

THE "MESSIANIC SECRET" IN MARK'S GOSPEL:  
AN HISTORICAL SURVEY

by  
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TO MY FATHER AND  
IN MEMORY OF MY MOTHER

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PREFACE

I began this thesis during William Barclay's tenure of the Chair of Divinity and Biblical Criticism. At the time I was living in Wishaw, Lanarkshire, and I used to travel into Glasgow at intervals to see him. His comments were always encouraging, and during my stay in Scotland from 1967 to 1971 I made good progress with my research. I then moved to Sheffield, where, owing to sheer pressure of pastoral work, my rate of progress slowed down. Only since I came to Birmingham in 1975, where my work as a university chaplain brought me into an academic community and where, at least in vacations, I had rather more time for study, have I been able to bring the project to a completion.

Meanwhile, William Barclay had been succeeded by Professor Ernest Best, to whom I am grateful for the constructive criticisms which he has sent through the post as I have submitted sections of the thesis to him. Two friends in Birmingham University have also placed me in their debt. Dr. Frances Young, Lecturer in the Department of Theology, has made a number of helpful suggestions, and Miss Betty Bardell, Supervisor of the Central Clerical Office, has typed the manuscript efficiently. My wife, Ann, has had to live with the messianic secret for almost as long as we have been married; I thank her for her patience and interest throughout a long enterprise.

December, 1978.



## SUMMARY

This thesis is a history of research into the "messianic secret" in Mark's gospel. The history is recounted in terms of a basic contrast between British and continental approaches, for an explanation is required for the fact that, whereas on the Continent the secret has usually been seen as a theological conception, imposed upon the tradition in the light of post-resurrection faith, British scholars, with few exceptions until recently, have defended the secret's historicity, regarding it as being necessitated by the nature of Messiahship as Jesus understood it. I try to show that the reason why such diverse interpretations have been offered is because exegetes have come to the text of Mark with different presuppositions.

In chapter one, "The Secret Identity of Jesus in Mark's Gospel", I set out my own understanding of the evidence, maintaining that in the end the "messianic secret" subserves Mark's pastoral purpose. The secret is the reflection of the willingness of Jesus to go to the cross, and Christians are called to follow him in cross-bearing. But the intention here is not to make an original contribution to the debate; it is rather to lay a foundation for the critical comments which follow in the historical chapters.

Chapter two, "Wrede and the End of Liberalism", takes the discussion up to 1914. The emphasis is placed upon the importance of Wrede himself, who decisively challenged the assumption of the liberals that Mark's gospel witnessed directly to the messianic self-consciousness of Jesus. Subsequent research has vindicated his methodology, though his results have needed correction. Schweitzer's methodology, on the other hand, did not differ fundamentally from that of the liberals; and, although the Jesus whom Schweitzer reconstructed was unacceptable to the liberal theologians, both the Jesus of thoroughgoing eschatology and the Jesus of the liberals had a messianic secret to keep. In Britain some scholars were persuaded by Schweitzer, others remained loyal to the liberal view; but Wrede gained no support, for he opened the door to historical scepticism.

The title of chapter three, "The Eclipse of the Historical Jesus", describes developments on the Continent between the wars, when the theology of crisis and form criticism were dominant. The logical end of the theological path opened up by Barth and Bultmann was arrived at, as far as the messianic secret was concerned, in H.J. Ebeling's Das Messiasgeheimnis und die Botschaft des Marcus-Evangelisten (1939). Here the historical Jesus was eclipsed. Mark's message was the revelation in Christ, and the various aspects of the secrecy theme were simply a literary foil to point up the kerygma. But some continental scholars (Schniewind, Otto, Lohmeyer) argued for the essential historicity of the secret, maintaining that its roots lay in Jesus' belief that he was the Son of Man. The general opinion in Britain was that Jesus' conception of his Messiahship was radically different from that of the people; he suppressed the disclosure of his identity lest he should arouse political excitement. Only R.H. Lightfoot among British scholars betrayed no fear of "negative" criticism of the gospels.

Chapter four, "Towards the Theology of the 'Messianic Secret'", gives an account of the post-war discussion. On the Continent there



were renewed attempts to discover the secret's positive theological function in Mark, though the explanation of Conzelmann, for example, appeared to be inspired by a twentieth-century concern with the problem of faith and history. It was not until the 1960s that a number of British scholars began to see the messianic secret as a theological conception; their predecessors in the years immediately after the war had continued to view Mark as primarily an historian. Among the most fruitful suggestions of the post-war period were those of E. Percy, who stressed the relationship between the secret and the passion, and G. Minette de Tillesse, who emphasized the theme's pastoral dimension. But the "messianic secret" (for scholarship increasingly recognized that the inverted commas were necessary) remains a subject of lively debate still.

The thesis concludes that, despite the persistent tendency, both in Britain and on the Continent, to read Mark's gospel through modern spectacles, New Testament scholarship has nevertheless had some success, particularly in recent years, in finding what are the appropriate questions to put to the text. But the lesson of the history of research into the "messianic secret" is that those questions may not necessarily be susceptible of conclusive answers.

ABBREVIATIONS

AJT	American Journal of Theology
BJRL	Bulletin of the John Rylands Library
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CTM	Concordia Theological Monthly
EQ	Evangelical Quarterly
ET	Expository Times
EvTh	Evangelische Theologie
HThR	Harvard Theological Review
IEJ	Israel Exploration Journal
JAAR	Journal of the American Academy of Religion
JEH	Journal of Ecclesiastical History
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JBR	Journal of Bible and Religion
JR	Journal of Religion
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
NovT	Novum Testamentum
NTS	New Testament Studies
RGG	Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart
SJT	Scottish Journal of Theology
ThLZ	Theologische Literaturzeitung
ThR	Theologische Rundschau
ZNW	Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZThK	Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche

## INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

Wrede's Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien (1901) is now widely recognized as marking a decisive turning-point in the study of the gospels. The recent translation by J.C.G. Greig (The Messianic Secret, 1971) is a belated tribute to its continuing importance. In its pages form criticism and redaction criticism are foreshadowed, and, reading Wrede, it is hard to believe that he was writing as long ago as the beginning of the century.

This thesis is an attempt to provide a comprehensive, though certainly not exhaustive, history of research since Wrede into a single theme: the "messianic secret" in Mark's gospel. Other surveys have, of course, been written. The first part of H.J. Ebeling's Das Messiasgeheimnis und die Botschaft des Marcus-Evangelisten gives an account up to 1939, though Ebeling can now be seen to be chiefly important for his own positive suggestions in the second part of the book. Post-war surveys include those of E. Percy,<sup>1</sup> E. Sjöberg,<sup>2</sup> G. Minette de Tillesse,<sup>3</sup> D.E. Aune<sup>4</sup> and, most recently, H. Räisänen.<sup>5</sup> There is also historical material in two unpublished theses: J.L. Clark's "A Re-examination of the Problem of the Messianic Secret in Mark in its Relationship to the Synoptic Son of Man Sayings" (1962), which singles out the contributions of selected scholars, and M.E. Glasswell's "The Concealed Messiahship in the Synoptic Gospels and the Significance of this for the Study of the Life of Jesus and of the Church" (1965),<sup>6</sup>

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1 E. Percy, Die Botschaft Jesu, 271-299.

2 E. Sjöberg, Der verborgene Menschensohn in den Evangelien, 100-132.

3 G. Minette de Tillesse, Le secret messianique dans L'Évangile de Marc, 9-32.

4 D.E. Aune, 'The Problem of the Messianic Secret', NovT 11 (1969), 1-31.

5 H. Räisänen, Das "Messiasgeheimnis" im Markusevangelium, 7 - 49.

6 The historical digest in Greig's introduction to his translation is based on Glasswell.



which adopts a chronological approach, but neither thesis is intended to be a history as such. Not until my work was nearly complete did I discover the existence of a third thesis: J.L. Blevins' "The Messianic Secret in Markan Research, 1901-1964" (1965). A careful reading of Blevins convinces me that my own thesis has not been rendered unnecessary. Blevins deals fully with the period covered by Ebeling, on whom he is heavily dependent, but his treatment of the more recent debate is inadequate, not least because of his omission of certain important contributors (for example, Percy and Conzelmann). And since he wrote the debate has gone on!

Blevins presents his story as a battle between "conservatives" and "liberals".<sup>7</sup> Each side schemes and campaigns against the other, here launching an offensive, there beating a strategic retreat, and periodically Blevins reports on the progress of the struggle. I question whether this presentation is either convincing or helpful. I have chosen instead to tell the story in the light of a basic contrast between continental and British scholarship. For a major problem which confronts the historian of research into the messianic secret is: What is the explanation of the fact that on the Continent the secret has generally been seen as a theological idea of the evangelist or of the pre-Markan community, whereas in Britain, with few exceptions until recently, scholars have defended the secret's historicity, regarding it as being necessitated by Jesus' distinctive conception of Messiahship? A theme which runs through my thesis is that this dichotomy is explicable in terms of the different presuppositions which exegetes bring to the text of Mark.

An article by E. Best has shown how the explanation of differing

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<sup>7</sup> Blevins' terminology is potentially confusing. Wrede was arguing against the liberals of his day (see the title of my chapter two), but for Blevins "liberals" are those who are in basic agreement with Wrede or whose position derives from his.



emphases in Biblical exegesis is mainly to be sought "in the world of theology and the philosophy of history".<sup>8</sup> For "Biblical scholarship, though at times it may claim to be neutral, has been much influenced by changing fashions in theology and philosophy".<sup>9</sup> Some would go further and allege, as C.E. Braaten has done, that "nothing can make an onlooker so skeptical of New Testament scholarship as noting the frequency with which there occurs a convenient correspondence between what scholars claim to prove historically and what they need theologically".<sup>10</sup> And yet the exegete may not consciously be seeking to buttress his own religious position; it may simply be that his own presuppositions diminish his sensitivity to "the complexity and multiplicity of the historical phenomena".<sup>11</sup>

I wish to argue that it was the presuppositions of British scholarship which caused Wrede to be seen as "negative, disturbing and dangerous".<sup>12</sup> He opened the door to historical scepticism - and so he remained untranslated for seventy years.<sup>13</sup> The same presuppositions led many British scholars to take a "conservative" view of the messianic secret. But it is not the case that the influence of theological and philosophical presuppositions is discernible only in British exegesis. Certain continental interpretations of the messianic secret also seem to depend upon the prevailing theological climate. It was no coincidence,

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8 E. Best, 'The Commentators and the Gospels', ET 79 (1967-1968), 262.

9 Ibid.

10 C.E. Braaten, History and Hermeneutics, 55.

11 H.D. Betz, 'Jesus as Divine Man', in Jesus and the Historian, 115.

12 R. Morgan, '"Negative" Criticism of the Gospels?', Religious Studies 6 (1970), 77.

13 The blame for this omission should probably be laid at the door of William Sanday. See below, 71-73.



for example, that H.J. Ebeling provided "a very theological answer to a very exegetical problem"<sup>14</sup> precisely during the period when the dialectical theology was dominant on the Continent, nor that Conzelmann should discover the secret to be the key to the problem of the relationship between faith and history at a time when that very problem was motivating the "new quest" of the historical Jesus.

This thesis, then, is a study, within a limited area, of the process of New Testament exegesis in the twentieth century. But I do not wish to claim too much. I am very conscious that I have not gone far to uncover the presuppositions of individual writers in the way that G. Turner has done for R.H. Lightfoot and T.W. Manson.<sup>15</sup> I can only plead that such an undertaking has hardly been possible in the context of what remains first and foremost an historical account of three quarters of a century's research into a complex exegetical problem.

In chapter one of the thesis, "The Secret Identity of Jesus in Mark's Gospel", I outline the answer to which I myself have come in the course of my study of the discussion since Wrede. But this outline does not aspire to be an original contribution to the discussion; it is placed at the beginning in order to provide some grounding for the criticisms which are offered in the historical chapters. It also enables my own presuppositions to be taken account of.

Chapters two and three are short, for the ground they cover has been well trodden. Chapter two, "Wrede and the End of Liberalism",

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<sup>14</sup> R.E.C. Formesyn, 'Was there a Pronominal Connection for the Bar Nasha Selfdesignation?', NovT 8 (1966), 2 (note 6 from page 1).

<sup>15</sup> See his thesis, 'Hermeneutics and Exegesis: The Role of Pre-understanding in the Interpretation of the New Testament with Special Reference to the Work of T.W. Manson and R.H. Lightfoot' (University of St. Andrews, 1974), which sets out to explain why, with much the same historical and philological data available to them, exegetes arrive at widely divergent interpretations. Turner argues that the determining factor is pre-understanding, and he goes on to attempt to reconstruct the respective pre-understandings of Manson and Lightfoot.

concentrates on the nature of Wrede's critique of the liberals. Their reading of Mark's gospel was based on the fundamental misconception that it was essentially an historical document. Schweitzer, on the other hand, though his results differed from those of the liberals, shared their belief in the basic trustworthiness of the gospel tradition, and this was the reason why British scholars in this period took Schweitzer much more seriously than they did Wrede.

In chapter three, "The Eclipse of the Historical Jesus", I try to show that the dialectical theology's indifference to the Jesus of history led inevitably to H.J. Ebeling's interpretation of the messianic secret as having nothing to do with Jesus but as highlighting the kerygma and the self-understanding of Christian faith. But in Britain, where a divorce between faith and history was theologically unacceptable, most scholars continued to maintain that the secret was rooted in the history of Jesus himself.

Chapter four, "Towards the Theology of the 'Messianic Secret'", is the longest, seeking to repair the omissions of Blevins and bringing the story up to date. The main emphasis here falls upon post-war attempts to discover the theme's positive theological content. It was during this period that at last there was some narrowing of the gap between British and continental approaches.

I conclude by assessing what the history of research into the messianic secret has to say about New Testament exegesis in general.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE SECRET IDENTITY OF JESUS IN MARK'S GOSPEL



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE SECRET IDENTITY OF JESUS IN MARK'S GOSPEL

The sketch which follows does not claim for itself any originality. Its purpose at this point in the thesis is to state the understanding of the "messianic secret" which serves as the basis for the critical comments in chapters two, three and four. Attention is concentrated here upon the question of the identity of Jesus, though I do not intend to imply that Mark's gospel is essentially a christological treatise. I hold the central theme to be discipleship, not christology, though the two are, of course, closely related.

#### Mark's Introduction (1 : 1-15)

Mark's introduction, whether it finishes at 1:13 or extends to 1:15,<sup>1</sup> is a disclosure scene. The evangelist wishes the reader to understand at once that Jesus is the Son of God. As Schweizer comments: "Only one who believes can speak in this way - one who already knows about Easter".<sup>2</sup> Mark's gospel is constructed backwards from the resurrection.

There is wide agreement that "the Gospel" in 1:1 bears a theological rather than its later literary meaning. The Gospel is the experienced good news of God's salvation. But there is less agreement about the precise force of ἀρχή. Does it refer to the preaching of John the Baptist? It may, particularly since in the apostolic preaching the activity of John seems to have been regarded as the terminus a quo (Acts 1:21f., 10:37, 13:24-25). Or it may be a title for the introduction

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1 The view that the latter is the case seems to be gaining ground. See, for example, L.E. Keck, 'The Introduction to Mark's Gospel', NTS 12 (1965-1966), 352-370 and Hugh Anderson, The Gospel of Mark, 63-64.

2 E. Schweizer, The Good News according to Mark, 31.

itself. Or it may express the view that the whole story of Jesus, "with his preaching and teaching and call to cross-bearing discipleship",<sup>3</sup> belongs to the presupposition of the Gospel. 1:1 would then refer to any part of what follows. ἀρχή, therefore, is perhaps best translated "basis" or "origin".<sup>4</sup> Behind the Gospel there is the life of Jesus, behind Jesus there is John the Baptist, and behind John there is the Old Testament. Ultimately there is God: "even before he appears Jesus is proclaimed as the one in whom the plan of God is fulfilled".<sup>5</sup>

The introduction is christological through and through. There is no interest, for example, in John for his own sake. Other information which Mark possesses about him (2:18, 11:32) is deemed superfluous here. John's importance consists solely in the fact that he is the precursor of Jesus. Nor is there any interest in the human development of Jesus himself. In the narrative of his baptism it is not even Mark's primary purpose to make the point that Jesus is aware of his unique status; the voice from heaven is addressed not so much to Jesus as to the reader, to whom the identity of Jesus is again disclosed. As far as the onlookers are concerned, however, that identity remains a secret, for only Jesus sees the heavens open and the Spirit descending on him, and he alone hears God address him as his Son. "The temptation, too, involves only Jesus, Satan, and God's angels (1:12-13). Thus from the very outset the reader is shown clearly the dimension in which everything takes place. Therefore only he will understand correctly who will hear that in Jesus God himself seeks to speak and act on earth."<sup>6</sup>

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3 Anderson, op.cit., 66.

4 See M.E. Glasswell, 'The Beginning of the Gospel: A Study of St. Mark's Gospel with regard to its First Verse', in New Testament Christianity for Africa and the World, 37.

5 Schweizer, op.cit., 31.

6 Schweizer, Jesus, 129-130.



The Authority of Jesus: Exorcisms and Debates (1 : 16-3: 35)

The conflict with Satan breaks out again almost immediately in the story of the man in the synagogue possessed by an unclean spirit. Almost certainly 1:24 was originally an apotropaic utterance and 1:25 a formula for binding the demon. The demon attempts to gain power over the exorcist by identifying and naming him, and the injunction to silence is intended to bring to an end the demon's activity.<sup>7</sup> But the redactional summaries in 1:34 and 3:11-12 demonstrate that for the evangelist the apotropaic utterance has become a mode of supernatural witness to the true identity of Jesus and the formula for binding the demon has become an injunction to secrecy. It is quite clear that the secrecy cannot here be understood from an historical point of view, for the command to silence comes too late to prevent the secret from being betrayed. But the possibility that the cries of the demon might have been heard by the bystanders is not in Mark's mind.<sup>8</sup> His point is rather that the cries were not intended to be heard. The demon identifies Jesus correctly, but the time has not yet come for that identity to be publicly proclaimed. The cries of the demon provide for the reader the answer to the vague questioning of the crowd about the "authority" of Jesus (1: 22, 27). While men remain in ignorance of Jesus' identity, the demon performs a function akin to that of the heavenly voice in the introduction. This contrast between the supernatural knowledge of the

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7 J.C. O'Neill finds the germ of the messianic secret here: "I should hold that the messianic secret was a theological development of a standard exorcism theme, that the exorcist silences the demons". J.C. O'Neill, 'The Silence of Jesus', NTS 15 (1968-1969), 154. J.L. Clark, too, finds that "this phenomenon of a contest between offensive and defensive apotropaic formulae provided the traditional impetus for at least one aspect of the Markan secrecy motif". J.L. Clark, 'A Re-examination of the Problem of the Messianic Secret in Mark in its Relationship to the Synoptic Son of Man Sayings', unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Yale University, 1962), 194.

8 In his commentary Vincent Taylor appears to accept that Jesus did indeed carry on the reported conversation with the demoniac. But D.E. Nineham is surely right to say (St. Mark, 45) that "we, if we had been there, should have heard simply the half-inarticulate cries of a man in an epileptic seizure".

demons and the ignorance of men persists until the confession of Peter in 8:29.

In the story of the cure of the paralytic (2: 1-12) a new theme enters the gospel - conflict between Jesus and the Jewish authorities. In this "debate", and in the four others which follow (2: 15-17, 18-22, 23-28, 3: 1-6), "the issue turns not on the abstract desirability of some principle or practice, but on the identity of Jesus, and the eschatological character of his coming".<sup>9</sup> As Minette de Tillesse observes, the first controversy reveals the true dimension of all of them: they are "not school disputes but secret epiphanies of the Son of Man".<sup>10</sup> The scribes are blind witnesses of the messianic revelation.

2: 1-12 has the form of a miracle-story but Mark is mainly interested in the debate at the centre. The scribes protest: "This is blasphemy! Who but God alone can forgive sins?" The answer is that Jesus as the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins. But this is an answer given by the Gospel; the point of 2:10a is kerygmatic and christological. There is no denying the loose connection of 2:10a with the rest of the narrative, and G.H.Boobyer has plausibly suggested that the words "But to convince you that..." are an aside addressed to Mark's Christian readers.<sup>11</sup> (Compare the similar parentheses in 7: 3-4 and 13: 14.) Boobyer's suggestion is a response to the objection that Jesus' open reference to the Son of Man so early in the gospel stands in clear opposition to the theme of secrecy, particularly in view of the fact that in 8:12 and 11:33 Jesus expressly refuses to meet his opponents' demand for a sign or to tell them by what authority he acts. And yet in any case the indirectness of Jesus' identification with the Son of Man is preserved by the use of the title

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9. Nineham, St. Mark, 101.

10 "... non pas disputes d'écoles mais épiphanies secrètes du Fils de l'Homme." G. Minette de Tillesse, Le secret messianique dans l'Évangile de Marc, 121-122.

11 See Boobyer, 'Mark 2:10a and the Interpretation of the Healing of the Paralytic', HThR 47 (1954), 115-120.



in the third person. "Jesus is not publicly revealing his own identity."<sup>12</sup>

In 2: 15-17 we have the story of how the Pharisees are offended by Jesus' association with "tax-gatherers and sinners". On the historical level the offence of the Pharisees must have been on the ground that to mix with sinners was necessarily to incur defilement. But once again Mark's point is christological: the unprecedented conduct of Jesus rests solely on his unique identity. "In the Old Testament it is Yahweh who is the doctor"<sup>13</sup> - and Jesus himself is now present as the doctor. It is this which the Pharisees fail to see. The true meaning of their offence will be revealed by the Gospel.

In the next debate (2: 18-22) the christological dimension is again present. 2:20 "seems to break the logic of the argument".<sup>14</sup> The point of 2:19a is that, with the coming of Jesus, fasting is rendered inappropriate; yet Jesus goes on to say, "But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and on that day they will fast". This saying can be seen as justifying the practice of fasting in the early Church, the "taking away" of the bridegroom being a reference to the death of Jesus. But at a deeper level the saying witnesses to the fact that his death inaugurates a new era, when the person of Jesus, the messianic bridegroom, is central, and when (2: 21-22) "the radical incompatibility between the new message, faith, and life of the Church, and the old institutions and practices of Judaism"<sup>15</sup> becomes apparent.

At first sight the controversy concerning the Sabbath (2: 23-28) seems not to turn on the question of Jesus' identity, for Jesus refutes the Pharisees with a rabbinical argument of his own - in exceptional

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<sup>12</sup> Anderson, The Gospel of Mark, 102.

<sup>13</sup> "Dans l'Ancien Testament, le médecin, c'est Yahweh." G. Minette de Tillesse, op.cit., 122.

<sup>14</sup> Nineham, St. Mark, 102.

<sup>15</sup> Anderson, op.cit., 108.



circumstances human need justifies the violation of the law. But the last verse of the pericope shows that ultimately it is because Jesus is the eschatological Son of Man that he can infringe the Sabbath. The very fact that 2:28 is added rather awkwardly to an argument which is complete in itself (though admittedly there is no syntactical difficulty in this case) suggests that, like 2:10, it should be seen as a Christian comment. This interpretation of 2:10 and 2:28 tends to be confirmed by the absence of any reference to the earthly Son of Man in 3:28, despite the parallels in Matthew (12: 31-32) and Luke (12:10). In other words, 2:10 and 2:28 are peculiarly Markan and are not to be compared with the earthly Son of Man sayings in Q. On the other hand, Anderson may be right that 2:28 "is hardly in line with the 'secret' in the Gospel. Here Mark has allowed his tradition to stand without controlling it."<sup>16</sup> Certainly it should not be assumed that Mark can have left no inconsistencies in his work. And yet in respect of 2:10 Anderson can say that "the way the title is used here is no breach of the 'secret'",<sup>17</sup> and it is arguable that even in 2:28 Jesus makes no direct equation between himself and the Son of Man. Minette de Tillesse remains convinced that 2:10 and 2:28 "do not breach the messianic secret: they simply pose a further question".<sup>18</sup>

The final debate (3: 1-6) is noteworthy for its reference to the desire of the Pharisees to plot the death of Jesus (cf. 2:20). That the early debates should contain such a reference is highly significant. The passion casts its shadow beforehand, and the implication in 3:6 is that the passion is to be seen as the climactic debate, the ultimate confrontation between Jesus and his opponents.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>18</sup> "... ne rompent pas le secret messianique: ils ne font que poser une question de plus." G. Minette de Tillesse, op.cit., 368.

All five debates exist on two levels. Their ostensible subject is conflict between the historical Jesus and the Jewish leaders of his day. At this level there is no answer to the questioning of the scribes and Pharisees; the answer is given at the level of the Gospel. In this sense the offence which is taken by the opponents of Jesus is part and parcel of the secret of his life and death. It is not the case, as some allege, that the theme of secrecy is absent from the debates.<sup>19</sup> On the contrary, in a context of offence and controversy, the secret is highlighted.

3: 22-30, where the doctors of the law charge Jesus with being possessed by Beelzebub and of driving out devils by the prince of devils, brings to a head the christological significance both of the exorcisms and of the debates. As Anderson notes: "At this point in the Gospel the level of engagement, theologically speaking, is deeper and more crucial than in the earlier conflict-stories. It is a question now not just of religious practice or observance on the part of Jesus or his disciples, but of the very nature and origin of his authority".<sup>20</sup> Jesus preserves his secret by answering his critics "in parables" (3:23), and Mark 4 proceeds to deal with the subject of parables in greater detail.

#### Parables (4: 1-34)

The difficulty of the parables - and their point - resided originally in the fact that there was no obvious relation between the preaching of Jesus and the eschatological future which it proclaimed. Jeremias classes the parables of the sower, the seed growing secretly and the mustard seed as "contrast-parables": the beginning may seem

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, R.H. Lightfoot, History and Interpretation in the Gospels, 110, followed by Nineham, St. Mark, 89.

<sup>20</sup> Anderson, op. cit., 121.



insignificant, but the end will be triumphant. "The fruit is the result of the seed; the end is implicit in the beginning. The infinitely great is already active in the infinitely small."<sup>21</sup> Neither scorn nor unbelief can disturb Jesus' certainty that God is bringing in his Kingdom and that his own preaching will be vindicated. The key to the understanding of chapter 4 is the fact that Mark sees that vindication in terms of the relationship between Jesus himself and the Gospel. The preaching of Jesus becomes the preaching about Jesus. "The secret of the kingdom of God" is not only "the insignificant and obscure beginnings of the kingdom in, with, and around Jesus",<sup>22</sup> but also what the Gospel reveals about the significance of his person. 4:11 holds together in tension both the eschatological proclamation of Jesus and the kerygma of the Church. Whereas the parables themselves looked forward, 4:11 is written from the vantage point of fulfilment - "To you the secret of the kingdom of God has been given". The secret only emerges with the Gospel, which draws out the implications of the ministry; and the force of τὰ πάντα is that the entire life of Jesus, not only his teaching in parables, lies under a veil until the veil is removed by the Gospel. Thus Marxsen can say that 4: 10-12 reflects the situation of the evangelist.<sup>23</sup>

Understood in this way, Mark 4 is fully congruous with what the rest of the gospel has to say about the secret identity of Jesus. Insofar as the parables contrasted a present hiddenness with a future disclosure, they were suitable vehicles of Mark's own teaching that the Gospel reveals the secret of Jesus' person. And so the parables themselves come to have new meaning in the light of the Gospel. 4: 26-29 and 4: 30-32, for example, have two levels of meaning. In the context

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21 J. Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 152.

22 Anderson, op.cit., 139.

23 See Marxsen, 'Redaktionsgeschichtliche Erklärung der sogenannten Parabeltheorie des Markus', ZThK 52 (1955), 255-271.

of the ministry they anticipate the certain coming of God's Kingdom. But in the context of the Gospel they emphasize that at the time the meaning of the life of Jesus was a secret. Similarly, the sayings in 4: 21-22 appear to have been included here by Mark in order to reinforce his teaching that the promise of God's Kingdom reaches its fulfilment in the Gospel about Jesus, for a comparison with 9:9 suggests that the correct interpretation of 4: 21-22 is in terms of Jesus' person.

