

a Pharisaic opponent of Jesus, are presumably not shared by the evangelist telling the story. In contrast, without strong evidence to the contrary, it would seem reasonable to assume that the views of Jesus himself, or of God (on the rare occasions these are made explicit), are regarded positively by the evangelist.

With these preliminaries in mind, we may turn to be Gospels themselves. I start with what I am assuming here to be the earliest Gospel, namely the Gospel of Mark.

NOTES

1. On this, see ch. 9 below.
2. The Greek word *syn* means 'with', 'optic' refers to viewing – hence 'synoptic' implies being able to be seen together.
3. The classic treatment in the English-speaking world is probably still B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels* (London: Macmillan, 1924). See too Kummel, *Introduction*, pp. 38–80. A useful collection of essays is provided by A. Bellinzoni (ed.), *The Two Source Hypothesis: A Critical Appraisal* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985). One of the main competitors to the Two Source Theory is the revived 'Griesbach hypothesis' (according to which Matthew comes first, Luke second, and Mark is dependent on both Matthew and Luke): see W. R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem* (Dillsboro: Western North Carolina Press, 1976). On this see my *The Revival of the Griesbach Hypothesis* (SNTSMS 44; Cambridge: CUP, 1983). For more on the theory of the existence of Q, see ch. 12 below.
4. Cf. my *Reading*, pp. 120–3.
5. The word 'reliable' is something of a technical term in literary studies to refer to a character whose viewpoint is that of the author and which is being commended to the reader through the story.

Chapter 6

MARK

The person of Jesus is absolutely central for Mark. Such a statement may sound bland, even trite to the point of being ridiculous. As we have already said, the person of Jesus was central for all early Christians. And to say that Jesus occupies centre stage in Mark's story hardly distinguishes Mark from the other evangelists: in all the Gospels, Jesus is the central figure of the narrative. Yet it is perhaps the case that, even more than in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, the question of who Jesus is provides the central focus of Mark's narrative. The opening verse identifies who the narrative is all about ('The gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God' 1: 1); John the Baptist in Mark speaks only about Jesus in his preaching (1: 7–8);¹ the voice from heaven at Jesus' baptism speaks only to identify who Jesus is ('You are my Son, the Beloved' 1: 11). And this continues throughout the story as told by Mark. A key point in the narrative is the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi where Peter makes his assertion about Jesus' identity ('You are the Christ' 8: 29). At Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin, a key issue is clearly the question of who Jesus is (14: 61–2); and finally, when Jesus dies, the centurion at the foot of the cross identifies and confesses Jesus as the Son of God (15: 39). Coupled with this is a prominent theme running through the whole of Mark's Gospel concerning *secrecy*. On several occasions, Jesus seeks to hide his identity and keep it secret (cf. 1: 39; 3: 11–12; 8: 30; 9: 9, etc.) The question then of who Jesus is – and perhaps who is allowed (or can) know who he is – is an absolutely central one for Mark.²

We must also bear in mind all that has been said in the introductory chapter about the nature of the Gospels as narratives, and about the fact that Mark does not write a doctrinal treatise on Christology.

Christology is of vital importance for Mark, but he presents what he wants to say in the form of a story. Mark's Christology is thus very much a 'narrative Christology'. Yet we should not lose sight of the fact that, in the telling of his narrative, key christological terms or 'titles' play an important role. Part of Mark's aim is clearly to ascribe such terms or titles to Jesus; part too of his aim may have been to give a particular emphasis or 'twist' to some of these titles, via the narrative. It may therefore be appropriate to try to approach the question of Mark's Christology via his use of key christological titles, whilst bearing in mind all the caveats we mentioned earlier about over-reliance on the use of titles in analysing New Testament Christology.

