Christology refers to the field of theology regarding the identity, nature and mission of Jesus Christ. Sects of Christianity have distinct opinions on Jesus. Some claim he is divine, others say he is human, some say he is both.[1]

The gospel of Mark is a valuable source for understanding christology. Considering that it's the first canonical gospel written, according to the widely accepted Marken priority hypothesis, it would be possible to evaluate how Jesus' nature evolved from Mark to what modern Christians believe. Understanding Christology through Mark will maybe shed some light on the nature of historical Jesus.

Jesus is the protagonist and key figure throughout Mark. In all other gospels, Jesus is also the central character. But in Mark the focus is on who Jesus actually is. Mark 1:1 highlights that the gospel is about Jesus and introduces him as "the Son of God". The Baptist, John, focuses solely on Jesus while spreading God's message to the world (1:7-8). After baptism is done, Father's voice comes from heaven to earth and calls Jesus as the 'Son' (1:11). Further to this, Jesus' identity is also highlighted when Peter calls him the 'Christ' in 8:29.

During Jesus' trial at Sanhedrin, there is a question raised on who Jesus actually is at 14:61-62 and when Jesus is crucified: the centurion at bottom of the cross identifies him as Son of God in 15:39. There are also some parts in Mark where Jesus hides his true identity especially at 1:39, 3:11, 8:30, 9:9 and so on. Mark raises the question on the nature of Jesus. Is he a divine being who is offspring of God or is he a flesh and blood mortal human or is he both of them?[2]

Mark repetitively refers to Jesus as the 'Son' or 'Son of God' in Mark 1:1 and 1:11. The meaning of this word and phrase is ambiguous. Many would argue it means Jesus is the son (offspring) of God, his incarnation on earth. Others would claim it just means that God loved Jesus a lot so used the word 'Son' for Jesus. It could also mean that Jesus is a messiah. In Judaism, this 'Son of God' title can refer to a pious believer who faces persecution due to his religious beliefs.

It is not explicitly stated what 'Son of God' really means in Mark so this makes it hard to identify the purpose of that phrase. It is also worth noting that this 'Son of God' term is missing from the opening verse in some of the oldest manuscripts of Mark. Some might argue the reason for lack of clear explanation of this term in Mark could be because this title was a later addition. But this can be countered as the 'Son of God' title still appears in other verses of oldest Markan manuscripts (like Codex Sinaiticus 3:11) despite being missing from 1:1.

Several titles taken from Jewish sources were attributed to Jesus by early Jewish Christians (Mark 8:29 and 10:47-8). Examples of these titles include 'Messiah' and 'Son of David'. These titles are also in the charge which led to Jesus' crucifixion as a false messiah in Mark 15:2,

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[1] Bernard L. Ramm, *An Evangelical Christology: Ecumenic and Historic* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1993), p. 15.
[2] Christopher Tuckett, *Christology and the New Testament: Jesus and His Earliest Followers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 109.

15:26 and 15:32. This highlights that the role of Jesus as the messiah was probably established during his lifetime but he neither rejects this claim or openly endorses it as in Mark 8:30. Catrin H Williams asserts that Jesus did not clearly claim the messianic role but still his mission could be called messianic due to the 'eschatological character' of his announcement of the kingdom of God; this led to speculation among his followers after Easter regarding what and who Jesus is.[3]

Christology in Mark can be referred to as 'narrative Christology'. Keywords and titles are very important for understanding Jesus' representation in Mark. Mark uses religious terminology such as 'Lord', 'Messiah', 'Son of Man' and 'Son of God' to refer to Jesus. These christological titles present Jesus as a central figure who has significant authority. In order to understand Mark's christology, one must analyse the titles that Mark utilized for Jesus.