As for the so-called "parable theory", which Wrede regarded as an integral part of the whole secrecy theme, I suggest that the "hard saying" in 4: 10-12 is best seen as explaining the rejection of Jesus by the Jews and their subsequent failure to receive the Gospel. Anderson is right to call verses 11-12 a "Church formulation",<sup>24</sup> which is scarcely reconcilable with Mark's own clear understanding of the purpose of parables evinced in 4: 3, 9 and 33. Anderson further remarks that it is difficult to maintain that Mark is "operating with the doctrine of a divinely decreed election of the few who surely know everything already",<sup>25</sup> since the disciples themselves, and not only "those who are outside", remain blind to the import of Jesus' teaching, in spite of "private instruction and open pronouncement".<sup>26</sup> The blindness of the disciples, which appears here (4:13) and remains an important theme throughout the gospel, will be considered in the next section but one. First we must investigate Mark's handling of miracle-stories.

#### Miracles (4: 35-6: 6a)

When we come to consider the injunctions to silence after miracles of healing, we must attend first of all to those who dispute Wrede's

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<sup>24</sup> Anderson, op.cit., 130.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



assumption that all the silencings have the same motive. As T.W. Manson protests: "No voice from Heaven has declared that all the injunctions to secrecy in Mark spring from the same motive, and there is no reason on earth why we should suppose that they do. Indeed, when they are examined on their merits, without presuppositions, other motives or reasons than the messianic [sic] secret readily suggest themselves."<sup>27</sup> J.H. Ropes, for example, contends that in 1: 44 the command to silence is intended by the evangelist to make it clear that "Jesus' conduct ... was wholly free from any effort to arouse public excitement".<sup>28</sup>

It is, in fact, more than likely that there were such motifs of secrecy in the tradition, and it is quite possible that some of them may have had historical foundations. However, I should want to argue that they have been put by Mark to a use of his own and that they now carry new implications. In the end it is misleading to look for a basis in history for the Markan idea of secrecy, for that idea has its origin in the resurrection. One can agree that the injunctions after miracles are to be distinguished from the messianic secret proper (for there is no recognition of Messiahship in 1: 40-45, 5: 21-43, 7: 31-37 and 8: 22-26) and yet still maintain that they can only be rightly understood in the light of the post-Easter Gospel. As Glasswell puts it: "The theme of the messianic secret stands over against false approaches to history or miracle which would preclude the choice of faith and forget that this is based on the Gospel and not on anything to do with the history itself".<sup>29</sup>

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27 T.W. Manson, 'Realized Eschatology and the Messianic Secret', in Studies in the Gospels, 212. Manson refers approvingly to H.J. Cadbury, 'Mixed Motives in the Gospels', Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 95 (1951), 117-124.

28 J.H. Ropes, The Synoptic Gospels, 16. Cf. the suggestion of A. Fridrichsen (in The Problem of Miracle in Primitive Christianity) that here and elsewhere an apologetic motive is at work against insinuations that Jesus was a self-advertising thaumaturge.

29 Glasswell, 'The Use of Miracles in the Markan Gospel', in Miracles: Cambridge Studies in their Philosophy and History, 157. *Italics mine.*

L.E. Keck has made the persuasive suggestion that the miracle-stories in 4: 35-5: 43 and 6: 31-56 are part of a pre-Markan cycle which presented Jesus as a "divine man" (theios anēr).

But the decisive thing to see is how Mark counterweights their effect by the way he builds them into his narrative. Whereas they were told originally to manifest Jesus' divine power, Mark used them to accent their inability to disclose Jesus' true identity.<sup>30</sup>

The corrective which Mark introduces is to insist that the character of the Gospel is determined by the suffering of Jesus and "the call to follow in that way".<sup>31</sup> "According to Mark, the miracles of Jesus can do no more than strike fear and amazement into his contemporaries. At most they provoke the question as to who this man might be."<sup>32</sup> That question (4:41) cannot yet receive its full answer. This is underlined by 6: 1-6a, where the people of Jesus' home town ask, "How does he work such miracles?" and yet still take offence at him. It is surely facile to interpret the offence as meaning that "familiarity breeds contempt". Once again Mark is writing on more than one level. He is less interested in men's understanding of Jesus "then" than in the Church's understanding of Jesus "now". The fact that offence is taken demonstrates that a purely historical knowledge of Jesus can never be enough. True faith in Jesus can only be evoked by the Gospel.

We can now see why stories of miracles remain important for Mark (for they occupy approximately 30% of his material). They are parables of contemporary faith in Jesus. "They seem ... to have the quality of symbols. They do not point to faith so much as represent truths

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30 Keck, A Future for the Historical Jesus, 119.

31 Ibid., 120.

32 H.D. Betz, 'Jesus as Divine Man', in Jesus and the Historian, 124.



about the nature of faith in Jesus."<sup>33</sup> And so Minette de Tillesse can say, with reference to the raising of Jairus' daughter in 5: 21-43 and the healing of the epileptic boy in 9: 14-29, that "behind the two children there are silhouetted the Christians who have been raised to new life by the power of their faith in Jesus".<sup>34</sup> The miracle-stories "preach Christ in his present availability. He is Lord of the waves, conqueror of death, controller of evil powers, restorer of human dignity - and dispenser of true bread."<sup>35</sup>

#### The Blindness of the Disciples (6: 6b - 8:26)

It is as the dispenser of true bread that Jesus appears in the next section, which is constructed around two parallel feeding miracles. The section is dominated by the theme of the disciples' blindness (see 6: 52, 7: 18 and 8: 17-21), to which the feedings are intended "to bear a dual witness".<sup>36</sup> Mark is highlighting "the difficulty of passing from Jesus' mighty works to awareness of his identity and belief in his person".<sup>37</sup> The question "Who is Jesus?" cannot be answered even by the disciples (cf. 4: 41). Their blindness persists to the end, but whereas at this stage in the gospel it may be characterized as imperceptiveness, later, after the confession of Peter, it takes the form of an inability to understand the plain teaching of Jesus that he must follow the way of suffering.

The fact that the disciples' lack of understanding is so widely

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33 Glasswell, 'The Use of Miracles in the Markan Gospel', in Miracles: Cambridge Studies in their Philosophy and History, 154.

34 "Derrière les deux enfants se profilent les chrétiens ressuscités par la puissance de leur foi en Jésus." G. Minette de Tillesse, op.cit., 56.

35 R.P. Martin, Mark: Evangelist and Theologian, 176.

36 Anderson, op.cit., 197.

37 Glasswell, 'The Use of Miracles in the Markan Gospel', in Miracles: Cambridge Studies in their Philosophy and History, 158.

attested in the synoptic tradition suggests that the theme can be traced back to the relationship which obtained during Jesus' ministry. But the reason why Mark stresses the theme so strongly is undoubtedly because he wishes to "bring out sharply the difference between the situation before the death of Christ and that which followed the resurrection appearances".<sup>38</sup>

[The disciples] are not represented as those who, from the beginning, understand and believe. Rather is it made decisively clear that it is only as they companied with the earthly Jesus, listened to his teaching, wondered at his authority, questioned his identity, fled from his Cross, that they came at last to know him as the risen and exalted one to whom all power had been committed. They carried their false hopes to his grave. Only a new act of God transformed their past, and made them see.<sup>39</sup>

The disciples' blindness, therefore, is related to the whole theme of secrecy in that it bears witness to the fact that the Gospel and the Jesus of history are not contemporaneous. "Only later would it be possible to look back and recognize in Jesus the Lord and the Christ."<sup>40</sup>

But can one go on to specify the function which the motif performs for the reader? Several scholars have recently maintained that Mark is carrying on a vendetta against the disciples. J.B. Tyson, for example, sees the gospel as a polemic against the Jerusalem church and its belief in a nationalistic royal Messiahship;<sup>41</sup> T.J. Weeden argues that

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<sup>38</sup> J.H. Ropes, The Synoptic Gospels, 22.

<sup>39</sup> N. Clark, Interpreting the Resurrection, 105-106. Italics mine.

<sup>40</sup> Glasswell, 'The Use of Miracles in the Markan Gospel', in Miracles: Cambridge Studies in their Philosophy and History, 159.

<sup>41</sup> J.B. Tyson, 'The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark', JBL 80 (1961), 261-268.



Mark is attacking the upholders of a "divine man" christology.

In each case the point of view which Mark is warning his readers against is represented in the gospel by the disciples. But the theories of Tyson and Weeden are unconvincing. The best refutation is to be found in Wrede:

If anyone for a moment entertained the idea that Mark is ill-disposed towards the disciples, he would soon dismiss it again. In the evangelist's mind it is actually no dishonour to the disciples that they behave as they do, for during Jesus' life, or shall we say during the period of the secret, this is quite natural. At all events, the high esteem in which the apostles came to be held is completely compatible with this. For in so far as it is a question of their characters, it is to the apostles at a later period that this applies, the apostles who after the resurrection of Jesus no longer have any obtuseness or blindness. What they later became is brought into the sharpest relief by what they previously were.<sup>43</sup>

R.P. Meye makes the further point that to view the gospel as an anti-Twelve polemic is to rob "the struggling (and sinning) Marcan community of the very hope that a gospel is calculated to bring".<sup>44</sup> For Mark is assuring his readers that "the same historical Jesus who bore with such disciples before Easter now bears with them after Easter. Thus, the Twelve, even when depicted in negative fashion, become bearers of hope to the Marcan community."<sup>45</sup>

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42 T.J. Weeden, 'The Heresy that Necessitated Mark's Gospel', ZNW 59 (1968), 145-158. Weeden's argument is developed at greater length in Mark: Traditions in Conflict.

43 Wrede, The Messianic Secret, 106.

44 R.P. Meye, 'Messianic Secret and Messianic Didache in Mark's Gospel', in Oikonomia, 65.

45 Ibid., 65-66.

It is much more likely, then, that the disciples are simply being used as a foil. D.J. Hawkin describes the incomprehension motif as "typology per contrarium",<sup>46</sup> setting in clearer focus what the reader needs to grasp concerning the mystery of Christ, namely, that the destiny of Jesus is "the paradigm of Christian existence".<sup>47</sup> In short, the role of the disciples is to be "examples to the community. Not examples by which their own worth or failure is shown, but examples through whom teaching is given to the community and the love and power of God made known."<sup>48</sup>

As the first half of the gospel draws to a close, the disciples' blindness persists; it seems that "nothing short of a miracle of God's grace can bestow believing-understanding on those who have eyes yet do not see".<sup>49</sup> Such a miracle now takes place in 8: 22-26, where the eyes of a blind man are opened. The clear parallels between this story and 8: 27-30<sup>50</sup> suggest that it is symbolic of the opening of Peter's eyes, for which no explanation of a psychological kind can be given. As Weeden says: "This sudden burst of insight occurs as inexplicably as the previous imperceptivity persisted".<sup>51</sup>

#### Messiahship and Discipleship (8: 27 - 10:52)

It is widely agreed that Peter's confession marks a turning-point in the gospel, but it is a fundamental error to seek to understand it

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<sup>46</sup> D.J. Hawkin, 'The Incomprehension of the Disciples in the Marcan Redaction', JBL 91 (1972), 500.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> E. Best, 'The Role of the Disciples in Mark', NTS 23 (1976-1977), 401.

<sup>49</sup> Anderson, op.cit., 202.

<sup>50</sup> In 8:22-26 Jesus puts a question to the blind man, the man recovers his sight, and Jesus dismisses him with the command, "Do not tell anyone in the village". In 8:27-30 Jesus asks a question of the disciples, Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, and the disciples are ordered not to tell anyone about him.

<sup>51</sup> Weeden, 'The Heresy that Necessitated Mark's Gospel', ZNW 59(1968), 146.



in biographical terms. This is done, for example, by Cullmann, who argues that Jesus accepts the messianic title, but with "extreme restraint".<sup>52</sup> The command to silence in 8:30 stops the disciples from proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah: they would only cause confusion if they did so, since they do not understand the nature of his Messiahship. Verses 31-33 then show what it is that they do not understand - the suffering messianic destiny of Jesus. On this view the disciples' incomprehension indicates why there has to be a secret.

Now there is no need to deny that 8: 27-33 may contain traces of authentic historical tradition. Both F. Hahn<sup>53</sup> and E. Dinkler<sup>54</sup> take the view that Jesus in fact rejected a messianic temptation. Anderson, too, declares: "Peter did confess Jesus as the Christ, and Jesus did rebuke him".<sup>55</sup> But he goes on to say: "Those who support the biographical approach have generally tended to pay insufficient heed to the difference between tradition and redaction".<sup>56</sup> As the passage now stands, it resists any historicizing explanation. How can it be maintained that 8:30 is designed to forestall misunderstanding when Peter has not yet demonstrated that he does misunderstand? Silence is imposed before Peter remonstrates, which must tell against the reconstruction of Cullmann. The fact is that Mark is no longer interested in the reaction of the historical Jesus to Peter's confession. "The focal point of the Caesarea Philippi episode"<sup>57</sup> is rather the statement in 8:31 that "the Son of Man had to undergo great sufferings, and to be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and doctors of the law; to

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52 Cullmann, The Christology of the New Testament, 125.

53 F. Hahn, The Titles of Jesus in Christology, 223-226.

54 E. Dinkler, 'Peter's Confession and the "Satan" Saying: The Problem of Jesus' Messiahship', in The Future of our Religious Past: Essays in Honour of Rudolf Bultmann.

55 Anderson, op.cit., 207.

56 Ibid.

57 Schweizer, Jesus, 131.



be put to death, and to rise again three days afterwards". Mark is setting the command to silence in the light of the Gospel: the Messiahship of Jesus cannot be proclaimed except on the basis of his passion and resurrection. It is not the case that Jesus rejects the title "Messiah" in Mark, though a comparison with Matthew's version of the same episode almost tempts one to say that he does. Mark means the imposition of silence to imply that the confession of Jesus' Messiahship, though not wrong, is at this stage premature and inadequate.

Peter's confession, then, is at best a preliminary insight. "It is only half-sight because he does not understand the destiny of the Messiah - to suffer."<sup>58</sup> The confession is not a climax but a beginning - in the sense that the way is now open for the Markan Jesus to instruct the disciples concerning the divine necessity of the cross, which he does in terms of the designation "Son of Man". The Son of Man problem is notoriously a storm-centre of critical controversy. The principal positions, briefly stated, are the following:

(1) Some scholars defend the possibility that Jesus used the term as a self-description in sayings concerning the three major aspects of the Son of Man's work - his authority on earth, the necessity of his suffering and his final vindication. M.D.Hooker, for example, claims that the Markan sayings "present us with an interpretation of the Son of man which is consistent, and which would make sense within the life of Jesus",<sup>59</sup> and that all three categories of saying are traceable to Daniel 7.

(2) Others argue that the only authentic sayings are those in which Jesus makes a distinction between himself and the coming Son of Man and which have a soteriological basis - there is a direct correlation between

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58 E. Best, 'Discipleship in Mark: Mark 8:22-10 :52', SJT 23 (1970), 325.

59 M.D. Hooker, The Son of Man in Mark, 192.

a person's attitude to Jesus and the Son of Man's attitude to him in the judgment. It was belief in the resurrection which caused Jesus and the Son of Man to be identified and Son of Man sayings to be placed on the lips of Jesus in other contexts. This is the position of H.E. Tödt.<sup>60</sup>

(3) But P. Vielhauer<sup>61</sup> contends that every single Son of Man saying belongs to the christology of the early Church. An expected intervention by the Son of Man would have been basically incompatible with the authentic message of Jesus, which envisaged an unmediated advent of the Kingdom of God.

(4) E. Schweizer thinks that it is the sayings about the Son of Man's earthly activity which have the best claim to authenticity and that their background is the book of Ezekiel. "Perhaps Jesus called himself 'Son of Man' in the way Ezekiel did in order to describe the commission he had received from God to serve in lowliness and in suffering."<sup>62</sup> At the same time he would have expected to be exalted to God's right hand and to play a unique role in the final judgment, speaking for or against those who had received or rejected his call. But in the thinking of the Church Jesus himself moved gradually into the position of Judge: soon he would return as the heavenly Son of Man.

(5) Finally there is the view represented by G. Vermes, who holds that "Son of Man" was used by Jesus without any titular force but simply as a circumlocution for "I".

The only possible ... genuine utterances are sayings independent of Daniel 7 in which, in accordance with Aramaic usage, the speaker refers

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60 See H.E. Tödt, The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition.

61 See P. Vielhauer, 'Gottesreich und Menschensohn in der Verkündigung Jesu', included in Aufsätze zum Neuen Testament.

62 Schweizer, The Good News according to Mark, 169.



to himself as the son of man out of awe, reserve, or humility. It is this neutral speech-form that the apocalyptically-minded Galilean disciples of Jesus appear to have "eschatologized" by means of a midrash based on Daniel 7:13.<sup>63</sup>

However, the question of the authenticity of the Son of Man sayings is not the same as the question of their use in Mark. The former question does not need to be pursued here; it is the latter which is our concern. What matters is that "for Mark the Son of Man is Jesus".<sup>64</sup> Jesus the Son of Man acts with authority on earth (Mark presents him as one who forgives sins and who is "superior to the law which defines what sin is"<sup>65</sup>); he must go to his death at the hands of men; and he will appear in glory for salvation and judgment. Anderson suggests that "'Son of man' was mysterious enough and probably unfamiliar enough to protect Mark's interest in the 'secret'".<sup>66</sup> Here, surely, is where the evangelist's main emphasis falls.

... Mark's problem is not to establish the heavenly authority of the Son of man in spite of denials of it. Rather it is to protect the truth first of all that the divine authority belongs to the 'man' who identifies himself with all the sons of men, and so is a 'secret' that cannot be understood; and, secondly, to show how great a stumbling-block it is to the world when the 'secret' is unfolded that the God whose authority resides in Jesus permits himself in lowliness and humiliation to be rejected.<sup>67</sup>

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63 G. Vermes, Jesus the Jew (Fontana edition), 186.

64 E. Best, The Temptation and the Passion, 162.

65 Ibid., 164.

66 Anderson, op.cit., 216.

67 Ibid., 212.

Throughout this section of the gospel, therefore, Mark depicts Jesus as careful "to suppress all false and premature notions of heavenly glory and victory".<sup>68</sup>

This is certainly true of the transfiguration narrative in 9: 2-8. Within the story Mark stresses the confirmation by God himself not only of Jesus' Sonship but also of his prediction of the Son of Man's suffering and death and the subsequent call to follow, for the command to "listen to him" in 9:7 is clearly intended to refer the reader back to 8:31 ("He spoke about it plainly"), and it is significant also that at the end of the narrative "only Jesus and the word he brings remain".<sup>69</sup> On the way down the mountain (for Jesus must now resume his journey to the cross) the three disciples are enjoined not to tell anyone what they have seen until the Son of Man has risen from the dead. The disciples' bewilderment at this (9:10) emphasizes yet again that the Gospel presupposes the passion and resurrection; but the reference here for the first time to a limit beyond which the truth about Jesus may be promulgated suggests that the secret's disclosure is now not far away.

The second of the three predictions of the death and resurrection of the Son of Man occurs in the context of a journey through Galilee (9:30), which Jesus is represented as making incognito. The mention of Galilee may well have a symbolic significance, for when later Jesus promises the disciples, "I will go on before you into Galilee" (14:28), the reference is probably to the Gentile mission, when the Gospel will be openly proclaimed: "Jesus will go at the head of his disciples to the Gentiles; by virtue of his death and resurrection the kingdom which has been hitherto constrained will burst its bonds, the germinal seed will become a tree and sowing will give place to harvest".<sup>70</sup> Now,

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>70</sup> C.F.Evans, 'I will go before you into Galilee', JTS n.s.5(1954), 13.



however, Jesus wishes his journey through Galilee to be kept secret, "for he was teaching his disciples, and telling them, 'The Son of Man is now to be given up into the power of men, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again'". Although at this stage the disciples do not understand (9:32), their failure is not seen as culpable. The point is that they have to misunderstand; but soon their eyes will be opened and they will remember Jesus' teaching. Here, then, as already in 8:31,<sup>71</sup> Jesus preaches the Gospel in advance. The Church's kerygma of the crucified and risen Jesus is placed on his own lips and thus grounded in his earthly life. Jesus bears witness to himself in anticipation of his future status as Lord of the community.

But the christological teaching which Jesus imparts to the disciples "is not a revelation pure and simple but one linked closely to following Jesus, to discipleship".<sup>72</sup> Christian discipleship is defined by the person and mission of the Son of Man. "The way of service along which Jesus goes must also be the way for the disciples... The understanding only comes to those who go in the way of Jesus."<sup>73</sup> Thus we find that the third prediction (10: 33-34) is preceded by Peter's protest, "We here have left everything to become your followers". The occurrence in Jesus' reply of the phrase ἐνεκεν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου (cf. 8:35) shows that it is the Gospel which gives validity to following Jesus and that Mark has his contemporaries in view; and the implications of discipleship are drawn out in 10: 32-45, which begins with the disciples "on the road, going up to Jerusalem, Jesus leading the way",<sup>74</sup> continues with the third

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71 καὶ παρρησίᾳ τὸν λόγον ἐλάλει : "the word" is surely the Gospel.

72 Best, The Temptation and the Passion, 73.

73 Ibid.

74 Significantly, the same verb (προάγειν) occurs here and in 14:28, suggesting that "the leading of the disciples to Jerusalem to be present at the scene of [Jesus'] rejection and death is to be matched by a reverse leading from Jerusalem to Galilee". Evans, 'I will go before you, into Galilee', JTS n.s. 5 (1954), 11.



prediction and the request of James and John to "sit in state" with Jesus, and ends with the saying, "Among you, whoever wants to be great must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the willing slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give up his life as a ransom for many." To follow Jesus, then, "means to drop in behind him, to be ready to go to the cross as he did, to write oneself off in terms of any kind of importance, privilege or right, and to spend one's time only in the service of the needs of others".<sup>75</sup>

This whole central section of Mark's gospel is a close interweaving of christological proclamation and summons to discipleship. The section was prepared for by the opening of a blind man's eyes (8: 22-26), and it ends in the same way (10: 46-52). But this time the man who receives his sight is not commanded to say nothing to anybody; Mark records instead that he "followed Jesus on the road"<sup>76</sup> - the road, that is, to Jerusalem, the place of the Messiah's death.

T.A. Burkill considers that 10: 46-52 is evidence of "strain on the secret": "by addressing the miracle worker as the Son of David, the blind man attributes to Jesus a status which in the evangelist's view properly belongs to him, and thus in a surprising fashion the secret comes to the ears of the general public".<sup>77</sup> Burkill succeeds only in demonstrating that he has failed to perceive what Mark has done in 8:27 ff. As soon as Peter (correctly) confesses Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus explains that his messianic destiny is paradoxical in that he has to be a crucified Messiah; and now, in 10: 47-48, Mark allows

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<sup>75</sup> Best, 'Discipleship in Mark: Mark 8: 22-10 : 52', SJT 23 (1970), 334.

<sup>76</sup> Best points out how the phrase ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ is repeated strategically throughout the section (in 8: 27, 9:33, 10:32 and here in 10:52). Mark is "the gospel of The Way". Ibid., 327.

<sup>77</sup> T.A. Burkill, Mysterious Revelation, 192.

Jesus to be greeted as the Son of David in order that he may enter Jerusalem, the city of David, as the Messiah on his way to the cross. There are to be no further predictions of the death and resurrection of the Son of Man;<sup>78</sup> Jesus now goes to his destiny.

#### Challenge to Jerusalem (11: 1-13 : 37)

The entry into Jerusalem, the centre of opposition to Jesus, is not represented by Mark as overtly messianic but as the dawning of "the kingdom of our father David" (11:10). The reader, however, is aware that the narrative in fact depicts the Messiah on the way to his passion, for "if the kingdom is greeted, then the passion is greeted. The reader knows what is going on because he knows the announcement of Jesus given three times."<sup>79</sup> He knows, too, that when Jesus cleanses the temple, he does so as "the bearer of the final prophetic word of judgment on Israel".<sup>80</sup> The stage is thus prepared for a further series of debates (cf. 2: 1-3 : 6) with the Jewish authorities.

It is the contention of Minette de Tillesse that in these debates the secret of Jesus' identity is now covered by the thinnest of veils. He notes how Jesus himself is shown as taking the initiative: "it is he... who recounts in front of the leaders of the people a parable which they could not fail to understand (12: 1-12); it is he ... who openly broaches in the middle of the temple the burning question about the Messiah (12: 35-37)".<sup>81</sup> The reason why Jesus acts in this way is because

78 It is true that Jesus speaks again of the destiny of the Son of Man in 14:2-4 ("The Son of Man is going the way appointed for him in the scriptures; but alas for that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed!") and 14:41 ("The Son of Man is betrayed to sinful men"), but the reference is no longer to an event in the future but to one which is happening now.

79 H. Conzelmann, 'History and Theology in the Passion Narratives of the Synoptic Gospels', Interpretation 24 (1970), 186.

80 Anderson, op.cit., 269.

81 "... c'est lui ... qui raconte devant les chefs du peuple une parabole qu'ils ne pouvaient manquer de comprendre (12:1-12); c'est lui ... qui aborde ouvertement la question brûlante du Messie au milieu du temple (12:35-37)." Minette de Tillesse, Le secret messianique dans l'Évangile de Marc, 292.



he knows that his passion is drawing inexorably nearer.

Before the leaders of the people he knows that his downfall is decided (11:18) and that the disclosure of his dignity will only harden their hearts (12:12 and already 3:6). The further the passion takes its course, the more also the Son of God reveals himself, for it is as the Messiah that he must die.<sup>82</sup>

Finally, when his condemnation to death is assured, Jesus is ready to make a public confession of his Messiahship (14:62); indeed, the confession itself becomes the ground of the verdict.

But before the passion narrative of chapters 14 and 15 Mark places the apocalyptic discourse of chapter 13, where "we appear to enter a different world of thought and expression from the rest of the Gospel".<sup>83</sup> In fact, however, closer examination reveals that "the marks of apocalyptic are scarce"<sup>84</sup> and that here we are given a clearer glimpse than anywhere else into the present situation of the Markan community. Mark's concern is with the community's demeanour in the face of the parousia's delay; for him paraenetic interests take precedence over apocalyptic instruction. There are close links, as R.H. Lightfoot has demonstrated,<sup>85</sup> between chapter 13 and the passion narrative; there is a no less striking parallel between 13: 9-13 and 8: 31-38, which both emphasize suffering for the sake of the Gospel. The so-called "Markan Apocalypse" is better described as "the reaffirmation in eschatological terms of Mark's theologia crucis".<sup>86</sup>

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82 "Devant les chefs du peuple, il sait que sa perte est décidée (11:18) et que la révélation de sa dignité ne fera que les durcir (12:12 et déjà 3:6). Plus le processus de la passion avance, plus aussi le Fils de Dieu se révèle, car c'est en tant que Messie qu'il doit mourir." Ibid., 326.

83 Anderson, op. cit., 287.

84 K. Grayston, 'The Study of Mark 13', BJRL 56 (1974), 380.

85 See Lightfoot, 'The Connexion of Chapter Thirteen with the Passion Narrative', The Gospel Message of St. Mark.

86 C.B. Cousar, 'Eschatology and Mark's Theologia Crucis: A Critical Analysis of Mark 13', Interpretation 24 (1970), 335.



Mark's whole understanding of the gospel, what it does for believers, and what believers must do in response, points to an eschatology understood in mission, not in withdrawal. The Son of Man who is to come recognizes as his own those who through proclamation and suffering have identified with his redemptive activity in the world.<sup>87</sup>

The parousia of the Son of Man, when at last it occurs, will unveil the secret of Jesus' identity for all to see.

