. Moreover, the Dead Sea Scrolls and cognate literature are there to remind us that Messianic undertones of all kinds were quite common in the Palestinian writings of those days.

Thus, it seems wiser to say that the evangelist made use of traditions which were all agreed on the fact that Jesus was an extraordinary man, but interpreted it in different ways: some christologically and some not; some with the help of Hellenistic ideas and some without. His literary endeavour was not aimed at 'kerygmatising' the image of Jesus found in tradition, but at synthesizing the various images of the Master that existed earlier into a reasonably coherent whole.

This being said, one further mistake should be avoided. The evangelist is often thought to have had as his main purpose the building of a christology. But this might well be one aspect only of a wider design. Since all the traditions available to the evangelist were centred on Jesus, their combination was bound to give the impression of an exclusive interest in this person. Under close scrutiny, though, the structure of

² W. Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien, zugleich ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Markusevangeliums*, Göttingen, 1901; M. Dibelius, *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums* (Tübingen, 1919; fifth edition 1966, cited here), pp. 230–4; R. Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (Göttingen, 1921; 6th edition 1964, cited here), pp. 370–6; J. Schreiber, 'Die Christologie des Markusevangeliums', *ZTK*, lviii (1961), pp. 154–83.

³ See his *Aufsätze zum Neuen Testament* (Munich, 1965), pp. 55–140.

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the Markan Gospel and its redactional seams show a somewhat different picture.

Each one of the main sections concentrates on the relationship between Jesus and this or that group of people: the Galilean crowd in 1: 14 to 3: 12; the chosen disciples in 3: 13 to 6: 13; the crowd and the disciples in 6: 14 to 8: 29; the disciples as suffering servants in 8: 30 to 10: 52; the disciples and the Jerusalem crowd in 11: 1 to 13: 37. The Passion narrative is a case of its own, which may be left aside at this point. As each of these main sections is a combination of various strands of tradition, one gains the impression of a persistent effort made by the evangelist to turn Jesus-centred traditions into larger literary units in which men are confronted with the Master.

In the same way, the connecting remarks added by the evangelist put the stress on the relationship between Jesus and people around him, either crowd (1: 22, 32-4, 45; 2: 13; 3: 7-12; 4: 1; etc.) or disciples (3: 34; 5: 18-20; 6: 1, 30-2; 8: 17-21, 30; 9: 28-9) or even opponents (3: 6, 30; 7: 1-2; 11: 18). It is therefore a fair statement to say that the Gospel of Mark centres around the person of Jesus *and the behaviour of those who come face to face with him*. In its earliest form, this was an ecclesiological Gospel, if by ecclesiology we mean the doctrine of the gathering of men around Jesus. Its christological side was important, but less so than its constant emphasis on the call to follow the Master, learn from him and become the church-for-the-world. This should be borne in mind as we now turn to the Markan teaching about Jesus.

To begin with, let us try and discover which means the evangelist used in order to give his readers a new image of the Master.

The first of these is the blending of various types of tradition. It is most unlikely, for instance, that the miracle stories and the sayings of Jesus found side by side in the Markan Gospel should have come from the same circles. As a matter of fact, Jesus behaves so much like a magician in some of the roughest narratives of that book that these cannot possibly have originated in Church tradition, whether Palestinian or Hellenistic (5: 1-18; 5: 25-34; 7: 32-7; 8: 22-6; 11: 12-14, 20-1). Those stories were gathered by the evangelist and left unedited although they were put next to more edifying narratives and sayings, where the Master played the part of a rabbi. By choosing to depict the Lord as a preacher one minute, as a sorcerer the next moment, the writer was bound to give a shock to all his readers and to arouse their

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attention. They were led to expect something quite out of the usual and to realize that Mark's christology went beyond that of any of the Churches they knew.