Lord

The term Lord (*kyrios*) seems to play a rather insignificant role in Mark. This is perhaps surprising, given that Mark (very probably) comes from a Hellenistic Christian milieu, and in many respects shows himself strikingly similar to Paul and Pauline Christianity. Yet *kyrios* does not seem to have been a very important term christologically for Mark. It occurs in Mark 5: 19 at the end of the story of the Gerasene demoniac ('Tell them how much the Lord has done for you'); but it is not clear if the reference here is to Jesus or to God. In Jesus' instructions to the two disciples to fetch the colt on which he will ride into Jerusalem, they are told to tell anyone who asks that 'The Lord needs it' (11: 3); but it is unclear how significant christologically this is: the words could simply mean 'our master needs it'. Finally, there is the debate in 12: 35-8 of David, Jesus, and the scribes about whether the Messiah can be the Son of David. Jesus, appealing to Psalm 110, claims that the Messiah must be David's 'Lord' and hence cannot be his son. Again the significance is not at all clear. The argument seems to be something of a verbal swordplay; and it is in any case not explicitly related to Jesus himself but has the form of a rather abstract discussion about 'the Messiah' in general. These are the only instances where Mark uses *kyrios* in a potentially christological way and hence it seems that the term was not of great interest or significance for him.

Messiah

There is more uncertainty about the significance of the term Messiah/Christ for Mark. In terms of numbers of occurrences, the word

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christos is relatively rare in the Gospel, occurring only seven times (1: 1; 8: 29; 9: 41; 12: 35; 13: 21; 14: 61; 15: 32). How significant the term is, and what meaning Mark attaches to the term, is not always clear. For example in 9: 41 ('whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ') the term seems to have lost all its original significance as a title and has become just a proper name. The same may also apply in the title verse in 1: 1 ('The gospel of Jesus Christ'). In 13: 21 the word refers to false messiahs; in 15: 32 it is part of the mockery of Jesus by the crowds while he hangs on the cross; and 12: 35 is part of the somewhat abstract debate between Jesus and the scribes which we have already considered briefly (cf. above).

The term does occur significantly in Peter's confession (8: 29) and in the question put to Jesus about his identity by the high priest at the Sanhedrin trial (14: 61). Further, whatever its precise significance, the word does occur in the title verse 1: 1, part of the function of which is evidently to announce to the reader right at the start who Jesus is and what categories he is to be seen in.

Yet there must remain some doubt about just how significant this is as a christological category. It is clearly one that Mark does not regard negatively.³ Yet one wonders if it expresses the most important aspect of Jesus' person for Mark. This may be indicated by two pieces of evidence. First, in the two main occurrences where Jesus is called the Christ (and in both, implicitly or explicitly, accepts the term), Jesus is immediately portrayed as going on to refer to his role as Son of Man (8: 31; 14: 62). Perhaps then, for Mark, talk of Jesus as a Messiah figure has to be qualified by reference to Jesus as a Son of Man figure.

Second, the way the story of Peter's confession is told in Mark's narrative may be revealing. The story is placed by Mark immediately after the story of the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (8: 22-6). It is widely agreed that the two stories are deliberately juxtaposed by Mark: the healing of the blind man serves as a kind of 'acted parable' for Peter's confession, so that the man coming to 'sight' illustrates Peter's coming to the 'insight' of who Jesus is. The healing story is, however, notable for the fact that the man only comes to full sight gradually. He is healed in two stages, and after the first stage, can only see in a confused way. It may be then that Mark wishes to imply that Peter only comes to a true insight of who Jesus is gradually, and at this point in the narrative, with his confession of Jesus as Messiah, has only reached an intermediate stage.⁴ This is suggested too by the immediate sequel

to the story in Mark: here Jesus speaks of his role (as Son of Man) as one who must suffer rejection, violence and death (8: 31), a role which Peter vehemently disputes (v. 32) and which in turn evokes a stern rebuke by Jesus ('Get behind me, Satan!' v. 33). It seems that, for all Peter's correct insight in his confession, he has failed to grasp one of the most important facets of Jesus' mission. Thus for Mark, although messiahship is an important factor in the picture of who Jesus is, it may not express all that there is to say, perhaps not even the most important thing about Jesus. As already hinted at, some of this may be indicated by the use of the term Son of Man.