But Jesus has yet to go to his death. Mark 13, then, functions as the Lord's farewell discourse on the eve of his passion.

The one who, once he is handed over, opens his mouth only three times in brief sentences, here speaks at length as privy to the divine secrets of the destiny of the universe, whose words are the sole permanent element in it, and in whose hands are the elect of God. The passion is thus not only the depotentiation of the one who acts with power, but also the silencing of the one who speaks with ultimate authority.<sup>88</sup>

#### The Passion and Resurrection (14: 1-16 : 8)

The first of the three "brief sentences" is what Minette de Tillesse calls "the official divulging of the secret"<sup>89</sup> in 14: 61-62:

Again the High Priest questioned him: 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?' Jesus said, 'I am; and you will see the Son of Man

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87 Ibid., 333-334.

88 C.F. Evans, 'The Passion of Mark and the Passion of Luke', Explorations in Theology 2, 39.

89 "... la divulgation officielle du secret." Minette de Tillesse, op.cit., 340.

seated at the right hand of God and coming with the clouds of heaven.'

The comment of C.E.B. Cranfield, that "now at last, when [Jesus] is in the power of his foes and in such circumstances as make the claim altogether paradoxical, it is consistent with his mission to declare openly what hitherto he has had to veil",<sup>90</sup> is true for Mark, though Cranfield's intention is to explain the openness of Jesus himself.

Here in the passion narrative Mark's gospel is full of profound irony. The secret is divulged, but the secret is safe! Conzelmann goes to the heart of the matter: "In Galilee Jesus' nature is hidden. His secret destiny is the cross. In Jerusalem he declares openly what he is, for now the passion is itself the manner of the veiling."<sup>91</sup> The secret is preserved in the historical facts of the trial, condemnation and crucifixion. The response of the High Priest to Jesus' declaration is to take offence, tearing his robes and saying, "Need we call further witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy." The offence deepens in 14: 66-72, which recounts the three denials of Peter - the very man who first confesses Jesus as the Messiah and who after the last supper insists, "Even if I must die with you, I will never disown you". The inscription on the cross, "The king of the Jews", is a public announcement of the truth which in 8:30 the disciples are forbidden to proclaim, but the inscription is mocking and sarcastic and so the secret does not escape. The cry of dereliction (15:34) can be taken to imply that at the last the secret is kept even from Jesus himself. The irony is that Jesus is precisely the crucified Messiah: "the story of the passion is the story of the historical

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<sup>90</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield, The Gospel according to St. Mark, 444.

<sup>91</sup> Conzelmann, 'History and Theology in the Passion Narratives of the Synoptic Gospels', Interpretation 24 (1970), 182. Italics mine.



realization of the essential meaning of the Messiahship".<sup>92</sup> Significantly, it is when Jesus dies that the centurion makes his confession of faith: "Truly this man was the Son of God". "Toward this climactic disclosure, hinted at from the beginning but in reality hidden from a blind world, Mark's whole Gospel has been moving inexorably."<sup>93</sup> The centurion encounters only the death of Jesus and for Mark he is the prototype and forerunner of all the Gentiles who in the future will be converted by the message of the cross.

The very fact that the gospel ends so enigmatically with the frightened silence of the women also tends to highlight the importance of the death of Jesus. R.H. Fuller suggests that the women's silence is part of the messianic secret. "For, as the crucial secrecy passage in 9:9 indicates, it is not until the resurrection that the secret is fully lifted, and then it is to be proclaimed by the disciples. This is why the women may not proclaim it."<sup>94</sup> It is true that in 16: 1-8 there is no appearance of the risen Christ and no missionary charge to the Church; but the words of the angel in 16: 6-7, which recall the promise of Jesus in 14:28, "Nevertheless, after I am raised again I will go on before you into Galilee", not only announce the resurrection itself, which unveils the secret, but also point forward to the post-resurrection period, when the task of the disciples is to publish the secret to the Gentile world: "the risen Jesus is always present with his people; he is at their head as they go on the mission to which he has called them".<sup>95</sup> And so C.F. Evans can say: "At this point of the universal mission, the gospel of Jesus Christ which Mark sets out to write catches up with his readers who are themselves part of it".<sup>96</sup>

92 Burkill, Mysterious Revelation, 219.

93 Anderson, op.cit., 348.

94 R.H.Fuller, The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives, 64.

95 Best, 'Discipleship in Mark: Mark 8:22-10: 52', SJT 23(1970), 336.

96 Evans, Resurrection and the New Testament, 81.

## Conclusion

Throughout this sketch I have tried to show that the "messianic secret" is to be interpreted in the light of the resurrection. Evans, who convincingly argues that in Mark's gospel the resurrection leads to something beyond itself, points out that the very concept of resurrection directs attention backwards also: "it is the recovery intact from death of this particular man, and of what made him the particular man he was".<sup>97</sup> He goes on: "It was this sense of the recovery of the past as the raw material of the eschatological future which led to the repetition and transmission in tradition of the words and deeds of Jesus, and eventually to the writing of the gospels, in their present form of accounts of his earthly ministry, as accessories to belief in the risen Lord".<sup>98</sup> The early Christians made no distinction between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history; for them the risen Lord and the earthly Jesus were one and the same, and the gospels maintain the continuity in terms of the words and deeds of Jesus. "The Lord who ... led Mark to the expression of his message for the (Roman?) church under threat of persecution, this Lord was the Jesus who had spoken in Galilee and Judea. The Lord who spoke was the Jesus who had spoken."<sup>99</sup> But in the setting of a presentation of the kerygma which moves towards the cross and resurrection as climax, the "messianic secret" becomes a necessary device. It is a device which, according to J.C.O'Neill, serves "to bind together" a host of traditions about Jesus' powerful and marvellous words and works with an account of his death. The messianic secret is, in short, a way of making the cross the centre of the gospels."<sup>100</sup> Conzelmann makes

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97 Ibid., 142.

98 Ibid., 142-143.

99 N.Perrin, 'The Wredestrasse Becomes the Hauptstrasse', JR 46 (1966), 300.

100 J.C.O'Neill, 'The Silence of Jesus', NTS 15 (1968-1969), 154.



the same point: "the secret is the application of the theologia crucis to the whole work of Jesus".<sup>101</sup>

However, Mark's gospel is not "about" the "messianic secret"; essentially it is a message of challenge and encouragement to the Markan community, showing the way of authentic discipleship. Minette de Tillesse is right that in the end the secret subserves Mark's pastoral purpose:<sup>102</sup> the secret reflects the willingness of Jesus to go to the cross, and Christians are called to follow him in cross-bearing. One might even say that Mark's gospel is a polemic against what Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace". "Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."<sup>103</sup> But costly grace "is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life."<sup>104</sup>

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101 Conzelmann, 'History and Theology in the Passion Narratives of the Synoptic Gospels', Interpretation 24 (1970), 182.

102 See Minette de Tillesse, Le secret messianique dans l'Évangile de Marc, 417.

103 D. Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, 36.

104 Ibid., 37.

## CHAPTER TWO

WREDE AND THE END OF LIBERALISM  
(1901 - 1914)



## CHAPTER TWO

### WREDE AND THE END OF LIBERALISM (1901 - 1914)

#### The Theological Climate at the Turn of the Century

Throughout the greater part of the Christian era very little critical attention was given to the life of Jesus, for not until the Enlightenment did there emerge the beginnings of the historical - critical method. It is often supposed that the modern techniques of historical investigation were perfected by the secular historians and then applied, against ecclesiastical opposition, to the Bible. In fact, it was the theologians who, precisely by their own critique of biblical history, were among the pioneers.<sup>1</sup> As early as 1718 we find a Genevan theologian, Jean Alphonse Turretini, writing this:

First and foremost, we should understand quite clearly that the Holy Scriptures are not to be expounded any differently from other books. We must take into consideration the sense of the words and phrases, the intention of the writer, the prior and the subsequent context and any other features of this kind. This is clearly the way in which all books and all speeches are understood, therefore as it was the will of God to instruct us by means of books and speeches and not in any other way it is quite evident that the Holy Scriptures are to be understood thus ...<sup>2</sup>

In view of the various rearguard actions which theology has been compelled to fight in the last 200 years, it is only right to give it credit in this case for being in the vanguard.

But as far as professional historians are concerned, the father

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<sup>1</sup> This point has been made more than once by C.F. Evans. See, for example, 'Queen or Cinderella', Explorations in Theology 2, 86-87.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in H. Zahrnt, The Historical Jesus, 38-39.

of modern historiography was the German historian, Leopold von Ranke, whose object, in his own phrase, was to recover the past "wie es eigentlich gewesen ist", "as it really was". History was a science, no less and no more. The liberal Protestants of the nineteenth century saw here their opportunity to re-establish the Christian faith on the firm basis of historical fact. Their famous "quest of the historical Jesus" was motivated by the desire to discover Jesus "as he really was", before the faith of the early Church transformed him into the "biblical Christ". In one of Albert Schweitzer's memorable metaphors:

They were eager to picture Him as truly and purely human, to strip from Him the robes of splendour with which He had been apparelled, and clothe Him once more with the coarse garments in which He had walked in Galilee.<sup>3</sup>

It was Christian dogma which was problematic, whereas Jesus furnished them with "an objective starting-point for the study of Christianity in an age when the prestige of science was rapidly growing".<sup>4</sup> From now on it was the Jesus of history to whom the religious man must be committed.

But at this point, as D.E. Nineham has observed, a new factor entered the situation:

It is of the essence of the modern historian's method and criteria that they are applicable only to purely human phenomena ... It followed that any picture of Jesus that could consistently approve itself to an historical investigator using these criteria, must, a priori, be of a purely human figure and it must be bounded by his death.<sup>5</sup>

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3 A. Schweitzer, The Quest of the Historical Jesus, 4-5.

4 W. Nicholls, Systematic and Philosophical Theology, 80.

5 D.E. Nineham, 'The Present Position with regard to the Jesus of History', Historicity and Chronology in the New Testament, 3.



Adolf von Harnack, who was the undisputed leader of liberal Protestantism at the turn of the century, drew the logical conclusion and banished from history, and therefore from theology, such concepts as incarnation, miracle and resurrection. Nor could Harnack make any sense of eschatology. He cleverly explained - or explained away - the eschatological preaching of John the Baptist:

The prophet's gaze penetrates the course of history; he sees the irrevocable end; and he is filled with boundless astonishment that the godlessness and blindness, the frivolity and indolence, have not long since brought everything to utter ruin and destruction. That there is still a brief moment left in which conversion is possible seems to him the greatest marvel of all, and to be ascribed only to God's forbearance. But certain it is that the end cannot be very far off.<sup>6</sup>

Harnack's What is Christianity?, from which that quotation comes, was the classic synthesis of liberal theology. The essence of Christianity, said Harnack, was the notion of the Kingdom of God (in a non-eschatological sense) growing silently in the hearts of individuals and gradually realizing itself. This idea is implicit in the closing words of the book:

... if with a steady will we affirm the forces and the standards which on the summits of our inner life shine out as our highest good, nay, as our real self; if we are earnest and courageous enough to accept them as the great Reality and direct our lives by them; and if we then look at the course of mankind's history, follow its upward development, and search, in strenuous and patient service, for the communion of minds in it, we shall not faint in weariness and despair, but become certain of God, of the God whom Jesus Christ

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6 A. Harnack, What is Christianity? (Harper Torchbooks edition), 42.

called his Father, and who is also our Father.<sup>7</sup>

Also implicit in that peroration is an optimistic view of man. He did not need a saviour from sin; all he needed was an exemplar of the highest and best, whom he would surely follow. This exemplar was provided in the person of Jesus, whose own place in the Gospel was as "its personal realization and its strength".<sup>8</sup> But the Gospel itself was about the Fatherhood of God. "The Gospel, as Jesus proclaimed it, has to do with the Father only and not with the Son".<sup>9</sup>

Just as in the gospels eschatology was the husk which surrounded the kernel, so gradually the kernel was overlaid by new husks, as Hellenistic influences corrupted primitive Christianity into historic Catholicism. Looking back sadly at past doctrinal controversies, Harnack remarked: "It is a gruesome story. On the question of 'Christology' men beat their religious doctrines into terrible weapons, and spread fear and intimidation everywhere".<sup>10</sup> But Jesus himself "desired no other belief in his person and no other attachment to it than is contained in the keeping of his commandments".<sup>11</sup>

There is one major criticism to be levelled against liberal theology's quest of the historical Jesus. Its presupposition was that, if only the real Jesus could be recovered, he would certainly be found to be full of meaning for the present. It was confidently expected that the picture of Jesus to emerge by the application of the methods of historiographical science would prove to be the inspiration for a purification and renewal of Christianity. This unexamined

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7 Ibid., 301.

8 Ibid., 145. The italics are Harnack's.

9 Ibid., 144. Harnack's italics again.

10 Ibid., 125.

11 Ibid.



assumption supplied a motive other than disinterested historical enquiry. It is not surprising, therefore, that between the lines of the liberal accounts of Jesus the religious viewpoints of their authors can be detected. As George Tyrrell said of them:

They wanted to bring Jesus into the nineteenth century as the Incarnation of its ideal of Divine Righteousness, i.e. of all the highest principles and aspirations that ensure the healthy progress of civilization. They wanted to acquit Him of that exclusive and earth-scorning other-worldliness, which had led men to look on His religion as the foe of progress and energy, and which came from confusing the accidental form with the essential substance of His Gospel. With eyes thus preoccupied they could only find the German in the Jew; a moralist in a visionary; a professor in a prophet; the nineteenth century in the first; the natural in the supernatural. Christ was the ideal man; the Kingdom of Heaven, the ideal humanity.<sup>12</sup>

However, it must never be forgotten that the liberal theologians did not shrink from embracing historical criticism in the first place, and "the heroism of this choice which seemed to put God to the test or to stand in judgement upon him is not always sufficiently appreciated".<sup>13</sup>

#### The State of the Leben-Jesu-Forschung

But what of the liberal approach to Mark's gospel in particular? For centuries Mark was overshadowed by Matthew, of which it was considered to be an abbreviation. What caused Mark to emerge from the shadows was the so-called "Markan hypothesis", classically stated in H.J. Holtzmann's Die synoptischen Evangelien (1863). This was the

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<sup>12</sup> G. Tyrrell, Christianity at the Cross-Roads, 47.

<sup>13</sup> R. Morgan, "'Negative' Criticism of the Gospels?", Religious Studies 6 (1970), 86.

discovery - now almost universally accepted - that Mark was in fact the earliest gospel. But a false conclusion was drawn. Since there was no earlier source with which Mark could be compared, the illusion arose that Mark contained a factual and chronologically reliable account of the life of Jesus, which fell into two periods, the first attended by success, the second by failure and death. It was Holtzmann who established the assumptions which were shared by the "Life of Jesus" movement. The chief of these assumptions was that Jesus held himself to be a spiritual Messiah and the Kingdom of God to be a self-fulfilling ethical society in which service was the highest law. Schweitzer, who studied under Holtzmann in the 1890s and later dedicated The Mystery of the Kingdom of God to him, remarked in The Quest of the Historical Jesus that "the ideal Life of Jesus of the close of the nineteenth century is the Life which Heinrich Julius Holtzmann did not write".<sup>14</sup> But perhaps it may be said to have been written instead by Oscar Holtzmann, whose Das Leben Jesu was published in 1901.<sup>15</sup>

Oscar Holtzmann's theological standpoint coincided closely with that of Harnack. For example, Harnack classifies the miracle stories into five groups, of which the first is "stories which had their origin in an exaggerated view of natural events of an impressive character",<sup>16</sup> and Holtzmann almost echoes Harnack's very words when he says that the two cases of feeding the multitude "are to be looked upon as popular exaggerations of occurrences which were felt to be wonderful".<sup>17</sup> There is agreement between them, too, as to the nature and course of Jesus'

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<sup>14</sup> A. Schweitzer, The Quest of the Historical Jesus, 294.

<sup>15</sup> An English translation appeared as early as 1904. William Sanday (Outlines of the Life of Christ, 241) described it as representing "the average opinion of German critical circles".

<sup>16</sup> Harnack, What is Christianity?, 28.

<sup>17</sup> Holtzmann, The Life of Jesus, 76.



ministry. They are at one that his belief in himself as the Messiah "was first implanted deep in his consciousness on the day he was baptised by John in the Jordan".<sup>18</sup> They agree also that the knowledge of his Messiahship was first communicated to the disciples at the time of Peter's confession. It was not made known outside the circle of the disciples until the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and the cleansing of the temple. Harnack, whose discussion of the Messiahship is only a sketch, says little about the theme of secrecy, but Holtzmann fills in the gaps. In his view it was at the time of the temptation that Jesus made the decision to keep his messianic status secret, since an open claim "would simply not have been understood".<sup>19</sup> This explanation of Jesus' silence, later to become much favoured by British scholars, is expanded by Holtzmann elsewhere :

Nobody lost anything through his silence, and he and others were preserved from temptations; for had the secret been known, people would have been only too ready to ... urge him to seize by some bold stroke the promised sovereignty of the world. Jesus, therefore, once again forbids his disciples to speak of him to others as the Messiah (Mark 8 : 30). Were the multitude to be told, 'Jesus is the Messiah', they would look to him to lead them in revolt against Rome; they would look for signs from heaven, and for earthly prosperity.<sup>20</sup>

To the same context (Mark 8 : 30), claims Holtzmann, belongs the saying in Matthew 7 : 6: "Do not give dogs what is holy; do not throw your pearls to the pigs: they will only trample on them, and turn and tear you to pieces". Holtzmann's use of this verse illustrates one of his two basic methods. Such is his faith in the Markan

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18 Ibid., 137. Cf. Harnack, What is Christianity?, 139.

19 Holtzmann, The Life of Jesus, 151.

20 Ibid., 330-331.

outline that certain crucial Markan passages have the power to attract to themselves isolated sayings in Matthew and Luke, and in this way connections are made between different parts of the tradition. The other method is psychological conjecture, of which a good example is the following:

At the time when his disciples returned from their preaching mission, filled with joy at the success of their labours, Jesus had still felt it to be a source of great happiness, that the profoundest secret as to his nature was known only to his heavenly Father. Now, however, when even those who held aloof from him expressed high opinions of him, at the very time when exile and tribulation were assailing him with their temptations and making his Messianic faith appear in his own eyes a foolish delusion - subsequently Jesus himself calls this period the time of his trials (Luke 22 : 28) - he longs to receive confirmation of his own belief in the belief of his disciples, and we can imagine with what anxiety he awaits their answer.<sup>21</sup>

Here Holtzmann displays a knowledge which he has mysteriously acquired from outside the text of the gospels. Pious imagination and wishful reconstruction supply what is lacking in the narratives.

Holtzmann's "Life" was typical of the confidence which was then felt that it was possible to write what amounted to a biography of Jesus and to trace the course of his ministry in chronological and causal sequence. But this confidence was about to be shaken by the work of Wrede.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 321.



Wrede and Schweitzer

Wrede's Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien also appeared in 1901, too late for Holtzmann's The Life of Jesus to be mentioned except in the preface, where Wrede remarks that "this work, of course, generally champions the very positions I have particularly challenged".<sup>22</sup>

Wrede begins his challenge with the question : "How do we separate what belongs properly to Jesus from what is the material of the primitive community?"<sup>23</sup> The method of the liberals was to rationalize miracles and remove contradictions in and between narratives; they considered that what they were left with was a basically reliable account. But, asks Wrede, how could this account be an historical kernel when it was not what the evangelist had in fact written? We must not be in too great a hurry to reach conclusions about the underlying history; "our first task must always be only that of thoroughly illuminating the accounts on the basis of their own spirit and of asking what the narrator in his own time intended to say to his readers".<sup>24</sup> Until this task is carried out, the scientific study of the life of Jesus will continue to suffer from an illness which Wrede diagnoses as "psychological 'suppositionitis'".<sup>25</sup>

Wrede then proceeds to substantiate his charge that the portrayal of the messianic consciousness of Jesus by the sort of scholarship exemplified by Oscar Holtzmann cannot be established from Mark. The search for a "development" of Jesus' messianic consciousness is based upon a misconception, for Mark simply does not answer the questions

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<sup>22</sup> Wrede, The Messianic Secret, 3. This and all subsequent references are to J.C.G. Greig's translation.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 5 - 6.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 6. .

which must be answered if such a development is to be traced.

On what account does Jesus continually forbid people to speak of his messianic dignity and his miracles? On what account does he keep silence over against the disciples? That he wishes to let them arrive at the right attitude towards him on their own is a motive neither hinted at nor self-evident. On what account is the secret still to be kept from the people even after the event at Caesarea Philippi? Mark is silent.<sup>26</sup>

And if difficulties arise because of what Mark does not say, they also arise because of what he does say. For although sometimes Jesus enjoins silence upon the people whom he heals, at other times he performs miracles "in the full glare of publicity".<sup>27</sup> There is also the problem of 2 : 10 and 2 : 28. "If 'Son of man' means the Messiah, then according to Mark Jesus designated himself as such long before Peter's confession."<sup>28</sup> Similarly, in 2 : 19 Jesus is the "bridegroom", which for Mark is "necessarily a designation with a messianic ring";<sup>29</sup> and in 3 : 27 he is the one who has overcome the "strong man", Satan himself. "From all this I conclude that ... Mark shows he was unaware of the view of history ascribed to him."<sup>30</sup> On the one hand, the material is lacking which would enable the gospel to be read as the story of Jesus' development; on the other hand, if Mark is describing such a development, he involves himself in manifest contradictions. As far as Wrede is concerned, "the question of the messianic self-consciousness of Jesus is far from the thoughts of the Gospel narrators; indeed for them it simply does not exist at all".<sup>31</sup>

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26 Ibid., 15.

27 Ibid., 17.

28 Ibid., 18.

29 Ibid., 21.

30 Ibid., 22.

31 Ibid., 7.



Wrede now assembles the evidence on which he is shortly to base his own view of the nature of Mark's gospel. He begins with the narratives of the demons' recognition of Jesus' Messiahship, for the historical assessment of these "is of basic importance for the way we evaluate Jesus's prohibitions".<sup>32</sup> Wrede argues that every one of these accounts is psychologically incomprehensible, for the demoniacs can have had nothing to suggest to them that Jesus was the Messiah. The reports are not historical. In Mark's mind, it is not the human beings but the demons possessing them who recognize Jesus; as supernatural beings themselves, they perceive him to be the supernatural Son of God. Next Wrede considers the various injunctions to keep the Messiahship secret, the most significant of which are prohibitions addressed to the demons, prohibitions after other miracles, and the two commands to disciples after Caesarea Philippi and the transfiguration. He notes that the commands are "sharp and definite"<sup>33</sup> and repeats his earlier observation that "nowhere is a motive expressed".<sup>34</sup> This absence of any expressed motivation increases the probability that all the injunctions have the same meaning. Any explanation which illuminates individual passages only is to be rejected. Wrede looks at some of the motives which exegetes have introduced, such as that Jesus was afraid of the political repercussions of an open avowal of his messianic status. But, in that case:

Was there no other and more natural way? It seems to me that it would have been a better way if Jesus had spoken, at least to the disciples. Why does he not simply say that the political messiahship is "no go" and that he has as little to do with that as with their materialistic expectation?<sup>35</sup>

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32 Ibid., 24.

33 Ibid., 37.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid., 42..

The trouble with every suggestion is that the text of Mark is by-passed.

Wrede finds himself forced to the suspicion and then to the conclusion that the injunctions are in fact unhistorical. This verdict on the commands in the exorcism stories was implicit in his earlier discussion. "If the demons did not greet Jesus as Messiah then equally he cannot have resisted their greeting."<sup>36</sup> Another circumstance which Wrede has already touched upon is that some miracles are performed openly, which renders pointless the commands to silence where they do occur. In any case, the particular prohibitions in 5 : 43, 7 : 36 and 8 : 26 are obviously senseless. Finally, if the disciples were witnesses of the prohibitions, it becomes incomprehensible why they themselves were so slow to discover the Messiahship.

In his next section Wrede turns his attention to a passage which is "unmistakably connected with the idea of messianic self-concealment",<sup>37</sup> namely, 4 : 10-13. "If according to Mark Jesus conceals himself as messiah, we are entitled to interpret the *μυστήριον τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ* by this fact."<sup>38</sup> Once again, the teaching is unhistorical. It is a theological extension of the idea of the messianic secret "beyond the miracles and the messianic apostrophes by demons or disciples".<sup>39</sup>

Wrede is now ready to declare "the meaning of the secret". He italicizes his chief contention:

In the history of Jesus we have so far found no motive which provides us with a satisfactory and

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 66.



intelligible explanation for his conscious concealment of himself as it is described in Mark ...

I would go further and assert that a historical motive is really absolutely out of the question; or, to put it positively, that the idea of the messianic secret is a theological idea.<sup>40</sup>

The key to this understanding is 9 : 9 ("On their way down the mountain, he enjoined them not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead"), which in turn illuminates 4 : 21f.

("Do you bring in the lamp to put it under the meal-tub, or under the bed? Surely it is brought to be set on the lamp-stand. For nothing is hidden unless it is to be disclosed, and nothing put under cover unless it is to come into the open"). The resurrection is the

dividing-line between two periods. "The underlying point of Mark's entire approach" is that "during his earthly life Jesus' messiahship is absolutely a secret and is supposed to be such; no one apart from the confidants of Jesus is supposed to learn about it; with the resurrection, however, its disclosure ensues".<sup>41</sup> According to Wrede, Mark

looks upon the subject-matter of the secrecy as "something completely supernatural".<sup>42</sup> Mark's conviction that Jesus is a supernatural being is evinced in the narratives of the baptism and temptation, the affirmative answer of Jesus to the question of the high priest, and the centurion's confession; and, as far as Mark is concerned, the title "Messiah" is no mere theocratic designation but just as surely points to the supernatural origin of Jesus as "Son of God". Summing up, Wrede says that the secret of Jesus' being is "not merely a secret of his consciousness but, so to speak, an objective secret".<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 80.

The teaching of Jesus, too, far from simply possessing unusual prophetic or ethical force, has a supernatural character; and his prophecies of his own suffering, dying and rising (8 : 31, 9 : 31, 10 : 32-34), to which Wrede turns next, "can only be considered as expressions of a superhuman knowledge".<sup>44</sup> The predictions are unhistorical and provide a summary of the passion story in the future tense; it is obvious that they contain information which Jesus cannot have known, "in particular ... the absolute miracle of an immediate return to life".<sup>45</sup> Why, asks Wrede, did Jesus go to Jerusalem?

Not in order to die there, as the dogmatic view of the evangelist will have it ... A much better answer seems to be, that he came to Jerusalem to work there, and to do so decisively!<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, when Jesus dies, the disciples are taken completely by surprise: "they flee and do not at first think of the possibility of his resurrection".<sup>47</sup> Wrede insists that there is no evidence that Jesus prepared them for his death. "Rather does the prophecy always confront the disciples unheralded",<sup>48</sup> and what is in fact characteristic of Mark is the absence of any attempt on Jesus' part to help their comprehension. Nor is there anything in the text to suggest that they were merely slow to understand: "Mark speaks only of lack of understanding, without any qualification".<sup>49</sup> The prophecies themselves are thus thrown into sharper relief. "Jesus does not indeed

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 87-88.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



make a secret of his suffering and resurrection with his disciples, but it remains a secret to them. But it is further tacitly supposed that afterwards ... the secret falls like scales from their eyes."<sup>50</sup> They hold on to the revelations which Jesus imparts to them against the time when understanding will dawn, that is, after the resurrection. Behind both Jesus' own preservation of the messianic secret and the closely related idea that the disciples completely fail to understand is the common conception that "real knowledge of what Jesus is only begins with his resurrection".<sup>51</sup>

At this moment the entire self-presentation of Jesus becomes effective a posteriori. What could not be understood is now known, and the knowledge is now spread and must be spread. Thus despite all their blindness the disciples receive from Jesus himself the equipment which they necessarily must have if they are to be his witnesses and apostles.<sup>52</sup>

In the light of all his previous arguments Wrede now takes a retrospective look at Mark's gospel. He reiterates his criticism of the view of Mark which sees him as an author whose chief interest, when due allowance has been made for inaccuracies and some later dogmatic accretions, is in the actual circumstances of Jesus' life. "This view ... must be recognised as wrong in principle. It must frankly be said that Mark no longer has a real view of the historical life of Jesus."<sup>53</sup> Wrede is not denying that there is history underlying Mark's presentation, and indeed he briefly sketches an outline of the ministry:

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50 Ibid., 95.