Many scholars consider that the earliest evangelist expressed his bold new ideas about Jesus through his use of christological titles.⁴ But opinions differ as to the titles favoured by Mark. Neither προφήτης nor the name Elijah, both rejected in 8: 27–9, nor κύριος, used almost exclusively as an address or with the meaning 'owner' or 'master', have any christological significance in Mark. 'Christ' – and the cognate titles 'Son of David' and 'King of the Jews' – is to say the least ambiguous in the eyes of the evangelist (see 8: 29ff.; 12: 35–7; 14: 61–2). It carries no special stress, even though it is not as drastically rejected as some think.⁵

'Son of God', 'Son of Man' and διδάσκαλος (with its cognates *rabbi* and *rabbouni*) are somewhat more common in the Gospel and do not seem to raise any objection on the part of the writer. But can it be said that those three titles, or one of them, are used by Mark to give expression to a new image of Jesus? 'Son of God' occurs six times only in the Gospel (1: 11; 3: 11; 5: 7; 9: 7; 14: 61; 15: 39), to which 13: 32 may perhaps be added, but not 1: 1, where textual evidence favours the omission of this phrase. The two occurrences in the Passion narrative (14: 61 and 15: 39) stand rather apart and did not belong to the original Gospel; even thus, the use of the title is limited to outsiders and plays no great part in chapters 14 to 16. Elsewhere in Mark, 'Son of God' is accepted only as a divine utterance (1: 11; 9: 7) which men have no right to imitate (3: 11–12; 5: 7–8); the evangelist objects to its use as a confession of christological faith.

'Son of Man' is somewhat more common in Mark: fourteen occurrences, concentrated mostly in the fourth main section of the Gospel (8: 31, 38; 9: 9, 12, 31; 10: 33, 45), as well as in chapter 14 (verses 21 – twice – 41 and 62), to which 2: 10, 28 and 13: 26 should be added. Although the phrase comes to the evangelist from tradition in a

⁴ To take but a few recent examples, see E. Best, *The Temptation and the Passion: the Markan Soteriology* (Cambridge, 1965), pp. 160–77; B. Rigaux, *Témoignage de l'Évangile de Marc* (Bruges/Paris, 1965), pp. 118–20, 139–52; M. D. Hooker, *The Son of Man in Mark* (London, 1967), pp. 174–82; Ch. Masson, *L'Évangile de Marc et l'Église de Rome* (Neuchâtel, 1968), pp. 51–76; G. Minette de Tillesse, *Le secret messianique dans l'Évangile de Marc* (Paris, 1968), pp. 327–88.

⁵ J. Héring, *Le Royaume de Dieu et sa venue* (2nd ed., Neuchâtel, 1959), pp. 111–43.

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majority of cases, he may have inserted it himself here or there (10: 45?). But he is so careless about identifying this mysterious figure with Jesus that it cannot be claimed as part of a christological structure built by him on top of what various layers of tradition said about the Master. As a matter of fact, one may even wonder whether Mark has not left out 'Son of Man' occasionally in sayings offered by tradition, either by omitting part of the saying (3: 28; cf. Matt. 12: 32 and Luke 12: 10)⁶ or by leaving aside the whole *logion* (cf. Matt. 8: 20 and Luke 9: 58; Matt. 11: 19 and Luke 7: 34; Matt. 12: 40 and Luke 11: 30). In other words, the use of 'Son of Man' in Mark reflects a very early christology which the evangelist found somewhat unsatisfactory and did not really make his own.

As to *διδάσκαλος*, it occurs twelve times in Mark (4: 38; 5: 35; 9: 17, 38; 10: 17, 20, 35; 12: 14, 19, 32; 13: 1; 14: 14), while *rabbi* is used three times (9: 5; 11: 21; 14: 45) and *rabbouni* once (10: 51). Interestingly enough, these figures are higher than the corresponding ones in Matthew (twelve times) and Luke (thirteen times), although the other two Synoptics are a good deal longer than Mark and devote much more space to recording the teaching of Jesus. Could that mean that the oldest Gospel favours a christology of the Master, which could be compared with the emphasis put in Qumran on the divine mission entrusted to the Teacher of Righteousness? It is not likely. In most of their occurrences, *διδάσκαλος*, *rabbi* and *rabbouni* are simply forms of address into which it would be quite wrong to read a deep christological meaning.