Son of Man

In terms of numbers of occurrences the term Son of Man is clearly of great importance for Mark, occurring as it does some fourteen times. Apart from two occurrences in chapter 2 which seem to refer to Jesus' activity in his earthly ministry (2: 10, 28), the phrase comes exclusively in the second half of the Gospel. Here it is used in two related contexts. First, it is used by Jesus to relate to his destiny of having to undergo suffering and death (cf. the three passion predictions in 8: 31; 9: 31; 10: 33, all of which are in terms of Jesus in his role as Son of Man; also similarly 9: 13; 10: 45; 14: 21, etc.). Then secondly it is used to refer to Jesus in his role at the parousia, 'coming' as the one vindicated by God and now active in dispensing judgement (8: 38; 13: 26; 14: 62).

It is quite clear that, for Mark at least, the last part of this overall picture is seen in terms of the vision of Daniel 7. Mark 14: 62 and 13: 26 clearly allude to the Danielic passage (cf. the language of the Son of Man 'coming' on/with the clouds of heaven). Hence Jesus *qua* Son of Man is clearly identified with the figure who is described in Daniel 7: 13 as 'one like a son of man'.

Although it is disputed, a strong case can be made for the other main pole of Mark's language about Jesus as Son of Man being also Danielic, namely the idea of Jesus as the one who is to suffer. In Daniel 7, the 'one like a son of man' acts as some kind of representative of the 'saints of the Most High'. In Daniel's vision these correspond to the Jews suffering persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes because of loyalty to their Jewish faith and practice. Thus although the 'son of man' figure of Daniel 7 is not explicitly said to be a suffering figure, nevertheless the context in which the chapter was written suggests

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strongly that the scene of vindication and triumph which it paints is one of triumph out of suffering. Thus built into the Danielic picture may be the twin idea of both suffering *and* subsequent vindication. It is just this which is reflected in Mark's picture of Jesus: Jesus *qua* Son of Man fulfils the Danielic role by being one whose destiny is to suffer but who is promised vindication after that suffering in the heavenly court.⁵

Both these features are clearly of great significance for Mark. The idea that Jesus is one who must suffer is one that dominates the Gospel. The whole narrative is structured to show in story form the gradual build-up in hostility to Jesus by others, and also the failure of the disciples to support him, so that in the end Jesus is isolated from everyone and dies alone and almost in despair (cf. the cry of dereliction in 15: 34). Yet beyond that despair there is hope and a promise of vindication by God, so that Jesus will come again at the end of time in triumph (13: 26; 14: 62).

It may be worth noting too at this point that the two Son of Man sayings in the early part of the Gospel (2: 10, 28) may also fit this pattern.⁶ Both occur in a series of five controversies (2: 1-3: 6) which illustrate the start of the build-up of the hostility to Jesus shown by the Jewish authorities, a hostility which will end in his death (cf. the death plot in 3: 6). A number of features in these stories act as pointers to the reader to the fate in store for Jesus.⁷ The references to Jesus as Son of Man may perform the same function, acting as hints to the reader of what is to come: the one who can forgive sins (2: 10) and who also is Lord of the Sabbath (2: 28) is the one who is arousing hostility and opposition and who will therefore have to go the way of the 'Son of Man' figure, the way that leads to the cross.