51 Ibid., 114.

52 Ibid., 112.

53 Ibid., 129.

Jesus came on the scene as a teacher first and foremost in Galilee. He is surrounded by a circle of disciples and goes around with them and gives instruction to them. Among them some are his special confidants. A larger crowd sometimes joins itself to the disciples. Jesus likes to speak in parables. Alongside his teaching there is his working of miracles. This is sensational and he is mobbed. He was specially concerned with those whose illnesses took the form of demon possession. In so far as he encountered the people he did not despise associating with publicans and sinners. He takes up a somewhat free attitude towards the Law. He encounters the opposition of the Pharisees and the Jewish authorities. They lie in wait for him and try to entrap him. In the end they succeed after he has not only walked on Judaeen soil but even entered Jerusalem. He suffers and is condemned to death. The Roman authorities co-operate in this.<sup>54</sup>

These are the main features which are discernible; "but the real texture of the presentation becomes apparent only when to the warp of these general historical ideas is added a strong thread of thoughts that are dogmatic in quality".<sup>55</sup> The Markan Jesus is "a higher supernatural being",<sup>56</sup> whose motives are not human motives at all. "The one pervasive motive rather takes the form of a divine decree lying above and beyond human comprehension. This he seeks to realise in his actions and his suffering."<sup>57</sup> In short, Mark's gospel belongs to the early chapters of the history of dogma.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.



Wrede brings to an end the first part of The Messianic Secret by remarking that the idea of the secret is not Mark's own invention. The importance of the remark emerges more clearly later, when Wrede comes to discuss the historical context in which the idea arose. He attaches great importance to those passages in the New Testament (Acts 2 : 36, Rom. 1 : 4, Phil. 2 : 6ff.) which suggest that the oldest christology was that Jesus became the Messiah only with the resurrection, a christology which was implicit also in the way in which the future appearance of the Messiah was spoken of as his coming (*παρουσία*), not his return. But as time went on, and as the expectation of an immediate parousia began to wane, there was a natural tendency to carry back the Messiahship into the life of Jesus. "His previous life was only worthy of the Easter morning if the splendour of this day itself shone back upon it."<sup>58</sup> But it was still remembered that only later had he in fact become the Messiah. Here was a contradiction, and "the tension between the two ideas was eased when it was asserted that he really was messiah already on earth and naturally also knew this but did not as yet say so and did not yet wish to be it".<sup>59</sup> By means of the messianic secret a theological bridge was constructed between the Church's growing conviction that Jesus was the Messiah on earth and traditional material in which the life of Jesus was not yet depicted in messianic terms. Wrede concludes:

To my mind this is the origin of the idea which we have shown to be present in Mark. It is, so to speak, a transitional idea and it can be characterised as the after-effect of the view that the resurrection is the beginning of the messiahship at a time when the life of Jesus was already being filled materially with messianic content. Or

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

else it proceeded from the impulse to make the earthly life of Jesus messianic, but one inhibited by the older view, which was still potent.<sup>60</sup>

The theme's stress does not fall, negatively, on ignorance of Jesus' Messiahship during his life,<sup>61</sup> but on the positive fact that recognition of it stemmed from the resurrection.

And yet the idea of the messianic secret does not completely resolve all tension, for in certain narratives there are signs of a doctrine of open Messiahship. The clearest examples are the entry into Jerusalem and the confession before the high priest, which "impute the recognition of the messiahship to ordinary men and accordingly simply exclude the secret".<sup>62</sup> The confession of Peter is problematic, too, because it contradicts the disciples' lack of comprehension elsewhere. Following Volkmar, Wrede suggests the possibility that the confession belonged originally to a post-resurrection appearance story.<sup>63</sup> But the very fact that Wrede admits the presence of contradictions inevitably raises the question whether perhaps there is some other understanding of the secrecy theme which is able to take account of all the data in the gospel. This is a matter which will occur again in our discussion.

The effect of Wrede's work, as we have seen, was to place the gospel of Mark in the history of dogma; but Wrede's own theological

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60 Ibid.

61 Wrede explicitly says that he quickly abandoned the supposition, which was his first thought, that there had been an apologetic tendency at work. Ibid., 225-226.

62 Ibid., 239. Wrede also includes 10 : 47 in this category.

63 Ibid. The suggestion would later be taken for granted by Bultmann in 'Die Frage nach dem messianischen Bewusstsein Jesu und das Petrus-Bekenntnis', ZNW 19 (1919-1920), 173.



position was liberal, and he is supposed to have suffered from the discrepancy between his results and the piety of liberal Christianity. His preface reveals that he was certainly aware that he would cause distress to others:

I have frequently been pained by the thought that my investigation raises questions about so many things on which good, pious people have placed all their trust. I have remembered old friends, kind listeners, children of God both known and unknown to me, who might see my work. However, I have been unable to alter anything here.<sup>64</sup>

Robert Morgan has well said: "Part of Wrede's greatness is that he (unlike most liberals) did not let his theological or apologetic disinterest in doctrine and preference for religion prevent him from recognizing that the New Testament writers were less modern".<sup>65</sup>

Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien was published on the same day as Schweitzer's Das Messianitäts- und Leidensgeheimnis. Eine Skizze des Lebens Jesu.<sup>66</sup> Like Wrede, Schweitzer launched an attack upon the Life of Jesus movement, but, unlike Wrede, he did not abandon the belief that the gospel material furnished direct witness to the historical Jesus and could be connected as an account of his life. What Schweitzer did was to give the place of first importance to eschatology, the very feature which the liberals dismissed as merely a temporary accommodation to Jesus' time. Johannes Weiss had already drawn attention to the eschatological element in the gospels with the appearance in 1892 of Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes. But Weiss concentrated upon the teaching of Jesus; Schweitzer's distinctive

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<sup>64</sup> The Messianic Secret, 1 - 2

<sup>65</sup> R. Morgan, The Nature of New Testament Theology, 17.

<sup>66</sup> Translated as The Mystery of the Kingdom of God and sub-titled The Secret of Jesus' Messiahship and Passion.

contribution was to make use of eschatology in an attempt to solve the historical problems of his life as well.

Schweitzer agrees with Wrede that the Jesus whom we encounter in the gospels cannot be understood in terms of ordinary human psychology, for his whole life is dictated by a dogmatic, eschatological compulsion. But for Wrede, what is dogmatic is unhistorical; for Schweitzer it is historical. According to Schweitzer the burden of the message of Jesus is the imminent advent of the Kingdom of God. This supernatural event will come like a bolt from the blue, taking men completely by surprise. When the twelve disciples are sent out (Mark 6 : 7, Matt. 10 : 5), Jesus expects the Kingdom to have come before they return: "I tell you this : before you have gone through all the towns of Israel, the Son of Man will have come" (Matt. 10 : 23). "The repentance which is to be accomplished by their preaching, and the overcoming of the power of ungodliness in the demoniacs, work together for the hastening of the Kingdom."<sup>67</sup> Jesus himself will then be revealed as the Son of Man, the Messiah in his Kingdom; meanwhile he keeps this a secret. But his expectation is disappointed: the Kingdom does not come. From then on the life of Jesus becomes, in the phrase which Tyrrell would use later, "a quest of ... death".<sup>68</sup> He will himself precipitate the great event; his own sufferings will constitute the birth-pangs of the new age:

... he as the coming Son of Man must accomplish the atonement in his own person. He who one day shall reign over the believers as Messiah now humbles himself under them and serves them by giving his life a ransom for many, in order that the Kingdom may dawn upon them ... In order to carry this out, he journeys up to Jerusalem, that there he may be

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67 Schweitzer, The Mystery of the Kingdom of God, 144.

68 Tyrrell, Christianity at the Cross-Roads, 56.



put to death by the secular authority, just as Elijah who went before him suffered at the hand of Herod. That is the secret of the Passion.<sup>69</sup>

The title "Son of Man" is employed by Jesus in the third person and with a future reference to denote a dignity and a power which are not yet his. For the time being he is the Messiah designate. He cannot disclose his Messiahship precisely because he is not yet the Messiah. Jesus hints at the truth about himself when he identifies John the Baptist with Elijah (for if John is the fore-runner, Jesus must be the Messiah), but he knows that he is uttering "an incomprehensible secret which to his hearers remains ... obscure".<sup>70</sup> Another hint is given when in the temple Jesus asks the question about the Davidic sonship of the Messiah. But on three occasions the secret of the Messiahship is divulged. The first is when Jesus is transfigured in front of Peter, James and John. The second is Peter's confession, for Schweitzer places this after the transfiguration: at Caesarea Philippi Peter answers Jesus' question out of the knowledge which he has gained on the mountain. The third is when the secret is betrayed to the high priest by Judas. "This last revelation of the secret was fatal, for it brought about the death of Jesus. He was condemned as Messiah although he had never appeared in that role."<sup>71</sup>

Whatever the weaknesses of his "sketch of the life of Jesus", Schweitzer performed the vital service of setting Jesus foursquare in the world of the first century. In another of his striking metaphors he wrote of the liberal endeavour:

It set out in quest of the historical Jesus,

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<sup>69</sup> Schweitzer, op.cit., 235.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 218.

believing that when it had found Him it could bring Him straight into our time as a Teacher and Saviour. It loosed the bands by which He had been riveted for centuries to the stony rocks of ecclesiastical doctrine, and rejoiced to see life and movement coming into the figure once more, and the historical Jesus advancing, as it seemed, to meet it. But He does not stay; He passes by our time and returns to His own.<sup>72</sup>

It certainly cannot be said of Schweitzer (as equally it cannot of Wrede) that the Jesus whom he portrayed was the product of the prejudices of contemporary liberal orthodoxy. And yet to Wrede it would surely have seemed that Schweitzer's explanation of the relationship between the self-consciousness of Jesus and the coming Son of Man was just as vulnerable as the reconstructions of the liberals to the charges of reading between the lines and psychological conjecture. For, to take only one example, what is it but reading between the lines to claim that the high priest was in possession of the messianic secret because Judas had betrayed it?

Schweitzer joined issue with Wrede five years later in The Quest of the Historical Jesus. The German title of this magisterial survey was Von Reimarus zu Wrede, Schweitzer's intention clearly being to consign Wrede to the past. In the penultimate chapter he faced his readers with a straightforward choice: either Wrede's thoroughgoing scepticism or his own thoroughgoing eschatology. Schweitzer was confident that the future belonged to the latter, but it can be seen in retrospect that it was Wrede who was turning synoptic studies in a new direction. Ironically, Schweitzer did not recognize Wrede's challenge as one which affected his own work. There was a fundamental difference of method between them. Wrede's methodological insight, in James M. Robinson's words, was that 'Mark is not a transparent  
<sup>72</sup> Schweitzer, The Quest of the Historical Jesus, 397. Italics mine.



medium through which the historical Jesus can be easily seen. Rather Mark is a prism which must be analysed in and of itself, before conclusions can be drawn as to the historicity of what is recounted."<sup>73</sup> Unlike Schweitzer, Wrede pointed a way out of the impasse into which research had strayed.

Wrede's methodology has been vindicated, though more than one commentator has observed that it should occasion no surprise that the results which he arrived at have proved more debatable.<sup>74</sup> In particular, subsequent investigation has questioned his explanation of the messianic secret as a transitional conception between a non-messianic and a messianic view of Jesus' life. In fact, there never was a time when the tradition was essentially non-messianic. Wrede's concern with elucidating the origin of the secret prevented him from being able to perceive its theological function in Mark. It is therefore an exaggeration to call him "the classical example of redactional criticism of the gospels".<sup>75</sup> He was certainly a precursor of the redaction critics, but he did not regard Mark as a creative theologian in his own right.

Wrede noted in his preface that for some time his attention had been occupied by "whether Jesus saw himself as Messiah and so represented himself".<sup>76</sup> He professed not to consider the matter settled by his own discussion, but he did go so far as to say that, if the idea of the messianic secret could only have arisen at a time when nothing was known of an open messianic claim on the part of Jesus,

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73 J.M. Robinson, The Problem of History in Mark, 9.

74 See, for example, J.C.G. Greig's translator's introduction (The Messianic Secret, ix) and D.R. Catchpole's review of the translation in EQ 46 (1974), 56.

75 R. Morgan, "'Negative" Criticism of the Gospels?', Religious Studies 6 (1970), 77.

76 Wrede, The Messianic Secret, 1.

"then we would seem to have in it a positive historical testimony for the idea that Jesus actually did not give himself out as messiah".<sup>77</sup>

This issue was the sensitive area in gospel research at the turn of the century, and what made The Messianic Secret so controversial was its implicit denial that Jesus made any messianic claim.<sup>78</sup>

### Reactions on the Continent

The results of Wrede and Schweitzer were radically different, but they had one thing in common: they constituted a combined assault upon the position of the liberal theologians. Walter Lowrie, a disciple of Schweitzer, later complained that The Mystery of the Kingdom of God was met in Germany "by something like a conspiracy of silence";<sup>79</sup> but Wrede's arguments did elicit a reply.

W.G. Kümmel has called the reaction of Wilhelm Bousset "the most characteristic".<sup>80</sup> In an early review Bousset conceded that Wrede was forcing Life of Jesus research to "a clearer awareness of the limits and the possibility of its knowledge".<sup>81</sup> It seemed that the works of scholars like Weizsäcker, B. Weiss and H.J. Holtzmann had solved all the problems, but Wrede posed a set of "unanswered

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77 Ibid., 230.

78 It is probably significant that one of the formative influences upon Wrede was Julius Wellhausen, whose colleague he was for a time in Göttingen and who in his Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte (1894) located the rise of faith in Jesus' Messiahship in the primitive Church, arguing that the life of Jesus was neither eschatological nor messianic.

79 The charge was made in his introduction to Schweitzer, The Mystery of the Kingdom of God, 19.

80 W.G. Kümmel, The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of its Problems, 288.

81 "... eine klarere Selbsterkenntnis über die Grenzen und die Möglichkeit ihres Wissens." W. Bousset, 'Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien', ThR 5 (1902), 362.



questions".<sup>82</sup> At first, therefore, Bousset defended the historicity of Jesus' messianic claim "with the utmost reserve",<sup>83</sup> but shortly afterwards his Jesus adopted the usual liberal view. Here Bousset insists that Jesus "must have regarded himself in some form or other as the Messiah, and must have imparted that conviction to his disciples":<sup>84</sup>

We have certain knowledge that the belief existed from the very beginning among the Christian community that Jesus was Messiah, and, arguing backwards, we can assert that the rise of such a belief would be absolutely inexplicable if Jesus had not declared to his disciples in his lifetime that he was Messiah. It is quite conceivable that the first disciples of Jesus, who by his death and burial had seen all their hopes shattered and their belief in his Messiahship destroyed, might have returned to that belief under the influence of their resurrection experiences, if they had formerly possessed it on the ground of the utterances and general conduct of Jesus. But it would be wholly incomprehensible that that belief should have originated in their hearts after the catastrophe, for in that case we must assume that those marvellous experiences of the Easter days produced something completely new in the disciples' souls by a process of sheer magic, and without any psychological preparation.<sup>85</sup>

But the Messiahship was a burden to Jesus: it was "the only possible form in which [he] could clothe his inner consciousness, and yet an inadequate form; it was a necessity, but also a heavy burden which he bore in silence almost to the end of his life".<sup>86</sup> He could not

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82 "... ungelösten Fragen." Ibid., 307.

83 "... mit allem Vorbehalt." Ibid., 350.

84 Bousset, Jesus, 169.

85 Ibid., 168-169. Similar arguments were advanced in A. Jülicher, Neue Linien in der Kritik der evangelischen Überlieferung (1906).

86 Ibid., 180.

openly appropriate the title because of its nationalistic overtones. An open claim would have caused an explosion of the simmering hopes of the people and would have provoked Jesus' enemies. "And when once the fanatic spirit of the mob was roused on one side or the other, who could have arrested its mad career?"<sup>87</sup> There is no discussion of Wrede; Bousset simply asserts that "I do not consider his position tenable",<sup>88</sup> and refers the reader to J. Weiss' Das Älteste Evangelium for "the best refutation of Wrede".<sup>89</sup>

It is true that Weiss remains convinced, like Bousset and Jülicher, that the Church's belief in Jesus' Messiahship must reach back into his life. Weiss accepts that Jesus' assumption of messianic status dates in the earliest tradition from the resurrection, but it need not follow that the life of Jesus was non-messianic. Jesus in fact conceived of his Messiahship as a status he would assume in the future, and Peter's confession meant that Jesus was the one destined to be the Messiah. The injunctions to silence are, therefore, historically understandable.

However, although Weiss does not discount the presence in Mark of authentic knowledge of Jesus' life, at the same time he is in agreement with Wrede that the gospel is basically proclamation and not history. The theological activity of the evangelist is present, for example, in the disciples' lack of understanding, which acts as a foil to the full content of the Gospel, and in the injunctions to silence, which, although they do not have their origin in a dogmatic idea, now meet the apologetic need to explain why the Messiah was rejected by his own people. Here we encounter the "apologetic theory" for the first time. Mark's solution to the problem of the unbelief

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 172 (note 3).

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 173 (note 3 from page 172).



of the Jews is that they failed to recognize the Messiah precisely because Jesus intentionally kept his identity secret. A key passage for Weiss is 4:10ff., "which Jülicher rightly took away from Jesus and attributed to the evangelist".<sup>90</sup> The repeated commands to keep the Messiahship and the miracles secret are used in the service of the quotation from Isaiah. The deliberate self-concealment of Jesus is the Markan equivalent of the Pauline doctrine of hardening in Romans 9-11.

When Bousset returned to the discussion in Kyrios Christos (1913), he too had become persuaded by the apologetic theory. Here he refers to Wrede's "splendid proof"<sup>91</sup> of the theory of the messianic secret. The confession of Peter is allowed "to stand as historical",<sup>92</sup> but the demons' recognition of Jesus' identity, the commands to silence after miracles ("the narrator here has lost all sense of the possible and the actual and is only following a schematic tendency"<sup>93</sup>), the theory of parables and the disciples' lack of understanding are all dogmatic ideas. Bousset is now in almost complete agreement with Wrede's presentation of the evidence, but his interpretation of it is the one which Wrede rejected: "Jesus intends to harden the Jewish people, therefore he conceals his messianic glory in word and work. Judaism's failure to believe was no failure of Jesus ... but his own free will".<sup>94</sup>

Bousset, Jülicher and Weiss were aware that Wrede had introduced a measure of uncertainty into the study of Christian origins. Schweitzer

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90 "... die Jülicher mit Recht Jesu abgenommen und dem Evangelisten zugeschrieben hat." J. Weiss, Das Älteste Evangelium, 52.

91 Bousset, Kyrios Christos, 107 (note 97). Kyrios Christos was not translated until 1970, to the great detriment of English-speaking scholarship.

92 Ibid., 108.

93 Ibid., 107.

94 Ibid., 108.

named Wrede the exponent of "thoroughgoing scepticism", but perhaps the term should be reserved for the protagonists of the "Christ-myth" theory, of whom the best-remembered are Albert Kalthoff and Arthur Drews. These took Wrede's relative scepticism to its extreme conclusion and claimed that the real task of scholarship now was to show how the figure of Jesus came to be invented. The issue was not, of course, new. But, for reasons directly connected with the work of Wrede, a fresh plausibility had been given to the suggestion that Jesus never lived. As Drews himself said, the Christ-myth writers were encouraged in their enterprise "by the essentially negative results of the so-called critical theology".<sup>95</sup> But both Kalthoff and Drews came to their work on the gospels with certain definite presuppositions. Kalthoff's were sociological. Under the influence of Marxist ideas he traced the beginnings of Christianity to proletarian movements in Rome. Christianity was not the creation of an individual but the product of a community, thrown up from a ferment of revolutionary communism and Jewish messianism. The figure of Christ was a later personification of the community's tribulations and aspirations. Drews, on the other hand, was a monist for whom reality consisted of a single all-inclusive process within which God was immanent, and to attach any special significance to one man, Jesus, was to obscure the truth that God was present in all men. He therefore set out to disprove the historical existence of Jesus, "because such a denial seemed essential to his religious philosophy and to his reading of the religious need of the age".<sup>96</sup>

But the Christ-myth theory was an aberration which could never win wide acceptance; and, despite the fact that "Hat Jesus gelebt?" was a question debated throughout Germany in 1910, it was liberal Protestantism which still dominated the German universities at the time

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95 A. Drews, The Christ Myth, 7.

96 H.G. Wood, Did Christ Really Live?, 23.



of the outbreak of the 1914-1918 war.

### Reactions in Britain

Wrede was quickly given a generous reception in Scotland, where James Moffatt paid warm tribute to "the qualities of acuteness and independence which are conspicuous in this daring, fresh, and carefully written monograph".<sup>97</sup> Moffatt clearly makes a real attempt to understand. He concedes, for example, that the story embodied in Mark "may have been, and probably has been, tinged with later conceptions".<sup>98</sup> But this element is seriously exaggerated by Wrede:

... any sweeping depreciation of Mark's historicity carries little or no conviction with it, and one must admit that it sounds almost like a fantastic paradox to describe such a narrative as thoroughly dogmatic, destitute of serious historical importance, and so symbolic that recurring phrases like τὸ ὄρος and εἰς οἰκίαν are practically symbols for states of manifestation and retirement.<sup>99</sup>

Moffatt charges Wrede with applying too logical a test to naïve narratives and with displaying throughout a repugnance to the "supernatural" (which, however, Wrede nowhere defined). Nevertheless, The Messianic Secret was a "radical and subtle contribution to New Testament interpretation",<sup>100</sup> even if its importance lay in the questions which it raised rather than in the conclusions which it sought to establish: it would now be impossible for any serious critic to discuss the messianic consciousness of Jesus without coming to terms with Wrede's argument.

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97 J. Moffatt, 'The Messianic Secret in the Gospels', ET 13 (1901-1902), 120.

98 Ibid., 121.

99 Ibid., 121-122.

100 Ibid., 121.

There was a less sympathetic response in England. William Sanday, who at the time was perhaps the leading English New Testament scholar and who kept in close touch with developments in Germany, reacted in a tone of pained surprise: "That any ancient should seek to cover the non-existence of certain presumed facts by asserting that they did exist, but that the persons affected were compelled to keep silence about them, is a hypothesis altogether too far-fetched to be credible".<sup>101</sup> Sanday has been blamed for the fact that Wrede remained for so long untranslated,<sup>102</sup> but here he is guilty of actually misrepresenting him. For although Wrede certainly believed that the messianic secret was a theological conception of the community, he did not say that it was a means of falsifying history. On the contrary, the secret safeguarded the historical truth that the Messiahship of Jesus began with the resurrection. But Sanday repeated the distortion in an influential book, The Life of Christ in Recent Research (1907). The first Christians were forgers. Faced with an embarrassing dearth of evidence that Jesus had claimed to be the Messiah, they invented the idea that he had in fact revealed his identity to his disciples but had ordered them to keep it to themselves. The theory of the messianic secret was the way in which the early Church "glossed over the flaw in its own title-deeds".<sup>103</sup> In fact, argued Sanday, Christians of the first century would surely have "sinned boldly" by simply filling up the blank with the facts required; "at least they would certainly not prefer methods so indirect and circuitous as Wrede imagines".<sup>104</sup>

Against Wrede, Sanday contends that too great a weight is thrown upon the resurrection, which has nothing to lead up to it.<sup>105</sup> His

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<sup>101</sup> W. Sanday, 'The Injunctions of Silence in the Gospels', JTS 5 (1904), 324.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. above, 8.

<sup>103</sup> W. Sanday, The Life of Christ in Recent Research, 74.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>105</sup> Sanday invokes Bousset here. Ibid., 75-76.



own explanation of the injunctions to silence is to link this feature of the ministry with Jesus' sense of fulfilling the prophecy concerning the Servant in Isaiah 42:2: "He will not call out or lift his voice high, or make himself heard in the open street".

There was to be no flash of swords, no raising of armies, no sudden and furious onset with the Messiah Himself in the van ... The Messiah saw opening out before Him a valley, but it was the valley of the shadow of death, and death itself stood at the end. He was preparing to descend into this valley, not like a warrior, with garments rolled in blood, but like a lamb led to the slaughter, with a supreme effort of resignation, as one who when he was reviled reviled not again.<sup>106</sup>

The injunctions, Sanday notes, are always strongly worded: ἐπετίμησεν (Mark 1:25), πολλά ἐπετίμα αὐτοῖς (3:12), διεστείλατο αὐτοῖς πολλά (5:43). This is the language of deep emotion. Now there was one occasion when Jesus used stronger language still - at Caesarea Philippi. When Peter remonstrated with him, after he had just made the first prediction of his passion and death, Jesus retorted: "Away with you, Satan; you think as men think, not as God thinks". In all these places the strong language has the same cause: the reaction of Jesus against the temptation not to be the servant Messiah and not to be "obedient unto death".

What now seems chiefly significant about Sanday's treatment of Wrede is the sheer force of his opposition. The Messianic Secret was "not only very wrong but also distinctly wrong-headed".<sup>107</sup>

Sanday could not imagine anything "more utterly artificial and impossible"<sup>108</sup> than this "strange hypothesis".<sup>109</sup> Since in the

<sup>106</sup> Sanday, 'The Injunctions of Silence in the Gospels', JTS 5 (1904), 325

<sup>107</sup> Sanday, The Life of Christ in Recent Research, 70.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 75.

absence of a translation many scholars relied upon him for their knowledge of Wrede's argument, it is no exaggeration to say that Sanday was to a great extent responsible for the subsequent neglect of Wrede in Britain.

It was Schweitzer who attracted attention here, and it was Sanday who first made the tenets of thoroughgoing eschatology widely known. A High Churchman himself, Sanday was predisposed to be on the side of anyone who entered the lists against the liberals and emphasized the theological, institutional and sacramental aspects of primitive Christianity over against the purely moral. Hence his early<sup>110</sup> enthusiasm in The Life of Christ in Recent Research for Schweitzer, whose merits were that he kept much closer to the texts than most critics (he claimed indeed that his investigations vindicated the essential historicity of the tradition), he did not seek to reduce the person of Christ, and thus he was able to make a natural link between the eschatology and christology of the synoptic gospels and those of Paul and John. For the next few years thoroughgoing eschatology dominated the discussion in Britain. Father George Tyrrell's Christianity at the Cross-Roads (1909) was particularly influential, though curiously it did not mention Schweitzer by name. But Tyrrell's views were clearly derived directly from Schweitzer:

... the whole attempt to write the Gospel story in the light of natural psychological laws, working in given social conditions, is doomed to failure. For the supernatural beliefs and intuitions of Jesus played the chief part in that story and interfered with the concatenation of natural causes. His Messianic consciousness was the main determinant of His action and utterance ... His Christhood was the secret, the mystery of His life. He revealed it reluctantly and cautiously to His disciples; He confessed it at His trial in order

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<sup>110</sup> Later Sanday had second thoughts. See 'The Apocalyptic Element in the Gospels', Hibbert Journal 10 (1911), 83-109.



to induce His death; but otherwise and even from the Baptist He hid it away.<sup>111</sup>

Tyrrell even followed Schweitzer in affirming that it was the messianic secret - Jesus' claim to be the Son of Man who would come on the clouds - which was betrayed by Judas. Tyrrell then went on to demonstrate the compatibility of "the Christ of eschatology" with "the Christ of Catholicism", for the doctrine of the two natures was foreshadowed in Jesus's own awareness of being at once the earthly Son of David and the heavenly Son of Man, "mysteriously united in one personality".<sup>112</sup>

Another of Schweitzer's British supporters was F.C. Burkitt, who contributed a preface to the first English edition in 1910 of The Quest of the Historical Jesus. In The Gospel History and its Transmission (1906) he had already declared his belief that in Mark "we are ... appreciably nearer to the actual scenes of our Lord's life"<sup>113</sup> than in Matthew or Luke. It was inevitable that Burkitt would be less sympathetic to Wrede than to Schweitzer. In his preface to The Quest ... he admitted that he found thoroughgoing eschatology congenial because it seemed to buttress certain aspects of Christian orthodoxy, although "our first duty, with the Gospel as with every other ancient document, is to interpret it with reference to its own time. The true view of the Gospel will be that which explains the course of events in the first century and the second century, rather than that which seems to have spiritual and imaginative value for the twentieth century".<sup>114</sup> Burkitt did not actually say that Schweitzer's was "the true view", limiting himself to the remark that it was "valuable and suggestive ... in its main outlines",<sup>115</sup> but there cannot be much

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111 Tyrrell, Christianity at the Cross-Roads, 50.