Thus, none of the titles applied to Jesus in the Gospel of Mark appears to be used by the evangelist as a vehicle for his own christology.

Another hypothesis was put forward by W. Wrede seventy years ago:⁷ in order to superimpose the christological doctrine of his church on traditions to which it was foreign, Mark made use, it is suggested, of the literary device of the Messianic Secret; in other words, he rearranged all the sayings and narratives which he started from in such a way as to show that the real nature of Jesus was revealed only to the privileged few in the Master's life-time, but carefully hidden from most

⁶ H. E. Tödt, *Der Menschensohn in der synoptischen Überlieferung* (Gütersloh, 1959), pp. 111–12.

⁷ W. Wrede, *op. cit.* Among recent treatments of this theory, see T. A. Burkill, *Mysterious Revelation, an Examination of the Philosophy of St Mark's Gospel* (Ithaca, 1963); G. Minette de Tillesse, *op. cit.*, with a very full bibliography.

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people. Many of the literary features of the Gospel were mentioned as evidence for this bold theory: the secrecy that surrounded many of the healings, the silencing of demons, of witnesses and of disciples, the lack of understanding on the part of the disciples. This sounded so convincing that even those scholars who could not bring themselves to thinking of the evangelist as such a clever schemer concentrated their efforts on finding the origin of the Messianic Secret in the behaviour of Jesus himself or in tradition and forgot to ask whether that Secret really existed in the Markan Gospel.

In actual fact, there is every reason to doubt that existence. Wrede was so eager to give evidence for this theory that he brought together a number of features of Mark which have nothing to do with one another. The fact that some healings are achieved secretly (5: 40; 7: 33; 8: 23) is part of the pre-Markan narratives themselves; in spite of what is often said, it is not a common feature at all in Mark; there is no sign of an effort of the evangelist to generalize what remains the exception. Some patients, once they have been healed, are warned by Jesus against spreading the news of their recovery (1: 44; 5: 43; 7: 36; cf. 8: 26), but again this is the exception; there is every reason to think that this warning comes from pre-Markan tradition, notably since it is contradicted in two of those stories by the redactional ending added by the evangelist himself (1: 45; 7: 36–7); even if the warning is Mark's creation in this or that case, it is meant to emphasize the moral greatness of Jesus, not to hide his powers from the masses (5: 43; 8: 26). The silencing of demons is mentioned only three times (1: 24, 34; 3: 11–12), once in a pre-Markan narrative (1: 24) where it has no christological implication, but twice in summaries due to the evangelist in which the order is directly related to his christology; it is not an attempt at keeping secret what should not be known, as the context shows; it is rather the rejection of efforts made to stifle Jesus' action under words of praise spoken by those who cannot become disciples (cf. 8: 30ff.).

This polemical aspect of the Markan Gospel accounts also for part of what the writer has to say about the lack of understanding shown by the disciples – another feature of his work which is all too often taken as evidence of the Messianic Secret. Polemics against the wrong type of disciples mixes here with exhortations aimed at those who can still be made to understand what discipleship really means. To take but a few instances, polemics are central in 4: 10–13, which should be read as a reprimand addressed to 'those who surrounded him with the Twelve':

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although the secret of the parables is theirs, they do not even understand the simplest of them; there is no sign whatever of a *Messianic Secret* here, but scorn is poured on those who claim to be initiates and are in fact dumb. The exhortatory aspect is more visible in 4: 35–41, even though the disciples are blamed for lack of faith (verse 40); no secret of any sort is alluded to here and the final question is nothing but a confession of faith. The obtuseness of the disciples is underscored by Mark in connection with the miraculous feedings (6: 35–7, 52; 8: 4, 15–21), the main theme being here an exhortation for the church to share its spiritual wealth with the crowd; it is hardly necessary to say that all this has nothing to do with a secret – except perhaps to repudiate the very idea of it. If the disciples seem particularly stupid in 9: 32, this is not evidence for a *Messianic Secret*, but for their foolish ambition and pride, their narrow-mindedness and heartlessness (9: 33–48).