Firstly, the title 'Lord' also known in Greek as 'kyrios' is used for Jesus in Mark. This title is not very significant in Mark, which is odd considering Mark's author is most likely from an Hellenistic Christian background. Also it seems like Mark is very inclined towards Paul's Christianity but surprisingly he does not consider 'Lord' to be an important title for Jesus. This word appears in Mark 5:19 but it is not certain if 'Lord' here refers to Jesus or God. When Jesus commands two of his disciples to bring a mount for him to visit Jerusalem, they are instructed to say 'Lord needs it' (11:3) to anyone who asks them about it.The meaning of 'Lord' here is ambiguous as it could just mean master instead of having a religiously significant meaning. Ultimately this title is used in Mark 12:35-8 in a debate between Jesus and scribes regarding if a messiah can be the Son of David and by using Psalms 110 Jesus argues that the messiah must be the 'Lord' of David, not his son. Here the meaning of 'Lord' is also ambiguous. The discussion is about the messiah, not clearly aimed at Jesus. It's not properly stated who this David's lord is.

Only in these cases the word kyrios 'Lord' was used by Mark in a potentially christological way, according to Tuckett. Therefore he claims the title, Lord, was not of any major importance for Mark.

Another title used for Jesus in Mark is 'messiah' or 'Christ' also known as 'christos' in Greek. It is also not clear how important this term was in Mark's view in regards to christology. 'Christos' appears only 7 times in Mark, very rarely. Like with 'Lord' and 'Son of God' titles: the meaning of 'Messiah' is also not crystal clear in Mark. For example in verses 1:1 and 9:41 the title of Christ is just used as a normal name instead of an important position of authority. This same word is used for deceivers or fake messiahs in 13:21 while in 15:32 this title is used by those who were being crucified to insult Jesus.

In many of these verses, this messianic title may not seem significant except in 1:1. This is because the opening verse introduces Jesus and emphasises who he is. It establishes what type of person Jesus is by using the title 'Christ' alongside (maybe) 'Son of God' for him. But despite that, the exact meaning of these 2 titles is not fully explained by Mark.

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[3] Catrim H. Williams, 'Interpretations on the Identity and Role of Jesus', *The Biblical World* (London: Routledge, 2021), p. 333

It seems Mark left it entirely up to the reader to figure out the exact meaning for the ‘Christ’ or messiah title. Sometimes it is used as a second name for Jesus while in other verses it is used as a word for just messiah.

Another key christological title used in Mark is ‘Son of Man’. This phrase appears around 14 times in Mark. Except in 2:10 and 28, this title is used mostly in the second half of Mark. Jesus as a Son of Man is portrayed by Mark as the ‘one like a son of man’ in Daniel 7:13. Perhaps Mark referred to Jesus as Son of Man due to the influence from Daniel. Jesus is emphasised as a believer who gets persecuted for his strong faith. In Daniel 7, this title is used for the representatives of Saints. Daniel, many times, refers to the Jews getting persecuted by the Greek Seleucid Empire. ‘Son of man’ in Daniel is not directly stated to be a pious person who faced persecution due to their religion. However the chapter’s background shows that there is a central theme of facing suffering then emerging victorious after it.

Mark’s passion narrative also has this theme. Jesus as Son of Man is demonstrated as an ideal example of a figure who faces persecution in this world then emerges victorious in the heaven of God. The concept of Jesus being the one who needs to suffer is reflected throughout Mark.

The Markan narrative highlights the negative perception of Jesus by the common people and this abhorrence keeps increasing as the story progresses. Thus leading to Jesus facing capital punishment on the cross. On the other hand, 13:26 and 14:62 show that Jesus will triumph and return to this world once more to establish God’s government.

Another christological title appearing in this gospel is the ‘Son of God‘. This term appears a very few times in Mark but appears at key moments. That might suggest this is a very important title and could be the key to understand who Jesus actually is. As talked before, this title’s meaning is not directly detailed in Mark but its usage at key moments of narrative suggests that it's an important term and could be the key to the identity of Jesus.

As discussed before, this term is perhaps mentioned in the beginning of Mark (1:1). The prime verse establishes Jesus as the ‘Christ’ and ‘Son of God’. Making it clear that the gospel is about the ‘Son of God’ and this is what Jesus is.

In Mark, Jesus calls himself the Son of God openly, for the first time, during the trial at Sanhedrin (14:61-2). Then after Jesus’ death, the commander - centurion - asserts that Jesus is God's son.