112 Ibid., 69.

113 F.C. Burkitt, The Gospel History and its Transmission, 102.

114 The Quest of the Historical Jesus, xix.

115 Ibid., xviii.

doubt but that he was already persuaded by Schweitzer's attempt to give the fullest historical value to the sayings about the Son of Man found on the lips of Jesus in the gospels.<sup>116</sup> The Messianic Secret, on the other hand, constituted "the most radical attack upon the historicity of the gospel tradition that has ever been made".<sup>117</sup> The Christ-myth writers were Wrede's inevitable successors.

But although Schweitzer dictated the terms of the discussion, he did not win universal acceptance. C.W. Emmet, for example, suggested in The Eschatological Question in the Gospels (1911) that thoroughgoing eschatology might well prove to be merely the latest theological mode. He shrewdly remarks:

After all, it may turn out that the charge of modernising, and of false modernising, will lie at the door of those who ascribe to [Jesus] their own absorbing interest in the recently studied apocalyptic literature, rather than of those who hold that He came to reveal the Fatherhood of God, and the joy of communion with Him ... Is it not possible that a future generation will reproach the eschatologist himself with creating a Christ after his own likeness?<sup>118</sup>

Emmet's express purpose in writing, indeed, is to "remove the widespread impression that the position of Loisy and Schweitzer is somehow more compatible with a full and Catholic Christianity than is that of the 'Liberal Protestants'".<sup>119</sup> Wrede is noticed only in passing, his solution to the problems of Mark's gospel being dismissed as "a

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116 For Burkitt's later views see below, 103.

117 Burkitt, 'The Historical Character of the Gospel of Mark', AJT 15 (1911), 175-176. This article incidentally contained several approving references to Schweitzer.

118 C.W. Emmet, The Eschatological Question in the Gospels, 34.

119 Ibid., viii.



sufficiently desperate one".<sup>120</sup> Emmet's own explanation of the messianic secret is "the ordinary view":

Jesus did wish to declare Himself as Messiah, but not to be regarded as the Messiah of popular expectation. There were ... elements in the current belief which He desired to eliminate, or spiritualise; and He realised that if His claim were widely known, it might be made the excuse for political agitation.<sup>121</sup>

Norman Perrin has observed concerning British scholarship in this period that "to the scepticism of Wrede ... it seemed sufficient to reply with a general statement of confidence, such as : 'That Jesus claimed to be the Messiah admits on critical grounds of no reasonable doubt'".<sup>122</sup> Nobody yet took the scepticism seriously enough to attempt to refute Wrede's arguments in detail.

### Conclusion

Because the liberal theologians desired nothing more than to render Christianity intellectually respectable, they preferred the religious consciousness of Jesus to the dogmas of the Church about him, and they assumed that the discovery of the priority of Mark justified their attempt to reconstruct the character of that consciousness from the text of the second gospel. The messianic secret fitted neatly into a presentation of Jesus which was dominated by the idea of development. During the first stage of his activity the strategy of Jesus was to keep his Messiahship secret. The confession

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 47. Cf. Sanday, Outlines of the Life of Christ, 62-63; H.R. Mackintosh, The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ, 17 - 18.

<sup>122</sup> N.Perrin, The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus, 45. The quotation is from William Manson, Christ's View of the Kingdom of God, 125.

of Peter inaugurated the second stage, during which the disciples were taught that Jesus would suffer and die.. The Messiahship was still kept secret from the Jews, however, and was not publicly divulged until Jesus was arrested. He died as a messianic pretender.

Wrede's immediate importance was that he decisively challenged the validity of the liberals' reading of Mark's gospel. He had already said, in his Über Aufgabe und Methode der sogenannten neutestamentlichen Theologie (1897):

We do not possess ipsissima verba of Jesus. We only know about Jesus from later accounts. In these accounts, which are all directed towards the Christ of faith, the picture of Jesus' personality and his preaching is overlaid and obscured by numerous later conceptions and interpretations, as can be seen somewhat from a comparison of the three synoptic gospels, and more clearly from other considerations. There are often several layers superimposed upon each other. Accordingly, the top coats must so far as possible be set aside.<sup>123</sup>

This was Wrede's point of departure in The Messianic Secret, which applied the principles of his earlier methodological essay to a particular area, namely, "the Gospel tradition of Jesus as the Messiah".<sup>124</sup> The result of the investigation was that Mark's gospel was seen to belong to the history of dogma; the error of the liberals, therefore, was to use this thoroughly dogmatic document as if it bore direct testimony to the historical Jesus. The priority of Mark was in fact no guarantee of its historicity.

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<sup>123</sup> Wrede, 'The Task and Methods of "New Testament Theology"', The Nature of New Testament Theology, edited, translated and with an introduction by Robert Morgan, 104.

<sup>124</sup> Wrede, The Messianic Secret, 1.



Schweitzer, of course, agreed with Wrede's criticisms of the liberals,<sup>125</sup> but he did not consider that those criticisms could be directed against his eschatological solution, which, in his own words, "at one stroke raises the Marcan account as it stands, with all its disconnectedness and inconsistencies, into genuine history".<sup>126</sup> Schweitzer's defence of the essential historicity of the gospel tradition is undoubtedly the chief reason why thoroughgoing eschatology captured the interest and in some cases gained the support of British scholars. A.M. Ramsey has observed that distinguished work was done in this period - by Sanday, Turner and Streeter at Oxford, and by Armitage Robinson, Swete, Stanton and Burkitt at Cambridge.

But what was the work? It was in the main the work of investigating the historical foundations - work ... of which the chief interest was to discover what elements of historical fact emerge from the critical study of the documents. The concentration was there, rather than upon the drawing out of the theology which the documents contain. It was in line with this concentration that a concern about the 'life of Jesus' ..., rather than a concern about the Gospel of God in Jesus, determined the scope and method of the study of the Gospels.<sup>127</sup>

Even if you rejected both Schweitzer and Wrede (as Emmet, for example, did), it was Schweitzer whom you carefully refuted, whereas Wrede could be dismissed in an aside!

But in Germany Schweitzer was virtually ignored and the debate was with Wrede. At first there was no complete agreement with him, but it is now clear that The Messianic Secret was one of several

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125 See, for example, The Quest of the Historical Jesus, 330-331, where Schweitzer uses Wrede's arguments with approval.

126 Ibid., 335.

127 A.M. Ramsey, From Gore to Temple, 130.

forces which were gradually undermining the liberal position with regard to the Jesus of history. Another was Martin Kähler's Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus (1892).<sup>128</sup>

Several years before Wrede, Kähler pointed out that the gospels were primarily testimonies of faith: "we find in them the same 'dogmatic' character as we find, for example, in the messianic sermons in the book of Acts, those proclamations of the messiahship of the crucified Jesus".<sup>129</sup> It was under the guidance of the Spirit that the evangelists remembered the words and deeds of Jesus, and "all the chaff of what is purely and simply historical was sifted by the winnowing fan of this pneumatic hypomnesia (John 14:26)".<sup>130</sup> The "so-called historical Jesus" of the liberals was nothing but the product of a combination of self-exegesis and scriptural eisegesis.

But Kähler's time had not yet come (he was not even mentioned in The Quest of the Historical Jesus), and, as the twentieth century approached, liberal theology was in good health. The effect of Harnack's What is Christianity? was to prolong its life until 1914, the fateful year when, in the words of Karl Barth, "the actual end of the 19th century as the 'good old days' came for theology as for everything else".<sup>131</sup> It was Barth's own Der Römerbrief<sup>132</sup> which ushered in a new theological age.

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128 Like Wrede and Bousset, Kähler had to wait many years for a translator. Carl E. Braaten remarks in the introduction to his translation (The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ, 1-2) that "the three epoch-making theological publications of the twentieth century, namely, Albert Schweitzer's The Quest of the Historical Jesus (1906), Karl Barth's The Epistle to the Romans (1918), and Rudolf Bultmann's New Testament and Mythology (1941), have elaborated motifs which were essential to Martin Kähler's theology... The currents set in motion by Schweitzer's history of the Life-of-Jesus movement, Barth's theology of the Word, and Bultmann's kerygma Christology now give Kähler's theology a ring of contemporaneity". (The translation is from the 1896 edition, which included additional material.)

129 Kähler, op.cit., 83.

130 Ibid., 94.

131 Barth, 'Evangelical Theology in the Nineteenth Century', The Humanity of God, 14.

132 The first edition appeared in 1918, the second in 1921.



## CHAPTER THREE

### THE ECLIPSE OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS (BETWEEN THE WARS)

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#### THE ECLIPSE OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS (BETWEEN THE WARS)

##### The Theology of Crisis and Form Criticism

The central concern of Barth's famous commentary on Romans is the total otherness of God:

The Gospel is not a religious message to inform mankind of their divinity or to tell them how they may become divine. The Gospel proclaims a God utterly distinct from men. Salvation comes to them from Him, because they are, as men, incapable of knowing Him, and because they have no right to claim anything from Him.<sup>1</sup>

Barth's attitude to the historical Jesus is entirely consistent with this fundamental assertion. He dismisses any suggestion that faith depends on the impression made by the person of Jesus. Indeed, he goes so far as to say that the Jesus of history is not even a particularly remarkable man: "He is not a genius ...; He is not a hero or leader of men; He is neither poet nor thinker".<sup>2</sup> The human life of Jesus does not reveal God; it veils him.

In Jesus, God becomes veritably a secret: He is made known as the Unknown, speaking in eternal silence; He protects himself [sic] from every intimate companionship and from all the impertinence of religion. He becomes a scandal to the Jews and to the Greeks foolishness.<sup>3</sup>

History is a kind of dispensable prelude to the unveiling which takes place at Easter. "The Resurrection is the revelation: the disclosing

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1 Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, 28.

2 Ibid., 97. .

3 Ibid., 30. ,



of Jesus as the Christ, the appearing of God, and the apprehending of God in Jesus."<sup>4</sup> Barth thus evinces a combination of theological dogmatism and indifference to history. His lack of concern with the Jesus of history remained constant throughout his long life. In 1958, for example, he expressed his amazement that the theologians of the "new quest" had "armed themselves with swords and staves and once again undertaken the search for the 'historical Jesus' - a search in which I now as before prefer not to participate".<sup>5</sup>

It is too often forgotten that in the 1920s Barth had an ally in Rudolf Bultmann: only later did their paths diverge. In the early Bultmann two men may be discerned: the form critic for whom, the gospels being documents of faith, the quest of the historical Jesus is impossible, and the kerygmatic theologian who believes that the Jesus of history is theologically irrelevant. Some scholars suspect that Bultmann is first a kerygmatic theologian and only then a form critic, whose scepticism knows no bounds because, as a theologian, he is convinced that to fall back on the reconstruction of factual data from the life of Jesus is to seek worldly props for faith. As Heinz Zahrnt puts it:

We must ... ask whether Bultmann's well-known radical criticism does not in fact conceal a theological presupposition and whether it is not precisely this hidden presupposition which leads to the radical nature of his criticism. Anyone who holds that the demonstration of genuine Jesus-material in the gospels is theologically so insignificant, indeed even dangerous, is unlikely to find a great deal of it. What need does he have of it?<sup>6</sup>

But other scholars think that Bultmann's views on the impossibility and the illegitimacy of the quest of the historical Jesus are not in fact

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>5</sup> Barth, How I Changed My Mind, 69.

<sup>6</sup> H. Zahrnt, The Historical Jesus, 87. This is the reverse side of the charge which I shall bring against the work of certain British writers.

interdependent. His reasons for finding the quest impossible are historical and critical, and are based on exegetical work completed before his theological liaison with Barth.<sup>7</sup> Wherever the truth lies, the fact is that Bultmann was able to say, in an essay written in 1927:

I have never yet felt uncomfortable with my critical radicalism; on the contrary, I have been entirely comfortable. But I often have the impression that my conservative New Testament colleagues feel very uncomfortable, for I see them perpetually engaged in salvage operations. I calmly let the fire burn, for I see that what is consumed is only the fanciful portraits of Life-of-Jesus theology, and that means nothing other than "Christ after the flesh" (Χριστὸς κατὰ σάρκα ).

But the "Christ after the flesh" is no concern of ours. How things looked in the heart of Jesus I do not know and do not want to know.<sup>8</sup>

Bultmann agrees with Barth that it is not the Jesus of history but the preached Christ in whom unquestioning faith is demanded. To attempt to legitimate the kerygma by means of historical enquiry would be to impugn the Lutheran principle of "sola fide", by faith alone. All that Bultmann professes to be interested in, from a theological point of view, is the mere fact that Jesus once lived, taught and died. (And yet, of course, even the very existence of Jesus is a question which has to be debated by the historians, for it is possible, as the Christ-myth controversy demonstrates, to doubt whether he did in fact exist.)

Form criticism itself confirmed the discovery of Wrede that the

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7 Even Vincent Taylor takes this view. See 'The Barthian School: Rudolf Bultmann', ET 43 (1931-1932), 490.

8 Bultmann, 'On the Question of Christology', Faith and Understanding, 132. Zahrnt calls this "a triumphal hymn of historical criticism and of faith in one". The Question of God, 249.



gospels are documents of faith, written with the intention of proclaiming the risen Christ. Bultmann, indeed, regards Wrede as the initiator of the process which culminated in form criticism, for it was he who conclusively demonstrated, against the prevailing view, that "Mark is the work of an author who is steeped in the theology of the early Church, and who ordered and arranged the traditional material that he received in the light of the faith of the early Church".<sup>9</sup> Julius Wellhausen carried the process further by clearly stating "the fundamental assumption that the tradition consists of individual stories or groups of stories joined together in the Gospels by the work of the editors; and he also showed how pieces of primitive tradition alternated with secondary material".<sup>10</sup> Then K.L. Schmidt, in Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu (1919), argued not only that the geographical and chronological connecting-links in Mark are redactional but also that the Sitz im Leben of the tradition is the worship of the primitive Church. Finally, first Martin Dibelius in Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums (1919) and then Bultmann himself in Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition (1921) systematized these earlier approaches, classifying the pericopes according to their form and seeking to trace the changes which have taken place in the course of the tradition. Dibelius observes, at the end of From Tradition to Gospel, that the theological outcome of form critical investigation is that "there never was a 'purely' historical witness to Jesus".<sup>11</sup>

Whatever was told of Jesus' words and deeds was always a testimony of faith as formulated for preaching and exhortation in order to convert unbelievers and confirm the faithful. What founded Christianity was not knowledge about a

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9 Bultmann, The History of the Synoptic Tradition, 1.

10 Ibid., 2.

11 Dibelius, From Tradition to Gospel, 295.

historical process, but the confidence that the content of the story was salvation: the decisive beginning of the End.<sup>12</sup>

It is not surprising, therefore, that in their respective treatments of the messianic secret both Dibelius and Bultmann acknowledge a debt to Wrede. Dibelius, however, wishes "substantially to reduce the number of witnesses brought forward by Wrede for this theory".<sup>13</sup> For example, the question of the Messiahship of Jesus is not at issue in the stories of Jairus' daughter, the deaf and dumb man and the blind man.

We are on a different footing in regard to the secret which surrounds the action of Jesus in these three Tales. The miracle worker avoids the public because He is not a magician with a propaganda, but an envoy and revealer of God, who does not allow his [*sic*] action, i.e. God's action, to be seen by profane eyes. As a sort of deus praesens He shows Himself to only a select group.<sup>14</sup>

A distinction has to be made between the secret nature of the miraculous process and the stereotyped prohibitions to publish what has happened. These latter (in 5: 43, 7: 36 and 8: 26) "can be easily freed from the narratives"<sup>15</sup> and do belong to the evangelist's theory of the messianic secret. The idea of a secret "is not in place in an isolated individual story",<sup>16</sup> but it becomes a necessity when an attempt is made to describe the work of Jesus as a whole. The messianic secret is the central thread on which Mark places the beads of the units of tradition. It is noteworthy that, although Dibelius

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 223, n.1.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 94. Dibelius also thinks (73-74) that the command to silence in 1:44 is not a stereotyped prohibition but has the particular purpose of ensuring that the laws of purity pertaining to leprosy are strictly kept.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 94.



refers to the evangelists as "principally collectors, vehicles of tradition, editors" and "only to the smallest extent authors",<sup>17</sup> he nevertheless ascribes the theory of the secret not to the pre-Markan community but to Mark himself.

According to Dibelius, the theory is intended as an answer to the question why the Messiahship of Jesus, despite his fame, was not widely recognized. That is, the messianic secret is an apologetic device in the debate with Judaism.

To the evangelist the life of Jesus as a whole is only comprehensible on the assumption that Jesus intentionally kept His real status secret. He was the Son of God, but He did not reveal to the people who He was. This is the reason why He could be so much misunderstood and even sent to the Cross.<sup>18</sup>

Mark sees a basic contradiction which cries out for a solution:

The more the fullness of revelation was presented in deeds and words, the more puzzling and incomprehensible became the final rejection of this revelation by the people who were blessed by it. Mark solved this contradiction by his theory of the Messianic secret. He put not only the great miracles but the whole activity of Jesus under the standpoint of a secret epiphany.<sup>19</sup>

Bultmann agrees with Dibelius that the messianic secret is to be attributed to the evangelist himself, but he does not accept the apologetic theory. Instead, the secret is "a veiling of the fact that faith in Jesus' Messiahship begins from belief in his resurrection".<sup>20</sup> The life of Jesus was unmessianic. (In an article written shortly before

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 297.

<sup>20</sup> Bultmann, The History of the Synoptic Tradition, 346.

Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition Bultmann goes further than Wrede himself and declares categorically that it is a consequence of Wrede's argument that Jesus did not consider himself to be the Messiah.)<sup>21</sup> But it soon became inconceivable that this should have been so, and inevitably the earthly activity of Jesus was depicted in the light of the Church's messianic faith. For the author of Mark's gospel, says Bultmann, the various aspects of the secrecy theme are "the means of writing a life of Jesus as the Messiah, in so far as he was able to do so on the basis of the tradition available to him and under the influence of the faith of the Church, in which he stood".<sup>22</sup> Mark's purpose is "the union of the Hellenistic kerygma about Christ ... with the tradition of the story of Jesus",<sup>23</sup> and by means of the messianic secret he has succeeded

in setting the tradition in a certain light, in impressing it with a meaning such as it needed in the Hellenistic Churches of Paul's persuasion; in linking it with the Christological Kerygma of Christendom, in anchoring the Christian mysteries of Baptism and Lord's Supper in it and so giving for the first time a presentation of the life of Jesus which could rightly be called εὐαγγέλιον Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Mk.1:1).<sup>24</sup>

Another significant contribution which saw the messianic secret as the consciously editorial work of Mark was E. Bickermann's article, "Das Messiasgeheimnis und die Komposition des Markusevangeliums".

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21 Bultmann, 'Die Frage nach dem messianischen Bewusstsein Jesu und das Petrus-Bekenntnis', ZNW 19 (1919-1920), 167.

22 Bultmann, The History of the Synoptic Tradition, 346.

23 Ibid., 347.

24 Ibid.,



Like Dibelius, Bickermann interprets the theory as the solution to a contradiction - but a different contradiction. On the one hand, Mark was confronted by narratives which showed Jesus to be the revealed Messiah; on the other hand, he knew that Jesus was not recognized as such until Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi - "the late recognition was a given fact".<sup>25</sup> Mark solved the contradiction by means of the idea that before 8:29 Jesus kept his Messiahship secret. According to Bickermann, Mark's messianic secret is analogous to the secret which is a characteristic feature in the lives of the prophets and in other "biographies" of divinely appointed heroes. In these writings the prophet or hero experiences two turning-points in his life - an inner one, when he is called or given the divine revelation, and an outer one, when he makes his public appearance; in the interval between the two he remains "silent, hidden, unknown".<sup>26</sup> In Mark's gospel the first turning-point is the baptism of Jesus, the second is Peter's confession. Prior to 8:29 Mark depicts Jesus as keeping his messianic status secret - for example, by performing privately miracles which, on the basis of Isaiah 35:5 and 42:7, might be understood as messianic; only "easy" miracles are done in public. After 8:29, however, there is open disclosure. But is there? Bickermann notes that injunctions to silence persist (8:30 and 9:9), and he admits that this calls in question his thesis. His answer is to make use of a further literary analogy, this time from 2 Esdras, where two different secrets are juxtaposed, one which is absolute and remains entirely unknown (2 Esd. 13:52), and another which is imparted to a select group in the form of a precise teaching (2 Esd. 12:38). In Mark the former secret is the messianic

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25 "Die späte Erkennung war eine gegebene Tatsache." Bickermann, 'Das Messiasgeheimnis und die Komposition des Markusevangeliums', ZNW 22 (1922-1923), 135. The lateness of Peter's confession in the pre-Markan tradition is, in fact, only an assumption on Bickermann's part.

26 "... schweigend, verborgen, unbekannt." Ibid., 126.

secret proper; the latter, which dominates the second half of the gospel, is the secret of the coming death and resurrection of the Son of Man.

But here Bickermann is clearly extricating himself from a difficulty. In any case, his initial analogy breaks down in that the confession of Peter is manifestly not the point at which Jesus' public appearance begins: he appears publicly from the outset. As Bultmann exclaims: "The corresponding event to the turning-point in such lives of the prophets would much more properly be the resurrection!"<sup>27</sup>

#### The Debate with Bultmann

The ensuing discussion of the messianic secret on the continent became in effect a debate with Rudolf Bultmann himself.

In 1926 Bultmann brought out his Jesus.<sup>28</sup> Here Jesus is presented as a prophet who announces the eschatological gospel of the impending advent of the Kingdom of God. The ministry of Jesus takes place, as it were, between the dawn and the sunrise. "His own activity is for him and for his followers the sign that the Kingdom is imminent",<sup>29</sup> but he is not himself the bringer of the Kingdom, only the bearer of the word of its imminence. The arrival of the Kingdom will be a miraculous, world-transforming event:

There can be no doubt that Jesus like his contemporaries expected a tremendous eschatological drama. Then will the "Son of Man" come, that heavenly Messianic figure, which appeared in the apocalyptic hope of later Judaism, partly obliterating the older Messianic figure of the

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27 Bultmann, The History of the Synoptic Tradition, 347 (note 4 from page 346).

28 Translated as Jesus and the Word (1934).

29 Bultmann, Jesus and the Word (Fontana edition); 30.



Davidic king and partly combining with it. Then will the dead rise, the judgment will take place, and to some the heavenly glory will be revealed while others will be cast into the flames of hell ...<sup>30</sup>

Bultmann is personally of the opinion that Jesus did not believe himself to be the Messiah, but he regards the question as of secondary importance anyhow. What matters is that "in this last hour, the hour of decision, Jesus is sent with the final, decisive word",<sup>31</sup> and men's fate in the judgment depends upon their response. He comes with no credentials but the call to repentance and the offer of God's forgiveness, and "the attestation of the truth of the word lies wholly in what takes place between word and hearer".<sup>32</sup>

Julius Schniewind took up these hints of Bultmann and, using them against him, made a notable attempt to understand the messianic secret as a factor in the life of Jesus. Bultmann's very scepticism concerning the historicity of any messianic claim on the part of Jesus is turned by Schniewind to his own advantage. Bultmann has led us further than he intends: "Jesus' call to repentance is his messianic secret".<sup>33</sup> "Jesus speaks to sinners God's unparalleled, definitive word of forgiveness. But this is his messianic secret."<sup>34</sup> The unprecedented nature of the teaching of the sermon on the mount conceals the same secret. The fact that in Jesus the Lordship of God becomes joyfully present ("Jesus' word, Jesus himself is the presence of the other aeon")<sup>35</sup> implies his secret

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>33</sup> "Jesu Bußruf ist sein Messiasgeheimnis." J. Schniewind, 'Messiasgeheimnis und Eschatologie', Nachgelassene Reden und Aufsätze, 6. This lecture was delivered in 1932.

<sup>34</sup> "Den Sündern aber spricht Jesus die einmalige, endgültige Vergebung Gottes zu. Dies aber ist sein Messiasgeheimnis." Ibid., 8.

<sup>35</sup> "Jesu Wort, Jesus selbst ist die Gegenwart des andern Aeon." Ibid., 6.

Messiahship. Yet the one who brings the offer of salvation is a non-regal Messiah who comes with but the powerless word, and the secret of his Messiahship can only be penetrated by those who radically respond to his message in repentance and obedience. The paradox of the unity of veiled sovereignty and manifest lowliness constitutes the real messianic secret. Jesus' use of the title "Son of Man" preserves the secret. It is deliberately ambiguous, capable at once of being taken to mean simply "man" generically and of being understood as an indirect christological self-reference, for according to Schniewind "the Messiah of ancient prophecy and the Son of Man from Dan. 7 were already in late Jewish tradition merged into one".<sup>36</sup> In Mark 8:38 ("If anyone is ashamed of me and mine in this wicked and godless age, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him, when he comes in the glory of his Father and of the holy angels") Jesus means himself in both parts of this saying, but he veils his secret by making a distinction between himself and the Son of Man. At this point Schniewind calls Jeremias to witness that in Jewish apocalyptic the characteristics of the Suffering Servant of the Lord in Deutero-Isaiah had begun to be applied to the Messiah - Son of Man, so that in the last resort the messianic secret consists in the fact that one whose way leads to the cross is none other than the Son of Man and universal judge. Schniewind concludes that "this secret lies behind all the words of Jesus".<sup>37</sup> For Schniewind, then, the messianic secret is not a dogmatic idea of the community but the motivation and inner meaning of the life and preaching of the historical Jesus.

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36 "Der Messias der alten Prophetie und der Menschensohn von Dan.7, sie sind schon in der spätjüdischen Tradition zur Einheit geworden." Ibid., 1.

37 "Dies Geheimnis liegt hinter allen Jesusworten." Ibid., 12. The same emphasis appears later in Schniewind's commentary on Mark. See, for example, Das Evangelium nach Markus, 40.