Another feature of the Markan Gospel might seem to come to the rescue of the theory of the *Messianic Secret*, especially as it is a result of the literary activity of the evangelist; the private teaching given by Jesus to his disciples once the crowd has been offered what it can take (1: 38; 4: 33–4; 7: 17–23; 8: 15–21; 9: 28–9). But the additional information granted to the companions of the Master on those occasions is not christological in most cases. It concerns numerous aspects of the life of the Christian church and of Christians individually. As a matter of fact, it is simply a literary device meant to attract the attention of the readers of the Gospel to some consequences of the teaching and action of Jesus for their own lives.

In other words, under close scrutiny, the theory of the *Messianic Secret* simply vanishes for lack of evidence. We must look elsewhere to find out how Mark tried to convey to his readers a new image of Jesus.

Two examples will be enough if we keep in mind some of the remarks made earlier. The story of the day in Capernaum (1: 21–38) is based on two miracle stories (verses 23–7 and 29–31) and a saying (verse 38) which may have been part of a brief apophthegm (verses 35–8). The exorcism in verses 23–7 certainly comes from tradition which originated outside of the Christian church, whereas the other two units look like ecclesiastical tradition: this bold blending of widely diverging elements makes it necessary for Mark to suggest a christological synthesis. This is done in the first place by the emphasis put on the teaching of the Master (verses 21–2 and a few words in verse 27). It is the unique combination of teaching and healing which achieves momentous

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success (verse 28), so that, when healing claims exclusive rights on the time of Jesus (verses 29–34), a balance has to be restored (verse 39). Christ is thus both a peerless teacher and an immensely powerful lord of nature, whose ministry is urgently needed. No one can tie him down, least of all the disciples, whose task it is to follow him, not to make impressive statements about him (cf. verses 24 and 34).

The confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi and the stern discourse that follows (8: 27 to 9: 1) is even more centred on the person of Jesus than the day in Capernaum. Mark combines here an apophthegm which he seems to have shortened (verses 27–9) and a number of isolated sayings, built into a dialogue followed by a speech where the hand of the evangelist is visible everywhere. Several imperfect christologies are set aside as popular and the title ‘Christ’ preferred: Mark has nothing to object to that classification, but goes into no ecstasy about it – rather to the contrary since, according to him, Jesus orders his disciples to keep silent about him instead of telling them whether they are right to call him ‘Christ’. This sharp remark (verse 30) must be read in conjunction with what follows: the prophecy of the Passion (verses 31–2a), the rebuke to Peter (verses 32b–33), the menacing speech about cowards who hope to save their lives (8: 34 to 9: 1). The evangelist is reacting against some Christians, whose spokesman is Peter, who know too well who Jesus is and like saying it, but dare not risk too much to spread the Gospel. To his mind, the right christology is primarily an acceptance of suffering for the sake of Christ. It is easy to see here how the blending of traditions is used by Mark as the starting point of a new christology.

Can we also go one step further and gain an idea of the inner structure and balance of this Markan christology? Where lies the main emphasis in that rather bitty whole? As we saw, none of the christological titles can help us there. Neither can the average christology of the Hellenistic churches, nor, for that matter, that of the Palestinian churches, provided we were able to reconstruct it.

As a matter of fact, Mark seems to object to any christology which to his mind would pin down Jesus and bring him under the control of men. Are we then to assume that he replaced christology by a mere call to action, in the steps of Jesus? But that is not sufficient to account for the passionate interest he takes in the person of the Master. There is undoubtedly something more to his thinking about this Master.