Seen in this light the Son of Man sayings in Mark show a remarkable coherence and homogeneity; they also clearly highlight key features of what is important about Jesus for Mark. Yet does Son of Man express the most profound truth about Jesus for Mark? Arguably not.⁸ As in all the Gospels, no character apart from Jesus uses the term. It is thus never used in any kind of confessional setting: no one ever says 'you are the Son of Man'. Nor is there any secrecy attached to the term. Quite what the significance of secrecy is in Mark is debated; but one important aspect seems to be that it provides a means by which Jesus' true identity is only revealed when it is clear that it will not be misunderstood. Yet no secrecy attaches to the term Son of Man. No one is

ever warned not to make Jesus' identity as Son of Man known to others. Finally we may note that on just two occasions in Mark, God himself speaks. In the stories of the baptism and the transfiguration, a voice from heaven says that Jesus is 'my son' (1: 11; 9: 7), implying that Jesus is to be seen as Son of God.⁹ It is then perhaps 'Son of God' that expresses a yet more profound truth about who Jesus is, and it is to this that we must now turn.

Son of God

Although not frequent in the Gospel, the term Son of God applied to Jesus occurs at key points in Mark's narrative. It (probably) occurs in the title verse 1: 1,¹⁰ whose function is in part to define for the readers the terms of the story to come:¹¹ the narrative is about the one who is the Son of God – indeed, as we shall see, the narrative to a certain extent defines what divine sonship means. The application of the 'title' to Jesus is given the backing of the authority of God himself in the words of the voice from heaven at the baptism and the transfiguration.¹² The demons recognise that Jesus is the Son of God, but their knowledge is put under a ban of secrecy (3: 11–12). Only at the Sanhedrin trial does Jesus himself acknowledge the term openly (14: 61–2). Then, in what is a climactic scene in Mark's narrative, at the moment when Jesus dies on the cross, the centurion confesses Jesus to have been the Son of God (15: 39). Despite then its relatively infrequent occurrence in the Gospel, it seems clear that Son of God is of vital significance for Mark as the term most adequately describing who Jesus is. But what does the phrase imply or mean?

We have seen in chapter 1 that the term had a very wide range of possible meanings in the ancient world. One possible meaning is reflected in the use of the phrase in Judaism to refer to a righteous sufferer, a person persecuted for his faith and his commitment (Wisd. 2–5). A background such as this would certainly explain some of the Markan references, especially the verses in the passion narrative. But it remains doubtful how far this will explain the fact that Jesus *qua* exorcist is seen as Son of God (cf. Mark 3: 11–12), or the heavy investment in the term made in 1: 1; 1: 11; 9: 7.

Another possibility is that the term is used messianically: Jesus *qua* Son of God is seen as the Messiah.¹³ A lot of the Markan evidence would appear to support this. The question of the high priest at the

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Sanhedrin trial ('Are you the Christ, the son of the Blessed [i.e. God]?') places Christ/Messiah and Son of God in parallel as if they were synonymous. So too the opening title verse does almost the same.¹⁴ If at the same time a Messiah is conceived in terms of a royal figure, this would all tie in with the very strong stress that emerges in the later part of Mark's passion narrative (especially ch. 15) where it is implied repeatedly that Jesus is a 'king'.¹⁵ So, too, right at the start of Mark's passion narrative, Jesus is 'anointed' (14: 3–9). There is then a powerful strain in Mark's passion narrative emphasising that Jesus is a *royal* figure: it is as the messianic king that he goes to his death, even though the very narrative itself, by virtue of the fact that it is recounting a violent and shameful death, implies an almost complete reversal of previous ideas of what royalty and messiahship involved. It may be then that Jesus' divine sonship is seen by Mark exclusively in these royal, messianic terms.

Yet it may be that Son of God for Mark expresses more as well. We have already seen that the word 'Messiah' itself is relatively rare in Mark and does not receive an enormous emphasis. Further, as we saw, the story in 8: 26–30 may imply that Peter's confession of Jesus as *christos* is somewhat inadequate. It *may* be that it is simply the *idea* of messiahship that is inadequate, and to a certain extent this must be the case, since Mark clearly does not regard the term *christos* itself as an improper one to apply to Jesus. Yet it may also be that Mark regards (an)other term(s) as more adequate to capture the essence of who Jesus is. In one way, Son of Man may be exercising this role.¹⁶ But it may also be that Son of God, whilst in one way capable of being taken as (simply) a messianic, royal term, also carries further overtones of meaning for Mark. It may then be these that are important for Mark and hence lead to the term being used on its own, without an explicit reference to messiahship, in such key contexts as 1: 11, 9: 7 and 15: 39.