Bultmann's reply came in his Theology of the New Testament. He has Schniewind specifically in mind when he writes: "The attempt to understand the Messiah - secret not as a theory of the evangelist but as historical fact ..., falls to pieces against the fact that its literary location is in the editorial sentences of the evangelist, not in the body of the traditional units".<sup>38</sup> Bultmann is ready to agree that "Jesus' call to decision implies a christology",<sup>39</sup> but he denies that this is equivalent to saying that a messianic self-consciousness is involved on Jesus' part. It is rather to say that his Messiahship is perceived by the Church in its response to his message. "Such christology became explicit in the earliest Church to the extent that they understood Jesus as the one whom God by the resurrection has made Messiah, and that they awaited him as the coming Son of Man."<sup>40</sup> Bultmann's position on the Son of Man question is that the authentic sayings are those which refer to a future apocalyptic figure, but what is chiefly significant about them is that Jesus speaks of the Son of Man in the third person and as distinct from himself. The other sayings are secondary. Those few which describe the Son of Man as now at work owe their origin to a misunderstanding (the original Aramaic meant only "man" or "I"), and those which predict the suffering, death and resurrection of the Son of Man are vaticinia ex eventu, in which "the Jewish concept Messiah - Son of Man is re-interpreted - or better, singularly enriched - insofar as the idea of a suffering, dying, rising Messiah or Son of Man was unknown to Judaism".<sup>41</sup> We discern in this last group of sayings the Church's new understanding of Messiahship, which has taken account both of Jesus'

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<sup>38</sup> Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 32. The actual publication date of this work admittedly falls outside the period, but I think that there is no serious distortion in making use of it here.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., I, 43.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., I, 43-44.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., I, 31.

own expectation concerning the Son of Man and of the events of the passion.

Bultmann is surely right to say that the first problem to be faced by the exegete is that of the editorial character of the messianic secret as it meets us in Mark. But this is a problem which Schniewind ignores. The reason is probably to be found in his view of salvation history, which is summed up by James M. Robinson thus:

The worship of the heavenly Lord is not a mystic experience separate from history, but is rather an awareness of living in a "time of salvation", which would not be possible if the heavenly Lord had not brought that "time" into history. The kerygma is the witness to the fact that the "time of salvation" is present because the Messiah has been in history.<sup>42</sup>

Schniewind understands Mark to be recounting eschatological history, but, not content to find the secret of Jesus' Messiahship behind that history, he wishes to locate it in it. But in history there is only the mystery of the Kingdom of God in its relationship to Jesus' preaching, which becomes the mystery of Jesus' Messiahship in the later understanding of the Church. The messianic secret may legitimately be seen as a valid theological interpretation of the historical Jesus, but it is illegitimate to see it as guarding any direct messianic self-consciousness on his part.

Another "conservative" contribution to the discussion which was "in latent argument"<sup>43</sup> with Bultmann was Rudolf Otto's Reichgottes und Menschensohn (1934).<sup>44</sup> Otto renewed the attempt to trace the messianic

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<sup>42</sup> James M. Robinson, The Problem of History in Mark, 13.

<sup>43</sup> W.G. Kümmel, The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of its Problems, 386.

<sup>44</sup> Translated as The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man (1938). It was doubtless translated so soon not only because it stood in the tradition of Schweitzer, but also because it anticipated the "realized eschatology" which C.H. Dodd was advocating in Britain.



secret back to the self-understanding of the historical Jesus. "A historical fact requires a sufficient cause",<sup>45</sup> and the messianic faith of the Church is only explicable on the assumption that Jesus made messianic claims. Otto asserts that Jesus understood his Messiahship in terms of the concept of the Son of Man. Jesus is the one who will become the Son of Man. The Son of Man, like the Kingdom of God, is future and transcendent; but just as the Kingdom is present in advance in the words and works of Jesus, so Jesus himself is proleptically the Son of Man. Otto says: "We might apply the term 'post-existential thinking' to a mode of thinking which places one in (paradoxical, anticipative) relation to a being which has yet to come into existence".<sup>46</sup> Jesus lays claim to be the Son of Man. Thus far this is the view of Schweitzer, but Otto goes beyond Schweitzer in finding in Jewish apocalyptic, and in particular in the Similitudes of Enoch, a pre-Christian foreshadowing of the conception of a hidden and revealed Son of Man. Enoch, in a series of visions, is granted insight into the nature and functions of the Son of Man, who remains hidden with God until the eschaton, when he will be revealed to all as God's agent in judgment and redemption. Meanwhile, Enoch is commanded by God to announce the content of the visions to the elect. But when he is translated to heaven, Enoch is told that he is himself the Son of Man; he is exalted to become the one whom formerly he has proclaimed.<sup>47</sup> In other words, Enoch on earth is the concealed Son of Man. Otto sees here the ultimate source and explanation of the messianic secret in the gospels, for Jesus himself "lived in the

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<sup>45</sup> Otto, The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man, 160.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>47</sup> The Book of Enoch 71:14. But R.H.Charles emends the text to read "This is the Son of Man ...", not "Thou art ...". In a review of Reichgottes und Menschensohn (ET 46 (1934-1935), 282-283) Vincent Taylor agrees that "it is not easy to believe that it was the writer's intention to describe Enoch as the Son of Man".

ideas of Enoch's apocalyptic tradition",<sup>48</sup> and when once he had come to think of himself as the Son of Man, it would inevitably be as a hidden Son of Man, who was not to be fully revealed until the end of the age. Thus Jesus does not openly proclaim himself as the Messiah - Son of Man, but his secret is disclosed by God to the disciples (Matt. 16:15-17). Since the disclosure has taken place from God's side, Jesus is now free to instruct the disciples further in the mystery of his person, and he effects a revolution by teaching that the Messiah - Son of Man is also the Servant of God from Deutero-Isaiah, a synthesis which is clear in Mark 10:45. The prophecies of the passion are original passages in which the tradition is "as hard as diamonds".<sup>49</sup>

Wrede is not considered in any detail, and the reason is not far to seek. It is quite simply that in Otto's view his suggestions are unnecessary. For example, the disciples' lack of understanding of the necessity for the Son of Man to suffer and the remonstrances of Peter are entirely explicable historically. Neither motif would have been invented subsequently. The disciples are thrown into confusion by "a completely revolutionary Messianic doctrine",<sup>50</sup> which to Peter seems even blasphemous. As for the commands to the demons, not to permit them to speak is how a typical charismatic proceeds. "If Wrede had taken the charismatic milieu ... into account, he would hardly have made the assertions that he did."<sup>51</sup>

The reaction of Ernst Lohmeyer to Bultmann's Jésus was to describe it as not so much a contribution to historical science as an apologia

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<sup>48</sup> Otto, op.cit., 213.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 349.



for Bultmann's own religious position: "the boundaries between faith and knowledge are now obliterated, faith is transferred from its own realm into the field of scholarship, and scholarship is subordinated to the dogmatic setting of faith".<sup>52</sup> "In a certain sense it is a book about Jesus without Jesus."<sup>53</sup> Bultmann errs in thinking that he can separate the work of Jesus from the question of his person. In his own commentary on Mark Lohmeyer proceeds to show himself essentially at one with Schniewind and Otto that Jesus believed himself to be the Son of Man. The messianic secret is understood by Lohmeyer as, more precisely, a "Son of Man secret". Jesus the Son of Man is a mystery, a person at once human and divine. He is "a Jew among Jews, a child of his land",<sup>54</sup> yet at the same time "he who bears the name Son of Man is ... a transcendent figure, a stranger in this aeon but Lord of the coming one".<sup>55</sup> The very name itself has a parabolic significance, for its association with the concept "man" is a veiling of the heavenly sovereignty to which in fact it alludes. According to Lohmeyer, a Son of Man christology may be present even where the title is absent. The criterion is the presence in any pericope of a paradoxical duality. For example, in the narrative of his baptism Jesus is declared to be God's Son, yet he submits himself to "a baptism in token of repentance" (Mark 1:4). The miracle stories evince the same duality. Thus, he who stills the storm nevertheless sleeps. Certain sayings of Jesus are interpreted by Lohmeyer in a similar way. The lament of Jesus in 9:19

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52 "... die Grenzen zwischen Glauben und Erkennen sind nun verwischt, der Glaube aus dem ihm eigenen Reich in die Bezirke der Wissenschaft hineingezogen, die Wissenschaft der dogmatischen Setzung des Glaubens unterworfen." Lohmeyer's review of Bultmann's Jesus in Th L Z 52 (1927), 439.

53 "Es ist in gewissem Sinne ein Buch von Jesus ohne Jesus." Ibid., 433.

54 "... ein Jude unter Juden, Kind seines Landes." Lohmeyer, Das Evangelium des Markus (1937), 6.

55 "Wer den Namen Menschensohn trägt, ist ... eine transzendente Gestalt, eine Fremdling in diesem und Herr des kommenden Königs." Ibid.

("What an unbelieving and perverse generation! How long shall I be with you? How long must I endure you?") is that of a higher being who for a time has left the heavenly realm which is his native home; and the wordless sigh of Jesus in 7:34 comes from a divine being "who is confined within human limitations and yet is a stranger to all things human".<sup>56</sup>

Jesus, then, simultaneously veils and reveals his true divine nature as the eschatological judge in the words and deeds of a wandering rabbi. He deliberately poses the Son of Man question, but he does not directly proclaim his own identity; though it is his intention that men should acknowledge him as the one who is to be revealed as the Son of Man, he wants them to discover the mystery for themselves. To the disciples he openly declares the necessity of his suffering, which he understands against the background of the Servant passages of Deutero-Isaiah. The disciples, however, cannot comprehend, for they share the prevailing messianic expectation. But Jesus himself does not wish to be held to be the Messiah.

There is clearly a large measure of agreement here with Schniewind and Otto. But Lohmeyer goes on to distinguish between the authentic mystery of the Son of Man and Mark's own redaction. Mark has been responsible for imposing upon the tradition a dogmatic theory of the deliberate self-concealment of Jesus. For example, the commands to silence are a feature which was already firmly rooted in the tradition but "which Mark himself has frequently and characteristically stressed".<sup>57</sup> Similarly, in the pre-Markan tradition the parables were not understood as a means of hardening men's hearts.

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<sup>56</sup> "... das in menschlichen Grenzen eingeschlossen, dennoch allem Menschlichen fremd ist." Ibid., 150.

<sup>57</sup> "... den Mk selbst häufig und eigentümlich betont hat." Ibid., 48. Lohmeyer cites 1:34, 7:36 and 9:9 as examples of Mark's own emphasizing work.



The chief difficulty of Lohmeyer's presentation is that the paradoxical duality which he discovers everywhere in the tradition is in fact the inevitable result of depicting the earthly life of one who was believed in as the risen and exalted Lord, and it would seem that Lohmeyer has read that duality into the Son of Man title in the gospels. He is unable in the end to show convincingly that Jesus thought of himself as the hidden Son of Man. Erik Sjöberg has said of Lohmeyer's interpretation of the messianic secret that "it proceeds from the tension between the salvation to be realized at the end of the age and the salvation now appearing in the person of Jesus. When eschatology becomes a reality in history, it has to be a hidden reality. This thought is associated ... with a philosophically - oriented notion of the contrast between time and eternity, God and man, and does not clearly emerge from the form historically given through Jewish apocalyptic."<sup>58</sup> In a broader context G. Lundström makes a similar criticism : Lohmeyer's "philosophical outlook so completely dominates his thought that it is often quite impossible to say where the purely exegetic interpretation ends and the philosophy begins".<sup>59</sup>

Another who touched on the Son of Man question was Dibelius, who made a further contribution to the discussion in his Jesus (1939). Here he sees the idea of the concealment of the Son of Man as providing the first Christians with "the key that unlocked for them the earthly

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58 "Er geht von der Spannung zwischen dem in der Endzeit zu verwirklichenden Heil und dem schon jetzt in Jesu Person erscheinenden Heil aus. Wenn die Eschatologie in der Geschichte Wirklichkeit wird, muss sie verborgene Wirklichkeit sein. Dieser Gedanke verbindet sich ... mit einer philosophisch orientierten Anschauung vom Gegensatz zwischen Zeit und Ewigkeit, Gott und Menschen und tritt darum nicht in der durch die jüdische Apokalyptik geschichtlich gegebenen Form klar hervor." E.Sjöberg, Der Verborgene Menschensohn in den Evangelien, 123 (note 2 from page 122).

59 G. Lundström, The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus, 156.

life of Jesus".<sup>60</sup> But he also thinks that the saying in Matt. 8:20 ("Foxes have their holes, the birds their roosts; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head") is evidence that Jesus himself was able "to speak in such a way as to suggest the contrast between the obscurity of his indigent earthly existence and the glory of the 'Man' from heaven - the contrast and at the same time the connection - for the needy life belongs to the concealment of the Son of Man and points to the future".<sup>61</sup> Despite these observations, however, Dibelius' understanding of the messianic secret remains basically unchanged, for the apologetic theory is still said to be "manifestly the leading thought in Mark".<sup>62</sup> Indeed, the attraction of the Son of Man doctrine for the communities was precisely that it helped them "to overcome the difficult riddle of the cross".<sup>63</sup> Jesus' earthly life and his ignominious end belonged to the period of concealment; but soon he would "come again in glory as the manifest Son of Man, and enter definitively into his Messiahship".<sup>64</sup>

H.J. Ebeling was yet another scholar who, in Das Messiasgeheimnis und die Botschaft des Marcus-Evangelisten (1939), alluded to the Jewish apocalyptic tradition, but he did not pursue the question of the possible connection between the Son of Man title and the Markan secrecy theme and placed his emphasis elsewhere. His interpretation of the messianic secret is in fact the first that can be called thoroughly kerygmatic, and it is best understood as the logical end of the theological path opened up by Barth and Bultmann. Here the historical Jesus is eclipsed. To Ebeling we now turn.

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<sup>60</sup> Dibelius, Jesus, 89.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.



H.J. Ebeling

The message of Mark's gospel, according to Ebeling, is the revelation in Christ. It is not Mark's wish to describe a concealed Messiahship. On the contrary, he seeks to strengthen the post-Easter kerygma with an account of how Jesus was publicly revealed as Messiah during his ministry. The prevailing theme is "Christus revelatus", not "Christus absconditus", and the various aspects of the secrecy theme are no more than a literary foil to throw into bolder relief the epiphanies of the messianic Son of God and to heighten the kerygma's impact upon men in the present. "The messianic secret is strictly to be understood from the message of revelation."<sup>65</sup>

Ebeling deals first with the commands to the demons and the injunctions to silence after miracles. He argues that these are a literary device. The commands to silence are pointless, either because they are immediately disobeyed (1:45, 7:36) or because there is quite simply no possibility that the secret can be kept (5:43, 8:26). Besides, on other occasions Jesus performs miracles publicly (2:1-12, 3:1-5, 6:31-42), apparently unconcerned about the keeping of any secret. Ebeling finds no difficulty in this seeming contradiction. For him the entire gospel is an epiphany of the Son of God, and in the secrecy passages the real intention of the evangelist is seen not in the fact of the secret itself but precisely in its being divulged. The secret only exists in order to be revealed. The divulging of the secret and the spread of Jesus' fame give expression to the transcendent power of the Messiah; the glory which is natural to the messianic Son of God cannot be prevented from manifesting itself to the world. The messianic secret is a foil to highlight this manifestation, a motif by means of which Mark proclaims "the epiphany of the Son of God,

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65 "Das Messiasgeheimnis streng von der Offenbarungsbotschaft her ... zu verstehen ist." Ebeling, Das Messiasgeheimnis und die Botschaft des Marcus-Evangelisten, 112-113.

not his temporary concealment".<sup>66</sup>

In the same way, the disciples' lack of understanding emphasizes the transcendence of the revelation which is made to them, and the injunctions to silence in 8:30 and 9:9 evoke the mystery of the revealer's person. The theory of parables has the effect of heightening the blessing and responsibility of the readers of the gospel.

Ultimately, all three major aspects of the "messianic secret" - the various injunctions to silence, the disciples' lack of understanding, and the theory of parables - are to be interpreted in terms of the relationship between Mark and his readers. The real subject of the gospel is not Jesus but the religious experience and self-understanding of the Markan church. The violation of the commands to silence serves to express "the 'must' of faith as the flowing, free impulse of the heart",<sup>67</sup> and the injunctions in 8:30 and 9:9 underline the fact that the believer has been found worthy to receive the secret. The motif of the disciples' lack of understanding, in particular their inability to grasp that the Messiah must suffer and die, points up the sheer privilege of the believer, who is able to understand what the disciples themselves dared not even ask about (Mark 9:32) - "the most profound mystery of God, the meaning of his loving act, the cross and resurrection of the Lord"<sup>68</sup> - and who is summoned to take up the cross in his own life. And in the theory of parables it is possible to sense "the consciousness of election, the trembling joy over it, as well as the feeling of mysterious obligation to which the elect person is summoned".<sup>69</sup>

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66 "... die Epiphanie des Gottessohnes, nicht seine einstweilige Verhüllung  
Ibid., 145.

67 "... das 'Muss' des Glaubens als der quellende, freie Drang des Herzens.  
Ibid., 223.

68 "... das tiefste göttliche Mysterium, der Sinn seines Liebeshandelns, das Kreuz und die Auferstehung des Herrn." Ibid., 168.

69 "... das Bewusstsein der Erwählung, die zitternde Freude darüber, wie das Gefühl der unheimlichen Verpflichtung, zu der der Erwählte gefordert ist." Ibid., 187.



"The psychologizing of the narrator", with which Wrede replaced the nineteenth century's "psychologizing of the narrative",<sup>70</sup> is taken by Ebeling to its furthest extreme. The history of Jesus is dissolved into the religious experience of the early community.

Ebeling insists that what is already characteristic of the tradition is "its charismatic lack of concern about all recollection of Jesus' life"<sup>71</sup> and that Mark himself is quite uninterested in history. Against Wrede, Ebeling denies that any necessity would have been felt to harmonize a fact of Jesus' life with the Church's post-Easter belief in his Messiahship. That belief owed nothing to a process of retrospective reflection; it was the risen Lord himself who announced his Messiahship, and faith's certainty rests not upon information about the historical Jesus but upon the claim to have had an encounter with the risen Christ, who is the sole theme of the Church's preaching. Mark's gospel is a backward look at the life of Jesus in the light of the resurrection, not with the interest of an historian, but with the purpose of stressing the Church's high christology.

The fundamental question left unanswered by Ebeling's discussion is : Why should Mark go to the trouble of casting the kerygma in the shape of a life of Jesus? For Ebeling the only purpose the messianic secret serves is to highlight the Gospel message, and it is difficult not to feel that the writing of a gospel is a laborious expedient if this is indeed the case. It is more likely that Mark does have an understanding of history and is not as indifferent to it as Ebeling thinks. In more than doing justice to the religious experience of the community, Ebeling does less than justice to the fact that Mark presents

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70 "... die Psychologisierung des Berichteten ... die Psychologisierung des Berichterstatters." Ibid., 12.

71 "... ihre' charismatische Unbekümmertheit um alle Erinnerungen aus dem Leben Jesu." Ibid., 99.

his confession as a history of Jesus.

Nevertheless, G. Minette de Tillesse is correct to say that Ebeling pioneered "a really new way".<sup>72</sup> His importance in the history of work on the messianic secret (of which he himself wrote an account up to 1939) lies in his demand for a truly theological appraisal of the theme. Later developments have vindicated him in this, and chapter four of this thesis is in part the story of the attempt to meet his demand.

### Work in Britain

In Britain, if only upon a minority of scholars, Schweitzer continued to exercise a direct and powerful influence well beyond the end of the 1914-1918 war. Despite Sanday's volte-face,<sup>73</sup> F.C. Burkitt still adhered closely to thoroughgoing eschatology's general picture of the ministry of Jesus. In 1929 he contributed to A History of Christianity in the Light of Modern Knowledge a chapter entitled "The Life of Jesus", which was published separately in 1932 as Jesus Christ: An Historical Outline. Two echoes of Schweitzer epitomize his persisting influence. Under the heading "Interim Ethics" Burkitt writes: "The Gospel morality is quite different from the ethics of modern Socialism or modern Capitalism, and it differs exactly in this, that the existing organization of mankind on this earth is not regarded as indefinitely continuing".<sup>74</sup> Later, discussing Jesus' motives for going to Jerusalem, he says: "What I think certain is that Jesus was fully persuaded that unless He did of His own initiative court failure and a violent death the new state of things, so ardently expected and longed for, would not arrive".<sup>75</sup>

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72 "... une voie réellement nouvelle." G. Minette de Tillesse, Le Secret messianique dans L'Évangile de Marc, 33.

73 See above, 73n.

74 F.C. Burkitt, Jesus Christ : An Historical Outline, 21.

75 Ibid., 38.



The influence of Schweitzer is even more pronounced in another English-speaking work, Walter Lowrie's Jesus to St. Mark (1929). Schweitzer himself had chiefly depended on Matthew, but Lowrie believes that thoroughgoing eschatology is the key to the problems of Mark also. His starting-point is Jesus' consciousness of being the Messiah, which is said to be "no longer disputable".<sup>76</sup> But Jesus wishes to keep his messianic status secret. Admittedly the secret is divulged by the demoniacs, but nobody pays any heed, "so remote it was from anybody's thought that this Jesus might be the Christ".<sup>77</sup> Only by revelation is his true identity disclosed. This first happens at the transfiguration, which Lowrie, following Schweitzer, places before the incident on the way to Caesarea Philippi on the ground that it is superfluous as a disclosure of Jesus' Messiahship to three favoured disciples if already the secret is known to the twelve. When the disciples are asked by Jesus who he is, Peter "blurts out"<sup>78</sup> the secret which he has been commanded to keep until the resurrection. Jesus does not, however, rebuke him, but takes the opportunity to reveal that as the Messiah he must suffer, a notion which he derives from the figure of the Servant in Deutero-Isaiah. But still he does not refer to himself openly as the Messiah. He uses instead the title "Son of Man", which the people would understand in a messianic sense, but he speaks of this Son of Man in the third person, claiming only a mysterious solidarity. The secrecy continues to be maintained. The acclamation of the crowd when Jesus enters Jerusalem is not a messianic ovation; in 11:27-33 the suspicion of the chief priests, lawyers and elders is that he is the Forerunner, not the Messiah; in 12:1-12, since the hearers are not in possession of the secret, they cannot imagine that the "son" is Jesus; and in 12:35-37 Jesus speaks with apparent detachment of a certain messianic

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<sup>76</sup> W. Lowrie, Jesus to St. Mark, 39.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 288.

conception. Nobody outside the circle of the twelve remotely suspects that Jesus is the Messiah - until the secret is betrayed by Judas.

Why does the secrecy persist for so long? The answer is that Jesus thinks of himself as the Messiah designate. "In a sense he was not yet the Messiah during the days of his flesh, for he lacked the visible glory which comported with that title."<sup>79</sup> Thoroughgoing eschatology is the reason for the secrecy. It is no part of Jesus' purpose to rally the people behind him as their messianic king, nor does he intend to give them an opportunity to register a decision for or against the proposition that he is the Messiah, for "all this is inconsistent with thoroughgoing eschatology".<sup>80</sup>

Clearly, Lowrie writes completely in the spirit of Schweitzer. The story of Jesus is a "strange history",<sup>81</sup> but thoroughgoing eschatology furnishes the solution to its most difficult problems. The error of Wrede, on the other hand, is that he does not interpret the gospels but criticizes them. He "destroys so radically the historical integrity of the Gospels that there remains but a short step to the conclusion, only too plausible from this standpoint, that such a person as Jesus of Nazareth never existed".<sup>82</sup>

But the enthusiasm of Burkitt and Lowrie for Schweitzer was not shared by the majority of scholars. The general opinion was that he was guilty of "an imperious forcing of the Gospel history into the narrow bounds of his eschatological dogma".<sup>83</sup> Sydney Cave, who expressed this view, was representative of what deserves to be called the "central tradition" in Britain. Others who were writing in the 1920s and who

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 534.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 351.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>83</sup> S. Cave, The Doctrine of the Person of Christ, 26 (note 2).



adopted the same cautiously conservative viewpoint were A.S. Peake, A.E.J. Rawlinson and A.W.F. Blunt. All four offered similar reasons for rejecting the hypothesis of Wrede and gave a common explanation of the messianic secret in the life of Jesus.

Peake's position is clearly stated in The Messiah and the Son of Man.<sup>84</sup> He attempts to cut at the roots of Wrede's theory by denying that "the belief in Messiahship would be a likely inference to draw from the belief in a man's resurrection. The Old Testament knew cases of resurrection in which no one dreamed of such an inference. And there is a contemporary case which is quite conclusive. Herod and some of the people thought that Jesus was John the Baptist who had risen from the dead. But not one of them hit upon the idea that He was therefore the Messiah."<sup>85</sup> Taking into account the ignominious circumstances of Jesus' death, which brought him under the Law's anathema, it is amazing that even the resurrection should have restored to his bewildered and disillusioned disciples a faith in his Messiahship which had been temporarily shattered; "that after His accursed death such a faith should have been for the first time created is ... a sheer impossibility".<sup>86</sup> "We may then infer with confidence that already before His death His disciples had believed Jesus to be the Messiah",<sup>87</sup> and the further deduction can be made that their belief must have had the explicit approval of Jesus himself.

Having demonstrated "beyond all reasonable question"<sup>88</sup> that Jesus understood himself to be the Messiah, Peake fills in the details of his messianic self-consciousness. The picture which Peake draws is a detailed one, even though on his own admission he now moves out of the

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<sup>84</sup> Reprinted from B J R L 8 (1924).

<sup>85</sup> A.S. Peake, The Messiah and the Son of Man, 7-8.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 16.

realm of logically guaranteed certainties and into the realm of probabilities. The first probability is that "at the Baptism Jesus attained the consciousness of Divine Sonship",<sup>89</sup> which in turn "probably included the conviction that He was the Messiah, for this seems to be implied in the third temptation".<sup>90</sup> It is uncertain whether the entry into Jerusalem was understood by the people as messianic, but "it seems to be clear that in His own mind"<sup>91</sup> Jesus felt the need to fulfil the messianic prophecy of Zech. 9:9. Finally, at the trial the reply of Jesus to the high priest meant in effect: "It is you who employ the term; I should not have used it myself; but I admit that it is correct".<sup>92</sup>

Peake's readiness to speak of the inner psychology of Jesus is displayed again in his discussion of the christological titles. "Son of God" expresses "a uniqueness and intimacy of relationship ... which seems to transcend that which belonged to His Messianic vocation".<sup>93</sup> "Son of Man" is an eschatological title, deriving from Daniel by way of the Similitudes of Enoch, but Jesus extended its application backwards into his own career and connected it with his passion, perhaps as a result of reflection upon the Servant passages in Deutero-Isaiah. The upshot of Peake's account is that Jesus thought of himself as at once Son of God, Son of Man, Servant of God and Messiah.

But if Jesus believed himself to be the Messiah, why did he wish the fact to be kept secret? Peake is satisfied with what he calls "the usual explanation":

He avoided the disclosure to the people because His conception of the Messiahship was so different from

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 19.



theirs ... He could not have proclaimed Himself as Messiah without evoking the popular enthusiasm which was in a very inflammable condition. Revolution against Rome might easily have broken out, and a life and death struggle might have been its inevitable sequel. In such a struggle Jesus could have had no share ... Nor could His purpose have been accomplished if He had explicitly declared that, though He was the Messiah, He was not the kind of Messiah they anticipated. This would have been practically equivalent in their eyes to a denial that He was the Messiah at all.<sup>94</sup>

And if he had revealed his identity too soon to his disciples, they too would certainly have misunderstood him. At first, therefore, he allowed his words and works to make their own impact on them, so that later, when it was time for the Messiahship to be disclosed, they would be able to control their interpretation of Jesus' vocation by the total impression which they had gained of him.

Rawlinson's has proved to be one of the most enduring of English-speaking discussions. At least he does not dismiss Wrede in the cavalier manner of Sanday. He follows Sanday in holding that Wrede's theory is invalidated by the fact that the resurrection cannot of itself explain the Church's belief in the Messiahship but at the same time Wrede's contentions are allowed to contain "a residuum of truth".<sup>95</sup> Mark does have a theory of the messianic secret, which manifests itself in several different ways. For example, the repeated recognitions of the Messiahship by the demoniacs are the result of "the thought in the mind of the Evangelist ... that the demons, as belonging to the supernatural world, have supernatural knowledge, and consequently recognize the supernatural character of the Christ at a time when men did not".<sup>96</sup> It is likely, too, that

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>95</sup> A.E.J. Rawlinson, The Gospel according to St. Mark, 260.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 258.