Tuckett claims that despite not being mentioned many times, the ‘Son of God’ title seems important for Mark. He asserts that this title was ‘possibly’ used to highlight Jesus’ messiahship. At Sanhedrin court both these titles are in a single sentence ‘Are you the Christ, the son of the Blessed [God]?’. He notices that this also happens in the first verse of Mark where both ‘Christ’ and ‘Son of God’ are used in a single sentence.’[4]

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[4] Christopher Tuckett, *Christology and the New Testament: Jesus and His Earliest Followers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), pp. 110-116.

These titles highlight that Mark presented Jesus as a devout believer who was persecuted for his faith (Son of Man and Son of God), who is the messiah (Son of God and Christ) and who has a level of authority over other believers (Lord).

Is Jesus of Mark the ‘crucified God’ that most Christians worship today?

The usage of ‘Son of God’ title at key places might give the impression that Mark is reflecting Jesus’ divinity. However there is no clear proof or explanation for this in Mark. It is even disputed whether the opening verse contains ‘Son of God’ or not as some Greek manuscripts do not have this phrase.

This title had a lot of meanings in ancient times. As highlighted before, in Judaism, the phrase ‘son of God’ was used to refer to a stoic believer who faced persecution. It can be said that Markan Jesus definitely fits in this category. He faced persecution due to his religious beliefs but he never gave up and was ultimately crucified. Therefore he is an ideal example of the Son of God from Judaic terminology. Furthermore, this links with the usage of title ‘Son of Man’ which according to Tuckett is a reference to Daniel 7 and is used for a believer who faces persecution then ends up being victorious.

Another point raised by some is that Son of God means messiah due to both terms being used multiple times in the same sentence (1:1, 14:61). This argument is plausible since Mark uses both titles together, ‘Christ’ is used like a name followed by the ‘Son of God' title. Perhaps emphasising that the messiah means the Son of God and both these terms can be used interchangeably.

Additionally this title is used during the baptism (Mark 9:11) where God’s voice descends from heaven to earth then announces Jesus as his ‘beloved Son’. Once again, this title is used without any explanation of what it actually means hence leaving it all up to the reader to interpret the meaning of ‘Son’.

In ancient times the words ‘son’ and ‘father’ were commonly used for individuals who had no blood relation with each other. For example a patriarch could be called a ‘father’ and similarly a young male could be called a ‘son’ by an elderly.

Claiming the ‘Son’ in Mark 9:11 means progeny would require evidence. The word ‘Son’ alone is not enough to demonstrate Jesus’ divinity as many contemporary Christians believe.

Since it is established that early Christians were Jews, it is most plausible that God’s ‘Son’ has the Judaic meaning and perhaps this is what Mark intended.

In Judaism, the Son of God refers to a pious believer, especially someone who faced persecution for their belief. The passion narrative in Mark highlights Jesus as exactly this type of person: the Judaic Son of God.

As the Markan narrative progresses, Jesus encounters persecution and it just keeps increasing ultimately leading to his crucifixion. This gospel presents an ideal Son of God, Jesus Christ, who is a role model for other believers so they can also take inspiration from him and keep their faith strong while facing persecution. Believers are encouraged by Mark's christology to transform themselves into sons of God (Judaic meaning) by following Jesus.

Therefore the most likely scenario is that Son of God has the Jewish meaning as it fits the Markan Jesus perfectly. Although since Mark does not clearly explain the meaning of this key term, it would be unwise to claim with 100% certainty what this term actually meant but the most likely scenario is that the intended meaning of this term is Jewish.

To conclude, Mark's christology highlights Jesus using several titles but the most important is the 'Son of God'. Mark does not clearly explain the meaning of this title but it's likely that the intended meaning is the one used by Jews since early Christianity was a sect of Judaism. If it is also taken into account that Markan Jesus fits the Jewish definition of God's son (i.e a pious believer who faces persecution) it becomes apparent that this is most likely the meaning of this title. Perhaps Mark is more inclined towards the unitarian view of Jesus than the divinely incarnate trinitarian view which is held by many contemporary Christians.

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