The scene at the crucifixion may provide the key. Here the centurion's confession (15: 39) is in response to the actual death of Jesus (v. 37); but that moment of death is immediately followed by the note about the veil of the Temple being torn in two (v. 38). This note about the veil is clearly meant to have great symbolic meaning for Mark, as in some way indicating the theological consequences and significance of Jesus' death. The problem is to know what that significance is, and in particular to know which veil is in mind. Two possibilities are often noted. One is that the veil is the barrier separating Jews from Gentiles – hence

its removal means the universalisation of the Gospel to encompass all people. However, it may be that what is in mind is the veil inside the Holy of Holies in the Temple. This is the veil that symbolically hides and separates God from all human beings. If then it is this veil that is symbolically destroyed in the death of Jesus, then Mark's narrative becomes an extraordinarily powerful piece of theological writing. For the narrative implies that, in the death of Jesus, the barrier preventing human beings from seeing God has been removed. God is now seen – but is seen precisely in the figure of the dead Jesus hanging on a cross. It is then this that seems to be reflected in the centurion's confession of Jesus as Son of God.¹⁷

Jesus *quia* Son of God is the one who enables God himself to be seen. (In this then Mark is perhaps closer to much later Christian claims about Jesus' divine sonship than others.) But the context is also vitally important. For not only does the centurion's confession say something about Jesus: it may also say something about God. The narrative seems to be emphasising starkly that God is to be seen in this figure of powerlessness, weakness and death. This too is what Mark's narrative has been leading up to as a climax. It is the moment when Jesus' true identity is seen in its clearest light and hence shows what it means to be 'Son of God'. But it also shows something of the God who lies behind the whole story, who defines and accepts Jesus as his Son, and who reveals himself – on the cross. The very first line of Mark's Gospel defines the terms of the story that is to come: Jesus is the Son of God. But what sonship means, *and* what 'God' means, is determined by the story itself. It is thus very much the case that Mark offers a *narrative* Christology. The story is vital and indispensable for his message. It is almost as if Mark is aware that christological terms can be multivalent. Hence he writes his story to show what he regards as the true significance of words that can be spoken. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. But the nature of kingship, sonship and of divinity, are all given a stark new meaning by Mark's story, especially by his account of Jesus' death on the cross. Mark's Jesus is perhaps closest to the 'crucified God' of some modern theologians.¹⁸

NOTES

1. In this then Mark differs from Q where John the Baptist gives his own eschatological preaching and warnings: cf. Luke 3: 7–9 par.