Mark has a theory about the hardening of the disciples' hearts as a way of accounting for the fact that they saw Jesus in an entirely new light after Easter. Further, it is sometimes the case that the teaching of the early Church is introduced into the narrative "by means of the literary device of representing that the Lord explained it thus in private to the disciples".<sup>97</sup> Finally, to the evangelist himself the miracles of Jesus are in some sense manifestations of his Messiahship, but Mark is aware that they did not lead the people to recognize him. He therefore depicts Jesus as normally enjoining silence after a miracle. These are real concessions to Wrede. But what Rawlinson gives with one hand he takes back with the other, for he goes on to assert two probabilities (and his whole argument is heavily dependent on the criterion of historical probability). The first is that Jesus did in fact seek to avoid attracting attention as a wonder-worker, and the presence of the more or less stereotyped injunctions to silence is explained by the fact that the evangelist "has simply generalized in the light of his general principles what was probably a datum of tradition in connexion with one or two episodes in particular".<sup>98</sup> The second is that, since his own conception of the Messiahship was different from the people's, Jesus put forward his claim "only indirectly and with a certain amount of reserve".<sup>99</sup>

Reading between the lines of Rawlinson's commentary, one perceives that he is repeatedly caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, he sees the mind of the evangelist at work; on the other hand, he is fearful of seeming to call in question the historical trustworthiness of the narrative. He remarks in his introduction that of every saying or anecdote he has tried to ask two questions:

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 261-262.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 262.



(1) How is this ... intelligible, considered in relation to its historical origin, i.e. in the setting and context of the life of the Saviour in Palestine? and, (2) What meaning would it have in its context as incorporated in a Gospel addressed to the Christians of Rome under Nero?<sup>100</sup>

In the course of the commentary Rawlinson gives helpful answers to the second question,<sup>101</sup> but does not sufficiently realize that the first, though it may not be illegitimate, is a much more difficult question to ask, since the gospel was not written primarily to give historical information. There is, for example, a significant passage where Rawlinson is discussing the doctrine of the cross:

It is this which distinguishes and differentiates the specifically Christian conception of the Messiahship of Jesus from the Messianic doctrines of Judaism. S. Mark points sharply the contrast in connexion with the story of Caesarea Philippi, from which point onwards the doctrines of suffering, crucifixion, and martyrdom are the leading ideas of the Gospel. Jesus is, for S. Mark, the Messiah, not in spite of His sufferings - as the earliest believers of all may for a time have been disposed to express it - but precisely because of His sufferings.<sup>102</sup>

This might be taken to mean that the Christian conception of Messiahship was worked out in the early Church. However, Rawlinson in fact believes that Jesus did instruct his disciples that he was the Messiah and that he had to suffer. But if so, it is hard to see that "the earliest believers of all" would have felt any problem.

The same unresolved tension is present when Rawlinson is discussing

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., xviii.

<sup>101</sup> It is significant that Hugh Anderson (The Gospel of Mark, ix) singles out Rawlinson's commentary for contributing to "a specifically religious understanding" of the gospel.

<sup>102</sup> Rawlinson, op.cit., lii.

passages which bear specifically on the messianic secret. For instance, he notes that there is an obvious historical difficulty about the command to secrecy in 5:43, "for how could the facts be concealed?"<sup>103</sup> He therefore suggests that this is a case where Mark has introduced his theory. But he then proceeds to offer an historical explanation, as if at all costs this must be done: "if we are right in thinking that the facts are as yet known only to the members of Jairus' household ..., it would be possible to conceal them until our Lord had had time to get away from the locality".<sup>104</sup>

Blunt's commentary on Mark lays itself open to similar criticisms. Like Rawlinson, he admits that there is a Markan theory of secrecy. There are several references in the notes to "the usual Marcan idea of a charge of silence after a miracle".<sup>105</sup> But we never discover what function the idea actually performs for Mark, for in every case but one<sup>106</sup> Blunt succeeds in locating an historical basis underneath, and it is impossible not to feel that this is where his real interest lies. He accounts for most of the injunctions by "surmising" (here is Rawlinson's "historical probability" again) that Jesus "shrank from the publicity, and the kind of publicity, which His miracles attracted to Him; that it caused Him no elation, and that He must often have been torn between the contending claims of His compassion on the one side and His desire to avoid the reputation of a wizard on the other".<sup>107</sup>

In his discussion of the self-consciousness of Jesus Blunt says at one point that "the gospels are not studies in the psychological history of Our Lord, and give us no groundwork for speculations as to

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 72

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> A.W.F. Blunt, The Gospel according to Saint Mark, 192 (here on 7:36).

<sup>106</sup> The exception is 5:43, where "we may well ask how the incident could possibly be concealed". Ibid., 175. It is rather surprising that Blunt does not follow Rawlinson here.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 148-149.



the processes of His mental development".<sup>108</sup> But this does not prevent him from knowing that Jesus presented himself as the Messiah and "deepened, moralized, and spiritualized"<sup>109</sup> the Jewish messianic expectation. And yet Blunt's comment on 8:30 is curiously terse: "Our Lord would not want Himself to be publicly proclaimed until He was ready".<sup>110</sup>

It is hard to escape the judgment that beneath the work of all these writers there lies a hidden fear of "negative" criticism of the gospels (which they share with the proponents of thoroughgoing eschatology). Wrede's theory has been rightly rejected, says Peake, "for it involves a scepticism as to the trustworthiness of our narratives so radical that, if it could be justified, we could hardly trust them for anything".<sup>111</sup> But this in itself is not an argument, only an a priori objection. Rawlinson's first criterion, as he seeks to come to terms with the various aspects of the secrecy theme, is historical probability, which leads him in practice to read between the lines of the text; and it is tempting to say that he attributes certain features to Mark himself (for example, the disciples' blindness) only because they will not yield to his own historicizing approach. Blunt for his part thinks that Mark's theory about the ability of the demons to penetrate the messianic secret "lands his account in perplexities and contradictions".<sup>112</sup> He means historical contradictions, for "if the demons publicly proclaim Jesus as Messiah, of what use is it for Him to forbid it to be published?"<sup>113</sup> But Blunt's concern with

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108 Ibid., 199.

109 Ibid., 64.

110 Ibid., 202.

111 Peake, The Messiah and the Son of Man, 7.

112 Blunt, op.cit., 148.

113 Ibid.

what actually happened blinds him to what Mark is doing; the conclusion which he ought to draw is that Mark is evidently not chiefly interested in writing a credible historical narrative. Cave, finally, reiterates the objection of Peake. Wrede's theory asks too much of us. It "requires us to suppose that Mark deliberately interpolated into the history of the life of Jesus the Messiah-secret, and thus makes of his Gospel, not an honest record of fact, but a work of fiction".<sup>114</sup>

Peake, Rawlinson, Blunt and Cave were writing before British scholarship had even begun to face the implications of form criticism. Peake ventures to predict that the new method "may have important bearings on the future investigation of the Gospel history and religion. But since the discussion of it is only in its initial stages, it is better, in the investigation of our special problem, to leave it out of account."<sup>115</sup> There is, therefore, no mention of Dibelius and Bultmann in the bibliography. Rawlinson notices them in his introduction but not once are they allowed to contribute to the discussion in the commentary itself. Blunt, though writing four years later than Rawlinson, gives no attention to form criticism at all.

The first full-length survey of form criticism in English did not appear until 1933. Vincent Taylor's The Formation of the Gospel Tradition is a not unsympathetic account, yet it is apparent that he is on the alert all the time against the threat of scepticism. The charge against Bultmann is that he is "kinder to the possibilities than to the probabilities of things".<sup>116</sup> Dibelius, on the other hand, is "liberal rather than radical".<sup>117</sup> The burden of Taylor's "reply"

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114 Cave, The Doctrine of the Person of Christ, 23.

115 Peake, op.cit., 5 (note 1).

116 V. Taylor, The Formation of the Gospel Tradition, 15.

117 Ibid., 14. This judgment doubtless explains why Dibelius was translated into English nearly thirty years before Bultmann.



to the form critics is that the presence of eyewitnesses guarantees the general trustworthiness of the tradition. "The one hundred and twenty at Pentecost did not go into permanent retreat; for at least a generation they moved among the young Palestinian communities, and through preaching and fellowship their recollections were at the disposal of those who sought information."<sup>118</sup> All too often the possibility that the Sitz im Leben is in the life of Jesus is not even considered by the form critics.

It is no surprise that Taylor, in his first significant contribution to the discussion of the messianic secret in Mark, insists that "the Markan representation is credibly explained as historical".<sup>119</sup> The view expressed in Jesus and His Sacrifice (1937) is essentially the one advanced by Peake earlier, except that Taylor firmly declares what Peake had only tentatively suggested - that Jesus reinterpreted the title "Son of Man" by the idea of the Suffering Servant. This "bold reinterpretation"<sup>120</sup> is what Jesus understood by Messiahship, but since current conceptions did not answer to his own, to him Messiahship was a burden. Once this is seen the Markan narrative presents no problems:

A record which begins with a story of revelation followed by temptation, which describes efforts to conceal the secret from popular misconception, to reveal it to intimate followers, to express it, albeit in a veiled form, in the events of the Entry, and, finally, to confess it when the claim is extorted by the high priest's question, has every right to be accepted as trustworthy. There can be no reasonable doubt that Jesus believed He was, and claimed to be, the Messiah.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>119</sup> V. Taylor, Jesus and His Sacrifice, 19.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

Taylor takes it that the real intention of Wrede's Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien is to deny that Jesus made such a claim. "His arguments have been answered by many scholars ...; but they have been given a new importance by the leading Form-Critics, Dibelius and Bultmann, and by R.H. Lightfoot in his recent Bampton Lectures."<sup>122</sup> Lightfoot is sufficiently important to merit separate consideration.

#### R.H. Lightfoot and the Apologetic Theory

Lightfoot's Bampton Lectures, History and Interpretation in the Gospels (1935), were written, as D.E. Nineham has said, "to familiarise English students with the methods and conclusions of the form-critics and the implications of their work".<sup>123</sup> In 1931 Lightfoot had gone to Germany to discover what fresh insights could be gained from the new discipline, and he returned with "a sense of mission to the English theological world".<sup>124</sup> He was well aware that recent German study of the gospels was regarded with "suspicion and indeed hostility"<sup>125</sup> and that his British colleagues would be unwilling to follow him along the way in which he was proposing to lead them. His preface reads like Wrede's more than thirty years before, for Lightfoot feels constrained to express the hope that "critics will pause, not once nor twice but many times, before they decide to level the charge against me that I destroy and do not build".<sup>126</sup>

Lightfoot's position on the messianic secret derives directly from Dibelius. The theory of the secret is the answer to a problem which confronts the evangelist. His problem is that he is unable

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>123</sup> D.E. Nineham, 'Robert Henry Lightfoot', Studies in the Gospels, x.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> R.H. Lightfoot, History and Interpretation in the Gospels, xvi.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., xiv.



"to reconcile completely his belief in the person and significance of Jesus with a purely historical presentation of his life".<sup>127</sup>

He is making an attempt - the first, so far as we know - to set forth, in more or less connected form, a narrative of Jesus' public life; and the latter is put before us from the beginning as the Christ, the Son of God: the fulfilment, that is, not only of Jewish but of all men's hopes. This was the conviction and the doctrine of the church for which the evangelist wrote, and it gives the keynote to his gospel. And yet it was also the case that Jesus had not been generally recognized as such on earth, and that his own nation, instead of finding its own expectations realized in him, had brought him to the cross.

This contradiction between what we may call outward fact and inward faith is accounted for in St. Mark's gospel by the secrecy ascribed to the truth of the Messiahship of Jesus. In this is found the explanation both of the lack of recognition, and of the rejection.<sup>128</sup>

The commands to the demons in 1:34 and 3:12 are "reminders, to the reader, of the veiled Messiahship",<sup>129</sup> and, in the case of the injunctions to silence in 5:43, 7:36 and 8:26, it is as if Mark is saying: "Here was a manifestation of Messiahship; but it was a mystery, and passed unrecognized; and it was the will of the Messiah that it should so pass".<sup>130</sup> Lightfoot admits that in 1:40-45 the command to the leper may in an earlier form of the tradition have been due to "the desire of Jesus to avoid an excessive publicity",<sup>131</sup> but Mark

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 70-71.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 71.

himself probably intends it to bear the same meaning as the commands in 5:43, 7:36 and 8:26. .In every case, Mark wishes his readers to see a revelation of the Messiahship and yet also to understand why at the time no adequate response was evoked. During the first part of his ministry the true nature of Jesus "remains hidden, and must remain hidden, ... from all men",<sup>132</sup> and only later is it revealed to chosen disciples, but even then under strict conditions of secrecy.

At the same time, Lightfoot notes the presence in Mark's gospel of what T.A. Burkill was to call "strain on the secret".<sup>133</sup> Two instances of this are the accounts of the entry into Jerusalem and the centurion's confession. In the first Mark does not indeed say that an ovation is given to the king, only to the prophet of the approaching kingdom, and yet undoubtedly he wishes his readers to recognize the coming of the Messiah. "It must have become ever harder for the little churches to believe that this coming, so much fraught with destiny, could have passed almost unnoticed at the time",<sup>134</sup> and the messianic meaning almost breaks through into the narrative. It does break through in the account of the centurion's confession, which represents the first Gentile conversion. The true identity of Jesus is openly confessed. Furthermore, there is a block of material early in the gospel (2:1 - 3:6) where there is no secrecy. Jesus performs miracles publicly and twice refers to himself as the Son of Man. "This form of the tradition is nearer to that in the fourth gospel."<sup>135</sup> Like Wrede, then, Lightfoot detects "signs of increasing tension ... between the narrative of fact and the significance seen in it by the early church, a significance which the

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>133</sup> See below, 172-174.

<sup>134</sup> Lightfoot, op.cit., 82.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 73' (note 1).



evangelist seeks to embody in his gospel".<sup>136</sup>

Throughout Lightfoot's discussion the influence of Dibelius is pronounced, though not always acknowledged. He agrees with Dibelius that a distinction must be made between the secrecy of the incident itself (5:37 and 40, 7:33, 8:23) and the command to secrecy at the close. "It is possible that, at any rate in 7:33 and 8:23, we see the influence of the idea that divine action must be veiled from profane sight."<sup>137</sup> There is an echo of Dibelius again in the statement that the commands in 5:43, 7:36 and 8:26 "can be separated without loss from the preceding story".<sup>138</sup> Finally, Lightfoot follows Dibelius in arguing that the secrecy theme gives structure to the whole gospel:

... the idea of the Messianic secret is much more in place in a connected "gospel" ... than in a story about Jesus related independently of any context. In the latter there would be no need to explain why Jesus was not forthwith greeted as Messiah, in spite of his great fame; for the story was not concerned with the subsequent course of events, or with the issue of his life. Indeed, the readers or worshippers who heard the isolated story would throughout be thinking of it as an example or revelation of Messiahship, and would welcome it as such. Only in connexion with the lowliness and obscurity of his whole life, and above all with its end upon the cross, would an answer be needed to the question why, in spite of all he was recorded to have done, men failed to understand and reverence and accept him.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 73 (note 1). Cf. Dibelius, From Tradition to Gospel, 94.

<sup>138</sup> Lightfoot, op.cit., 72. Cf. Dibelius, op.cit., 73.

<sup>139</sup> Lightfoot, op.cit., 74. Cf. Dibelius, op.cit., 94.

Lightfoot is repeatedly underlining the point that "the portrait which we have in our gospels is always of Jesus regarded as the Christ"<sup>140</sup> and that there never was a desire "to bequeath to the church what we should call a purely historical picture of Jesus".<sup>141</sup> Lightfoot narrows the gap between Mark and the fourth gospel. Although our first impression of Mark may well be that we are dealing with a plain historical record, which we must interpret for ourselves, the likelihood is rather that "the significance which the evangelist believes to belong to and inhere in the history is constantly suggested in the form of fact".<sup>142</sup> Mark's gospel, like John's, contains history and interpretation; it is "an attempt ... to set down in the form of an historical narrative truths which cannot receive their full expression in that form".<sup>143</sup> Lightfoot's insight is that Mark is not an historical account in the sense of "what actually happened"; it is a narrative into which a theological interpretation has been absorbed.

Norman Perrin has called Lightfoot "the first redaction critic".<sup>144</sup> The third lecture in History and Interpretation in the Gospels, on "The Doctrine of the Gospel according to St. Mark", is "to all intents and purposes ... an exercise in redaction criticism",<sup>145</sup> and certainly it is true that Lightfoot's remarks, for example, on the theological significance of John the Baptist anticipate Marxsen's Der Evangelist Markus, which appeared more than twenty years later. However, it should be remembered that Lightfoot himself denies that the synoptists

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<sup>140</sup> Lightfoot, op.cit., 208-209.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>144</sup> N. Perrin, What is Redaction Criticism?, 22.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 23.



are, "strictly speaking, theologians".<sup>146</sup> Moreover, the lecture which Perrin particularly praises is, as I have tried to show, largely derived from Dibelius. A less flattering but safer assessment of Lightfoot, therefore, is that of James M. Robinson, who refers to him as "a transmitter of German research".<sup>147</sup> His essential importance is that he was the first British scholar (with the partial exception of Rawlinson) not to insist on seeking to understand the messianic secret in a purely historical manner. His achievement was to free himself from the straitjacket of what he himself called the "widespread tendency in this country to value the gospels almost solely for what is believed to be their biographical worth".<sup>148</sup> He seems to be consciously atoning for the sins of his Oxford predecessor, William Sanday, whose condemnation of Wrede he calls "regrettable".<sup>149</sup> "If ... we take a longer view, as a generation later it ought to be possible for us to do, we may believe not only that Wrede's very honest work was necessary, but that its results have been for the most part to the good."<sup>150</sup>

A position closely akin to Lightfoot's was being maintained in the U.S.A. by J.H. Ropes, to whom Lightfoot himself later acknowledged his own indebtedness, at the same time regretting that Ropes' views were not better known in Britain.<sup>151</sup> The Synoptic Gospels was first published in 1934, but a second impression did not appear until 1960. Like Lightfoot, Ropes was writing at a time when a sharp distinction

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<sup>146</sup> Lightfoot, op.cit., 216. He also cites with approval Wellhausen's observation that Matthew and Luke "are not yet theologians, and allow different growths to exist side by side". Ibid., 199 (note 1 from page 198).

<sup>147</sup> J.M. Robinson, The Problem of History in Mark, 11 (note 1).

<sup>148</sup> Lightfoot, The Gospel Message of St. Mark, 102-103.

<sup>149</sup> Lightfoot, History and Interpretation in the Gospels, 17.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>151</sup> See Lightfoot, The Gospel Message of St. Mark, 37n.

was customarily made between John's gospel and the synoptics. The fourth gospel was agreed to have a theological purpose; the synoptics, and particularly Mark, were primarily biographical. Ropes demonstrated that the distinction could no longer be maintained. Each of the synoptists was a theologian rather than a biographer, selecting and ordering his material according to different controlling motives. Ropes' work, then, was another pioneering exercise in redaction criticism.

According to Ropes, Mark is "a kind of theological pamphlet",<sup>152</sup> designed to explain "how it could have come about that [the Messiah's] career on earth had ended in contumely and a criminal's death".<sup>153</sup> This purpose is achieved chiefly by allowing Jesus himself to prophesy that it is God's will for the Messiah that death should be the pathway to his future triumph. The various parables in Mark 4, which share the theme of ultimate success in spite of hindrance, are said by Ropes to express in figurative language "the same prophecy as later in the direct and repeated announcement: The son shall be put to death, but he shall rise again".<sup>154</sup> As for the blindness of the disciples, it seems to be intended "to bring out sharply the difference between the situation before the death of Christ and that which followed the resurrection appearances, and so to throw into stronger relief the decisive significance of the passion".<sup>155</sup>

It is in the context of his remarks on the disciples' lack of understanding that Ropes rejects Wrede's theory (though without mentioning him by name). Unfortunately, however, he gives the impression that the disciples' blindness is the only evidence on which the theory is based, failing to notice Wrede's equal if not greater stress on the

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<sup>152</sup> J.H. Ropes, The Synoptic Gospels, 10.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 22.



injunctions to silence. Ropes, in fact, conspicuously ignores the injunctions (and also the puzzle of 4:10-12), even though these are the very features which are usually held to be significant by those who take the view that Mark's gospel is an apologia for the death of the Messiah.

The apologetic understanding of the messianic secret was advanced again in F.C. Grant's The Earliest Gospel (1943). It was Grant who, more than any other American scholar, performed Lightfoot's function of mediating German results, and The Earliest Gospel contains a full discussion of Werner's Der Einfluss paulinischer Theologie im Markusevangelium and Lohmeyer's Galiläa und Jerusalem. It also contains the significant statement that Wrede's theory must "in principle ... be accepted".<sup>156</sup> But Grant thinks that the messianic secret is subsidiary to Mark's main purpose, which is "to show that Jesus, instead of becoming Messiah at his resurrection, was already Messiah during his earthly life".<sup>157</sup> The theory of the secret is intended to forestall objections to this interpretation of the life of Jesus:

If Jesus was already Messiah during his earthly career, why was he not recognized as Messiah? The answer is, he was recognized, even by the demons, who had supernatural insight, and by his disciples, through faith; and yet the disciples were forbidden to declare it, and the demons were silenced; and if the Jews as a whole did not recognize him, it was because their eyes too were "holden", and because they were already bringing upon themselves a judgment for their sins. Here was a mystery, a divine mystery, God's secret purpose: since the Son of Man had to die, as in the denouement

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<sup>156</sup> F.C. Grant, The Earliest Gospel, 161.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 153.

of some ancient tragedy the forces at work were now furthered, now hindered, until God's ends were achieved.<sup>158</sup>

The apologetic theory was put forward by a distinguished succession of Germans, including, as we have seen, J. Weiss, Bousset and Dibelius, and it is not surprising that those English-speaking scholars who were most closely in touch with continental work should also have been persuaded by it. At last the messianic secret was being recognized by a small number of British and American scholars as a theological conception. And yet Mark's gospel does not read like an apologia. It is likely that the messianic secret in fact has a positive meaning of its own.

### Conclusion

It must be strongly emphasized that the title of this chapter, "The Eclipse of the Historical Jesus", is a description of developments on the Continent, where the 1920s and 1930s witnessed the rise and dominance of a theology which appealed to the immediately self-attesting Word and, at the same time, of form criticism, which saw the gospels as essentially testimonies of faith. As far as the interpretation of the messianic secret was concerned, the main line ran from Bultmann to Ebeling, despite the attempts of Schniewind, Otto and Lohmeyer to maintain that the secret was rooted in Jesus' belief that he himself was the Son of Man. In Ebeling we have a reading of the messianic secret which exposes itself to the charge which Lohmeyer brought against Bultmann's Jesus, that "it is the meaning of one's own faith which is discovered in it".<sup>159</sup> However, Ebeling was right to seek to provide

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 162. Cf. 253-255.

<sup>159</sup> "... es ist der Sinn des eigenen Glaubens der in ihm gefunden wird." Lohmeyer's review of Bultmann's Jesus in ThLZ 52 (1927), 439.



a kerygmatic interpretation of the theme.

But in Britain, where theologians refused to divorce faith from history, the dialectical theology won few wholehearted disciples. As for form criticism, British scholars were cautious in their approach to it and questioned certain of its presuppositions. They doubted, for example, whether the processes operative in the folk-lore of primitive peoples or in early Hebrew saga offered any analogy with the development of the Christian tradition: "the conservative mentality of the Beth-ha-Midrash may be considered to offer a closer analogy ... than the naive creativeness of a primitive story-telling society".<sup>160</sup> They insisted, too, that it was paradoxical to suggest that the anonymous community had greater creative power than Jesus himself. Some aspects of the tradition (such as those which reflected no credit on the disciples) would certainly never have been invented by the community. They were glad, finally, to find some support for their caution in Die formgeschichtliche Methode by E. Fascher, the historian of form criticism, who said that "the form alone permits no historical value-judgements".<sup>161</sup> The scepticism of a Bultmann was not the necessary trend of the method.

Only R.H. Lightfoot welcomed and appropriated the insights of form criticism, though even he could say that Bultmann was "apt to set forth conclusions which will seem to many needlessly negative in character".<sup>162</sup>

D.E. Nineham has observed that it was Lightfoot's own religious position, "a doctrine of unmediated mystical approach to God which largely by-passed the problems of historic New Testament Christianity",<sup>163</sup> which

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<sup>160</sup> W. Manson, Jesus the Messiah, 27.

<sup>161</sup> Cited in V. Taylor, The Formation of the Gospel Tradition, 18; cf. W. Manson, op.cit., 26.

<sup>162</sup> R.H. Lightfoot, History and Interpretation in the Gospels, 44 (note 1 from page 43).

<sup>163</sup> D.E. Nineham, 'Robert Henry Lightfoot', Studies in the Gospels, xiii.

enabled him "to face with comparative equanimity the rather negative conclusions about the Gospels to which at one time he felt driven".<sup>164</sup>

Others whose theological standpoint was different were disturbed by Lightfoot's radicalism, especially by his often-quoted peroration in History and Interpretation in the Gospels:

It seems . . . that the form of the earthly no less than of the heavenly Christ is for the most part hidden from us. For all the inestimable value of the gospels, they yield us little more than a whisper of his voice; we trace in them but the outskirts of his ways.<sup>165</sup>

At the time of the outbreak of the 1939-1945 war, then, scholarship on the Continent was poised to look for a kerygmatic understanding of the messianic secret, but British scholars, with the solitary exception of Lightfoot, were still maintaining that the secret was Jesus' own.

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., xiv.

<sup>165</sup> Lightfoot, op.cit., 225.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### TOWARDS THE THEOLOGY OF THE 'MESSIANIC SECRET' (THE POST-WAR PERIOD)

## CHAPTER FOUR

### TOWARDS THE THEOLOGY OF THE 'MESSIANIC SECRET'

#### (THE POST-WAR PERIOD)

#### The Central Tradition in Britain

A good index of British opinion at the beginning of the post-war period was a series of lectures delivered by H.G. Wood in 1948, not at first published but later included in Jesus in the Twentieth Century. Wood's reasons for rejecting Wrede's hypothesis are the familiar ones. "The Resurrection might confirm or re-establish faith in the Messianic claim of Jesus; it can hardly have suggested or created such a faith."<sup>1</sup> And the crucifixion implies the messianic claim, for "if Jesus did not reply to the High Priest's question as Mark records he did, on what charge was he condemned to death?"<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, Wood is another English scholar who gives the impression that Wrede attributed to Mark the deliberate falsification of the tradition. Wrede is supposed to have made the suggestion that "Mark or his predecessors and informants invented the theory of the Messianic Secret in order to conceal the fact that the disciples only came to believe in Jesus as Messiah when they had become convinced of the truth of his Resurrection".<sup>3</sup> In fact, however, as we have already seen,<sup>4</sup> Wrede did not contend that the messianic secret was a device to explain away a difficulty.

Wood's own explanation of the place of secrecy in the life of Jesus is expanded from a hint given in the nineteenth century by Sir John

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1 H.G. Wood, Jesus in the Twentieth Century, 94.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 See above, 71.