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2. On the theme of secrecy in Mark, see my Introduction and the other essays in Fickett (ed.), *The Messianic Secret* (London: SPCK, 1983); also H. Räisänen, *The Messianic Secret in Mark's Gospel* (ET Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991).
3. This has been denied by some who have argued that Mark is uniformly negative about the disciples in the story: cf. e.g. T. J. Weeden, *Mark – Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), who thinks that Mark is conducting something of a vendetta against the disciples in the story and, through them, against an opposition group in his own church. However, the structure of the pericope here suggests that Mark thinks that Peter's confession is not entirely wrong: the words of Peter are clearly contrasted with the views of the 'people' mentioned in vv. 27–8. Clearly they are inadequate – hence the implication is that Peter's viewpoint is better. Whether it is entirely right is another matter: see below.
4. Cf. E. S. Johnson, 'Mark 8: 22–26. The Blind Man from Bethsaida', *NTS* 25 (1979), pp. 370–83.
5. For a similar view, cf. M. D. Hooker, *The Son of Man in Mark* (London: SPCK, 1967). See further, pp. 216–19 below (in relation to Jesus himself).
6. For what follows, cf. my 'The present Son of Man', *JSNT*, 14 (1982), pp. 58–81.
7. E.g., in 2: 7 Jesus is accused of 'blasphemy', anticipating the charge on which he will be condemned to death in 14: 64. In 2: 20, the prediction is made that the time will come when 'the bridegroom will be taken away', almost certainly another allusion to Jesus' death.
8. For what follows, cf. J. D. Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), esp. pp. 157–66 (although I am less persuaded by Kingsbury's own interpretation of the significance of Son of Man for Mark).
9. Kingsbury rightly stresses the importance of the fact that here it is God himself speaking, and hence presumably expressing a 'point of view' which Mark would regard as unquestionably valid and important. This must then tell against some who have argued that Mark wishes to 'correct' a 'Son of God' Christology by his 'Son of Man' Christology: cf. Weeden, *Mark*; also N. Perrin, 'The Christology of Mark: A study in *Methodology*', *JR* 51 (1971), pp. 173–87, repr. in W. R. Telford (ed.), *The Interpretation of Mark* (London: SPCK, 1985), pp. 95–108.
10. The words 'Son of God' are missing from some MSS of Mark, but the importance of the term in the rest of Mark suggests that they should probably be read here as well.
11. This probably applies to the whole of the prologue of the Gospel in 1: 1–13 (or perhaps 1: 1–15): see F. J. Matera, 'The prologue as the

- interpretative key to Mark's gospel', *JSNT* 34 (1988), pp. 3–20, and what applies to the prologue applies to the initial 'title' verse even more.
12. Hence any theories that Mark disapproved of the term, or wanted to correct it, e.g. via Son of Man, are very implausible. Cf. n. 9 above.
 13. Cf. D. H. Juel, 'The origin of Mark's Christology', in Charlesworth (ed.), *The Messiah*, pp. 449–60.
 14. Though 'Christ' in 1: 1 has no definite article and is virtually a proper name: cf. above.
 15. Cf. 15: 2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32. Some of these are said in apparent mockery, but Mark's passion narrative is shot through with a powerful use of irony and hence these mockings are probably intended by Mark to express a profound truth about Jesus.
 16. As we have already noted, talk of Jesus' messiahship in 8: 30 and in 14: 61 is immediately qualified by Mark's Jesus talking of himself as Son of Man.
 17. Cf. H. L. Chronis, 'The torn veil: Cultus and Christology in Mark 15: 37–39', *JBL* 101 (1982), pp. 97–114.
 18. Cf. especially J. Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (ET London: SCM Press, 1974), whose debt to the Markan passion narrative is clear.

Chapter 7

MATTHEW

All the general observations we have already made – about the potentially misleading picture which can emerge by focusing on christological titles alone, and about the importance of taking seriously the genre of the Gospels as stories, not doctrinal treatises – apply even more when we turn to the Gospel of Matthew and seek to identify Matthew's Christology. We must also be alive to the possibility that a neat, coherent Christology may not emerge from the Gospel. Matthew is famous (or infamous!) among the evangelists for presenting elements that appear at times to be in considerable tension with each other on key issues such as Jesus' attitude to the Jewish Law, or Jesus' attitude to Gentiles.¹ There is no space here to enter into these debates, but their very existence should alert us to the fact that the Christology which emerges from Matthew's Gospel may present at least a rather variegated picture.

With Matthew we must also be aware of the evangelist's indebtedness to his sources. Matthew is almost certainly using Mark as a source, and, as we have seen, Mark's Gospel focuses on the christological question of who Jesus is in a major way. Many of the texts that are key parts of the evidence for Mark's Christology thus reappear in Matthew. We cannot discount the significance such texts might have in Matthew, simply because they are taken over from Mark. Matthew has made a conscious decision to include them and hence they contribute to the overall picture of Matthew's Christology.² But we may also note some places where Matthew changes Mark in rewriting the Markan account, and some of these changes may tell us a lot about Matthew's own concerns. Our approach here will therefore be both synchronic and