Seeley in his Ecce Homo. Seeley drew attention to the paradox of Jesus, who was a humble man, "entertaining for the human race a feeling so singularly fraternal that he was likely to reject as a sort of treason the impulse to set himself in any manner above them",<sup>5</sup> yet whose words and deeds implied and whose final confession asserted a claim to a transcendent and universal dominion. The humility of Jesus, says Wood, "helps to explain why the claim was not asserted more openly and constantly".<sup>6</sup> "He came as one who serves. He would not assert, or force, or defend his Kingship. God will vindicate him. His status is not his concern."<sup>7</sup> Wood suggests that perhaps John 10:24, where Jesus refuses to tell the Jews plainly if he is the Messiah, is a true reflection of the historical situation. "His words and works evoked the question, Can this be the Messiah? but each must answer it for himself."<sup>8</sup>

The mature views of Vincent Taylor were set out in his famous commentary on Mark, but the ground was prepared in an earlier article, "Unsolved New Testament Problems: The Messianic Secret in Mark". Here he considers the "residuum of truth" which Rawlinson was prepared to concede to Wrede. Taylor himself is less generous. Rawlinson had agreed that Mark had a theory about demons and their supernatural knowledge, but Taylor remarks that "the uncanny perceptions of mentally deranged persons are too well known to permit us to dismiss Mark's accounts as imaginary".<sup>9</sup> Again, whereas Rawlinson had admitted that some instances of private instruction given to disciples were a literary device by means of which Mark introduced into his narrative the teaching of the

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5 Cited in Wood, op.cit., 147.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., 148.

8 Ibid., 148 (note 1).

9 V. Taylor, 'Unsolved New Testament Problems: The Messianic Secret in Mark', ET 59 (1947-1948), 147.

Church, Taylor thinks that "the creation of situations is not in Mark's manner".<sup>10</sup> Finally, with regard to Rawlinson's concession that some of the injunctions to silence after miracles were due to Mark's over-working of the fact that Jesus gave such commands, Taylor comments: "Mk 5:43 and 7:36 are widely, although perhaps unnecessarily, believed to be instances of the kind".<sup>11</sup>

Taylor comes to the conclusion in the article that the messianic secret is grounded not merely in the expedient desire to avoid stirring up popular excitement but "in the nature of Messiahship as Jesus conceived it".<sup>12</sup> This is the view which reappears in the introduction to the commentary:

To Him it was not primarily a matter of status but of action. In His own estimation Jesus is Messiah in His works of healing, His exorcisms, His victory over Satanic powers, His suffering, dying, rising, and coming with the clouds of heaven. Messiahship is a destiny; it is that which He does, that which the Father is pleased to accomplish in Him and which He fulfils in filial love. It is for this reason that He silences the demoniacs and commands His disciples to tell no man His secret till after the Resurrection. The Messiah already, He would not be the Messiah until His destiny was fulfilled.<sup>13</sup>

Jesus is "Messias absconditus" and, above all, "Messias passurus". There is a doctrine of the messianic secret, but the doctrine is Jesus' own; it "preserves ... an original element in the thought of Jesus".<sup>14</sup>

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10 Ibid., 148.

11 Ibid. Italics mine.

12 Ibid., 150.

13 Taylor, The Gospel according to St. Mark, 123.

14 Ibid., 133.



And yet more than once in the body of the commentary Taylor empties the theme of the dogmatic content with which he has filled it in the introduction. On 1:44, for example, his first suggestion is that the command to silence must not be isolated from the order to the leper to show himself to the priest. "The man is to make this duty his first concern."<sup>15</sup> But Taylor then goes on to say that "it may be questioned whether Mark understood the injunction in this way, and, in this case, the hypothesis of the 'Messianic Secret' is overstressed".<sup>16</sup> This is puzzling. Taylor gives no hint in the introduction that the doctrine of the messianic secret is anything other than the doctrine of Jesus himself, but here he implies that Mark has intruded it. Then, to confuse the situation further, he writes a few pages later that the injunction "is naturally explained by the withdrawal of Jesus from Capernaum and His desire to devote Himself to a preaching ministry".<sup>17</sup> But this "explanation" is complete in itself. The same is true of Taylor's comment on 7:24: Jesus' reason for seeking privacy is probably that "He desired to reflect upon the scope and course of His ministry".<sup>18</sup> In these instances Taylor in effect explains the messianic secret away.

The difficulties for an interpretation like Taylor's are, of course, particularly acute in the case of the injunctions to silence in 5:43, 7:36 and 8:26. However, in his comments on 5:43 he still feels able to argue that Jesus "sought for a time at least to avoid the embarrassments of publicity".<sup>19</sup> On 7:36 he remarks that whether or not the verse is a Markan addition depends on one's view of the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 189-190.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 349.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 297.

messianic secret. The implication here is that Taylor recognizes the historical problem (how could the cure possibly be concealed?), but he overcomes it with the lame explanation that "reluctance to have the fame of the cure noised abroad might be felt and expressed even if the injunction was sure to be disobeyed".<sup>20</sup> 8:26 presents the acutest difficulty of all. Even here Taylor would like to suggest that the prohibition was temporary, but he is forced to admit that more probably it is editorial, "reflecting the Evangelist's interest in the idea of the Messianic secret".<sup>21</sup>

I draw two conclusions from this brief review of Taylor's discussion. Firstly, the account of the messianic secret which is sketched in his introduction is not substantiated by his detailed comments on particular texts. It appears that Taylor starts from a hypothetical reconstruction of the messianic self-consciousness of Jesus instead of from the text of Mark. This becomes clear in his comment on 1:34 (which is similar to his comment, already referred to, on 7:36): "Whether this detail belongs to the tradition or is a dogmatic construction on the part of Mark ... depends on the view which is taken of the 'Messianic Secret'".<sup>22</sup> What Taylor ought to say is that the view which is taken of the messianic secret depends on the interpretation of evidence such as 1:34.

Secondly, because he believes that the messianic secret belongs to the history of Jesus, Taylor looks for an historical explanation, however far-fetched, of every injunction to silence, and only as a last resort does he allow the presence of editorial activity. There is, to be sure, no reason why he should not maintain that Mark was extending

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 355-356.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 373.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 180.



an idea which began with Jesus, and yet even when he does detect Mark's hand at work, he offers no suggestion as to the function which the idea of the messianic secret performs in the gospel. This tends to reinforce a more general criticism that Taylor applies a non-historical explanation to a narrative only when he is left with no alternative. His general attitude appears to be that we are given a plain historical record of the events of Jesus' ministry. He admits the presence of apologetic, liturgical, catechetical and doctrinal interests, but denies that these detract seriously from the gospel's value as history. In his discussion of 8:14-21 he concedes that the stupidity of the disciples is exaggerated, for here Mark is writing "didactic history",<sup>23</sup> but at once he forestalls a possible objection: "If it be asked why such an explanation is given to this narrative while others in Mk are accepted more objectively, the answer is that the data call for this kind of explanation and that it is mistaken to assume that Markan narratives are of one stamp".<sup>24</sup> Many will feel that the data should require Taylor to make use of "this kind of explanation" more often than he does. The first question he asks is: "Did this happen?", and he usually answers in the affirmative.

Taylor's commentary is implicitly a work of apologetics, in which two motives predominate. One is to defend the historical reliability of Mark, which Taylor does by accepting every vivid detail as evidence of primitive tradition. The other is to vindicate a modern christology, which he does by explaining away many of the miracles - the storm at sea ceased providentially, Jesus did not walk on the water but waded through the surf, and so on. But, as C.F.D. Moule observed in a review of the commentary: "Many will be quick to point the moral that there is no half-way house between a barren rationalism on the one hand, and, on

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 364.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

the other hand, a frank acceptance of the miracles as symbols of the Christian belief in Christ as the bearer of the Kingdom of God, and a refusal to be concerned with 'what really happened'.<sup>25</sup> Taylor's commentary is as much a memorial to his piety as it is a monument to his erudition. The apologetic assumptions which he brings to the text and the apologetic questions he asks of it prevent him from being able to give a clear statement of "the Gospel according to St. Mark".

The contribution of T.W. Manson to the discussion, "Realized Eschatology and the Messianic Secret", appeared in Studies in the Gospels (1955), a book of essays in memory of R.H. Lightfoot. There is a certain irony in this fact, for Manson shows none of Lightfoot's sympathy with Wrede, who is charged with representing Mark as "possessed by a dogmatic notion which compelled him to write historical nonsense".<sup>26</sup> The nonsense evaporates as soon as we recognize that the messianic secret "is not concerned with the identity of the Messiah but with the nature of his task".<sup>27</sup> Manson's essay is an elucidation and expansion of this statement.<sup>28</sup>

While others were asking: "Who is the Messiah?", Jesus asked: "What is the Messiah?", "and he found the answer by fusing the two Old Testament conceptions of the Son of man and the Servant of the Lord".<sup>29</sup> Manson agrees with Wrede that the three predictions in Mark 8, 9 and 10 of the passion of the Son of Man present a problem, for if Jesus made them of himself it is incredible that the disciples should

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25 JTS n.s.4 (1953), 72.

26 T.W. Manson, 'Realized Eschatology and the Messianic Secret', Studies in the Gospels, 220.

27 Ibid.

28 See also an earlier article by Manson, 'The New Testament Basis of the Doctrine of the Church', JEH 1 (1950), 1-11.

29 Manson, 'Realized Eschatology and the Messianic Secret', Studies in the Gospels, 221.



later have been so completely unprepared for what happened. Wrede concluded that the predictions were vaticinia ex eventu. Manson, however, notes that "the subject of the predictions as they stand is not 'the Messiah' or 'I' but 'the Son of man'",<sup>30</sup> and he suggests that the answer to the problem of the predictions, and the key to the right understanding of Mark's narrative, is the hypothesis that "Son of Man" has a corporate connotation.<sup>31</sup> The title has the collective sense of "the people of the saints of the Most High", and "what is pictured in these sayings is the realization of the ideals represented by the Servant of the Lord through the service and sacrifice of the Son of man, who comes upon the stage of history in the corporate body formed by Jesus and his disciples".<sup>32</sup> The disciples themselves understood that they belonged to this corporate body; what they could not understand was the prospect of suffering, for in Dan. 7 "once the Almighty takes action the triumph of the Son of man is immediate, complete, and irreversible".<sup>33</sup> Manson thinks that they found a working solution for themselves. They came to believe that the triumph of the Son of Man would not now be immediate, but would have to be preceded by a time of tribulation. In concrete terms, they would fall foul of the authorities in Jerusalem and some of them would be killed, but the outcome would soon be deliverance and the vindication of their cause. Suffering would be the price of victory, but "the nature of the triumph ... remained for them unchanged".<sup>34</sup>

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30 Ibid., 215.

31 See Manson's earlier writings: The Teaching of Jesus, 211-234; 'The Son of Man in Daniel, Enoch and the Gospels', BJRL 32 (1950), 171-193; The Servant-Messiah.

32 Manson, 'Realized Eschatology and the Messianic Secret', Studies in the Gospels, 216.

33 Ibid., 217.

34 Ibid., 219.

James and John are prepared to accept hardships now as a prelude to better things to follow - and to follow quickly. They are willing to postpone the glory and humble themselves to the role of the servant in the meantime. They are not ready or willing to find the supreme glory in the role of the servant.<sup>35</sup>

But precisely here, contends Manson, we meet the real messianic secret. It is given in 10:42-45, where the messianic task is clearly defined. "The essence of the matter is that the Ministry is the kingdom and the power and the glory. That is the messianic secret; and it is an open secret - παρρησίᾳ τὸν λόγον ἐλάλει ."<sup>36</sup> It is this which Jesus wishes the disciples to grasp, but they fail to do so because they view the Kingdom of God as an Israelite world-empire: "no secret is ever so well kept as that which no one is willing to discover".<sup>37</sup> In the end "Son of Man" becomes a name for Jesus alone. The point at which this narrowing of the denotation takes place is the Last Supper, where Jesus says (14:18), "One of you will betray me", and then (14 :21), "Alas for that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed". Manson comments:

It is a strange coincidence - I venture to think that it is more than a coincidence - that our Lord's certainty that he would be left to face his destiny alone and his assumption of the name "Son of man" as a personal designation come at the same point in the story.<sup>38</sup>

A serious objection against Manson is that he fails to grapple with the evidence which Wrede adduces. The latter brings forward

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 216.



evidence which in his opinion indicates that the messianic secret is a doctrine of the community's; the former produces other evidence for, on Manson's own admission, "a very different messianic secret"<sup>39</sup> in the ministry of Jesus. In fact, however, Manson's secret is not really a secret at all; it simply arises from the sheer unwillingness of the disciples to understand Jesus' unique conception of the role of the Son of Man. Manson quite ignores the injunction to silence in 8:30, where undoubtedly it is the identity of Jesus which is at stake.

In the last resort, the most revealing feature of the essay is the strength of its opposition to Wrede, which is reminiscent of Sanday's many years earlier.

The evangelist cannot be given the credit of having invented the lunatic structure by himself; and so we fall back on that ever-present help in critical difficulties, the anonymous group. They concocted the bulk of the farrago of nonsense, which Mark, with a few embellishments of his own, eventually put into writing.<sup>40</sup>

The language is intemperate, and the suspicion is unavoidable that Manson only thinks that the structure is "lunatic" because he comes to the gospel with radically different presuppositions from those of Wrede.

There is an interesting comparison to be made between Taylor's commentary and that of C.E.B. Cranfield (1959). In two respects Cranfield is much more thoroughgoing. In the first place, he finds the messianic secret everywhere and is in no danger of explaining it away. In 1:9, for example, it is congruous with the messianic veiledness

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

that Jesus should emerge from so obscure a village as Nazareth. In 1:43 the sternness of ὑποβρυγούμενος must be linked with Jesus' request for secrecy in 1:44: "the maintenance of his messianic veiledness was indeed an urgent matter".<sup>41</sup> In 2:5 there is an ambiguity in ἀφίενταί σου αἱ ἁμαρτίαι : the forgiveness might be from God or it might be from Jesus, who "exercises the divine prerogative, but in a veiled way".<sup>42</sup> In 3:21 the relatives of Jesus think him mad, "striking evidence"<sup>43</sup> of the hiddenness of the Messiah. Many more examples could be cited; a few must suffice. Taylor's explanation of the command to silence in 8:30, after Peter has confessed Jesus as the Messiah, is that it is "a counsel of prudence in view of the political repercussions of such a confession".<sup>44</sup> But for Cranfield this does not go deep enough:

While the desire to avoid rousing false political hopes was no doubt an important motive, it was surely not the only one. More fundamental was the will to obey the Father, who had purposed for his Son the path of messianic hiddenness.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, the silence with which the crucified Jesus meets the taunts of the passers-by, the chief priests and lawyers, and the two bandits "is yet another step along the costly path of his messianic hiddenness",<sup>46</sup> and the cry of dereliction in 15:34 "marks the lowest depth of the hiddenness of the Son of God".<sup>47</sup>

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41 C.E.B. Cranfield, The Gospel according to St. Mark, 94.

42 Ibid., 99.

43 Ibid., 134.

44 Taylor, The Gospel according to St. Mark, 377. Yet in the introduction this view is criticized for being "perilously near the suggestion of playing for safety". Ibid. 123.

45 Cranfield, op.cit., 271.

46 Ibid., 457.

47 Ibid., 458.



In the second place, Cranfield is more consistent than Taylor in depicting the messianic secret as kept to the end. Taylor evinces a certain ambivalence in this respect. He seems to be unable to make up his mind whether Jesus wishes to keep his secret or not. When Jesus enters Jerusalem, "He seeks to show to His disciples and to the crowd the kind of Messiah He is".<sup>48</sup> But Cranfield is more circumspect:

It seems clear that [Jesus] intended to fulfil the prophecy of Zech. 9:9, but to do so in circumstances so paradoxical as to make the meaning of his action hidden. It was a veiled assertion of his Messiahship, which would not be recognized at the time, though it would afterwards be luminous for his disciples. To them it would then be a confirmation of the truth of his Messiahship - they would know that the scripture had been fulfilled, though the fact had been unnoticed at the time, and that he had indeed come to Jerusalem as the true Messiah.<sup>49</sup>

Taylor's Jesus, like Schweitzer's, plays with his secret, until in 14:62, if Ἐγώ εἰμι is the correct reading, he divulges it himself. Cranfield sees that this openness on the part of Jesus requires an explanation. The explanation must be that "now at last, when he is in the power of his foes and in such circumstances as make the claim altogether paradoxical, it is consistent with his mission to declare openly what hitherto he has had to veil".<sup>50</sup> Jesus may reveal the truth publicly since nobody is likely to believe him.

Properly to understand the messianic secret, contends Cranfield, is to grasp the very nature and purpose of the Incarnation itself:

It is a necessary part of the gracious self-abasement

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<sup>48</sup> Taylor, op. cit., 452. Italics mine.

<sup>49</sup> Cranfield, op. cit., 354. Italics mine.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 444.

of the Incarnation that the Son of God should submit to conditions under which his claim to authority cannot but appear altogether problematic and paradoxical. In the last hours of his life his incognito deepens until in the helplessness, nakedness and agony of the Cross, abandoned by God and man, he becomes the absolute antithesis of everything that the world understands by divinity and by kingship.<sup>51</sup>

The hiddenness is for the sake of man's freedom to believe. "God's self-revelation is veiled, in order that men may be left sufficient room in which to make a personal decision."<sup>52</sup> Cranfield comes very near to saying that Jesus knows himself to be the Incarnation of God and deliberately plans his self-manifestation so as not to bludgeon men into belief. But it is anachronistic to read Mark in terms of incarnational doctrine. The two quotations in this paragraph are not so much exegesis as a reading back of systematic theology into the gospel.

The question of history is clearly the crucial one for all these writers: the trustworthiness of Mark's narrative as an historical record must not be put seriously at risk. H.G. Wood fears the consequences of Wrede's work: "If Wrede and the Form-critics are right, the baptism of Jesus had not the Messianic significance which Mark attributed to it and the great confession was never made. Even the confession of Jesus before the High Priest must be surrendered. Much else will be suspect as legend rather than history."<sup>53</sup> If this is the price which must be paid, Wood is unwilling to pay it. But, as we saw in the case of the previous generation of British scholars,<sup>54</sup> this is

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>53</sup> Wood, Jesus in the Twentieth Century, 89.

<sup>54</sup> See above, 112-113.



not an argument.

Vincent Taylor returned to the question of the messianic secret in two further articles: "Important and Influential Foreign Books: W. Wrede's 'The Messianic Secret in the Gospels'"<sup>55</sup> and "The Messianic Secret in Mark: A Rejoinder to the Rev. Dr. T.A. Burkill".<sup>56</sup> The latter is a response to some criticisms of the commentary. The burden of Burkill's complaint was that Taylor failed consistently to recognize that "St. Mark's gospel is essentially a religious document in which history subserves a doctrine of salvation".<sup>57</sup> Taylor's reply is unsatisfactory. He does not face Burkill's objections in detail but simply reaffirms his earlier position, and, predictably, he even goes so far as to assert: "If, with Dr. Burkill, we think that this Gospel is essentially a soteriological document in which history is subservient to theology, we had better cease discussing historical problems, since the ultimate end is historical nihilism".<sup>58</sup> This non sequitur is followed by Taylor's endorsement of F.C. Burkitt's judgment, pronounced in 1935, that Mark's gospel "embodies the private reminiscences of Peter, supplemented for the last week by the reminiscences of young Mark himself".<sup>59</sup> Here Taylor only reinforces Burkill's contention that he is unwilling to abandon a mode of interpretation which was once universally prevalent but which now impedes the progress of research. It is not without significance that the very title of his next book but one after the commentary, The Life and Ministry of Jesus (1954), was in a measure a gesture of defiance against the view that a "Life of Jesus" was something that could no longer be attempted.

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55 ET 65 (1953-1954), 246-250.

56 Hibbert Journal 55 (1957), 241-248.

57 T.A. Burkill, 'Concerning St. Mark's Conception of Secrecy', Hibbert Journal 55 (1957), 158.

58 Taylor, 'The Messianic Secret in Mark: A Rejoinder ...', Hibbert Journal 55, (1957), 247-248.

59 Ibid., 248.

As far as T.W. Manson is concerned, "the farther we travel along the Wredestrasse, the clearer it becomes that it is the road to nowhere".<sup>60</sup> The gospels should be taken for what they profess to be: not theological treatises or manuals of Christian behaviour, but "accounts of the public activities ... of an extremely important and interesting person",<sup>61</sup> who was "no less interesting, for his own sake, to people in the first century than he is to historians in the twentieth".<sup>62</sup> Manson remains convinced that Mark's gospel "presents in the main an orderly and logical development".<sup>63</sup>

Cranfield, finally, evinces the same optimism regarding the historical reliability of Mark. Even as late as 1965, in a review of T.A. Burkill's Mysterious Revelation, we find him echoing Manson's plea, first voiced in 1949, that "what is long overdue is a return to the study of the Gospels as historical documents concerning Jesus of Nazareth, rather than as psychological case-material concerning the early Christians".<sup>64</sup>

These four scholars share the presupposition that Mark is first and foremost an historian. They raise the question of historicity too soon, whereas a prior requirement is a sober concentration on the nature of the gospel. This was a basic methodological principle with Wrede, and it enabled the theological or "evangelical" character of Mark to emerge. It is paradoxical that New Testament scholars who are at the same time convinced Christian believers should feel so threatened by

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60 Manson, 'The Life of Jesus: Some Tendencies in Present-day Research', The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology, 216. This essay is a slightly revised version of a lecture delivered in 1949. The lecture is printed in Manson, Studies in the Gospels and Epistles, 3-12.

61 Manson, 'The Life of Jesus: Some Tendencies in Present-day Research', The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology, 215.

62 Ibid., 214. Manson's italics.

63 Ibid., 213.

64 See SJT 18 (1965), 361. The quotation is from the lecture referred to in note 60: Manson, 'The Quest of the Historical Jesus - Continued', Studies in the Gospels and Epistles, 8.



a measure of historical scepticism, for they might be expected to welcome the fact that the gain is a positive appreciation of Mark as "Gospel". But Wood, Taylor, Manson and Cranfield continue to ground Christian theology in the existence of authentic information about Jesus. They are the heirs of the liberal Protestants according to the spirit. Their concealed, even unconscious, motives can only be inferred. Robert Morgan, in a perceptive discussion of "historians of the gospels who are also apologists for the Christian religion",<sup>65</sup> has suggested three possible motives. One is the fear that "negative" results will undermine confidence in the gospels "in an age which instinctively locates the truth of a narrative containing history in its historical reliability".<sup>66</sup> But "the essential truth of the gospels is not to be found in historical accuracy, however much of this they may contain and however much the essential truth of them may even depend upon a certain amount of this. That Jesus is the incarnate Son of God is not a historical claim although it is a claim about a historical person."<sup>67</sup> Another motive is the praiseworthy desire to safeguard the truth of Jesus' humanity. But the historicity of Jesus is as little in doubt for Wrede and Bultmann as it is for Harnack and T.W. Manson. A third motive is the necessity to maintain, if Christian living is a matter of imitating Jesus, that "the reports of his behaviour are historically reliable".<sup>68</sup> But Christianity is not a new law.

I suggest, then, that these inheritors and continuing expositors of the "central tradition" in Britain are open to the charge that their work hides a presupposition. It is theologically important

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<sup>65</sup> R. Morgan, "'Negative' Criticism of the Gospels?", Religious Studies 6 (1970), 84.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 85

to them that there should be a basically reliable account of the life and ministry of Jesus. They therefore exaggerate the extent to which Mark intends to be an historian, and inevitably they see the messianic secret as belonging to the history of Jesus. And yet they all offer different accounts of the reason for the reserve of Jesus, and it must surely count against the attempt to explain the secret historically that British scholars have not been able to agree upon a motive.

### The "Pauline" Interpretation

But one British scholar, though he was writing at a time when the influence of Taylor and Manson was near its zenith, advanced an interpretation which, potentially at least, was not tied to the view that the messianic secret, in Taylor's words, "is not a hypothesis imposed on the records from without, but an element integral to the tradition itself".<sup>69</sup> First in an article,<sup>70</sup> then in a book,<sup>71</sup> G.H. Boobyer argued that the early Church thought of Christ's manifestation to the world as involving four stages. First, he was pre-existent with the Father; next there ensued a period of humiliation and hiddenness on earth; but then the resurrection and ascension disclosed his true status; and finally the parousia would openly reveal him in his majesty and power. This revelational scheme is fundamental to apostolic thought, and since the gospels are christological documents, we should expect to find signs of its influence there. In Mark there is admittedly no explicit reference to the period

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69 Taylor, The Gospel according to St. Mark, 123.

70 G.H. Boobyer, 'St. Mark and the Transfiguration', JTS 41 (1940), 119-140.

71 Boobyer, St. Mark and the Transfiguration Story (1942). In fact, the manuscript of the book was completed in 1939, but at that time there seemed little chance of its being published. The article is a digest of the argument.



of pre-existence with the Father, but Boobyer thinks that it is implied throughout, not only in the titles applied to Jesus (notably "Son of God", "Son of Man" and "Lord"), but also in verses such as 1:13, where he is ministered to by the heavenly world from which he has come, and 1:38, where he says that he has "come out" (from God?) to proclaim his message. Mark is explicit about the resurrection and the parousia as marking further stages of Christ's revelation. The three predictions of the passion are of special importance. "But why are these passages generally called forecasts of the passion? That seems to miss entirely their true nature. They are not just forecasts of the passion, but of the passion and resurrection."<sup>72</sup>

Then there are 9:9; 10:37; the whole of chapter 13; 14:25-28; 14:62; and the beginning of Mark's account of the resurrection in 16:1-8. These all anticipate, or speak of the resurrection or parousia as a moment when Jesus will be seen in his real glory, when his power will be manifest.<sup>73</sup>

But Mark's primary concern is with the period of humiliation and hiddenness. Boobyer's suggestion comes in the form of a question: "Are not the secrecy passages in Mark in part, for the evangelist, a reflection of the apostolic conception of the second stage of Christ's manifestation?"<sup>74</sup> Boobyer finds the Pauline view that Christ's life on earth was a time of obscurity in, among other passages, Rom.8:3, 1 Cor.2:8-9, 2 Cor.8:9, Gal.4:4 and, of course, Phil.2:5f.; and he suggests that Mark is making the same point "by giving prominence to incidents and sayings which represented the Master as hiding his divine nature, as withholding his power, or certain aspects of his message, from the world".<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 54-55. *Italics mine.*

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 55.

Boobyer's comments on the messianic secret are difficult to assess, mainly because they are so brief. On the one hand, it looks at first glance as if he is meeting Ebeling's requirement that the secrecy theme should be understood in terms of the kerygma; on the other hand, he is careful to say that "faith in Christ's divine Sonship had also a foundation in what Jesus had said and done before the cross; and for the Church the Gospels were in part the presentation of that aspect of the historical justification of its message".<sup>76</sup> The reader's difficulty is that he cannot tell how much weight Boobyer attaches to his two uses of "in part". His position is an uneasy compromise: the secrecy passages serve to emphasize the Pauline conception but at the same time they are rooted in history, for Boobyer insists that his argument is "in no sense a plea for Wrede's contention that Mark's Gospel belongs so much to the sphere of christology that its value as history is seriously to be discounted".<sup>77</sup> Boobyer provokes a number of questions which he does not answer. For example, if the secrecy passages are now used in the service of the apostolic conception of revelation, they must surely bear a different meaning from what they did in history. But Boobyer does not even go very far to explain what the new meaning is.

It was Ernst Percy, in Die Botschaft Jesu (1953), who took up Boobyer's suggestion and developed it. Percy states that for Paul "the Christian gospel consists only in the message of the crucified and risen one".<sup>78</sup> What preceded the resurrection was a period of humiliation and therefore of concealment; it was the resurrection which disclosed "the secret hidden for long ages and through many

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76 Ibid., 48-49. My italics again.

77 Ibid., 49.

78 "... erst 'die Botschaft vom Gekreuzigten und Auferstandenen ist das christliche Evangelium.'" Percy, Die Botschaft Jesu, 294.



generations" (Col.1:26). Mark's conception of the history of the Christian revelation is fundamentally the same,<sup>79</sup> but where Paul depicts a life of lowliness, Mark, because he is using the tradition of Jesus' words and deeds, is obliged to present Jesus as making a secret of the nature of his Messiahship. There can be no disclosure of the Messiahship of Jesus before the crucifixion and resurrection. Like Wrede, Percy sees 9:9, with its reference to the resurrection as a terminus, as a key verse. Before the terminus the disciples remain unreceptive to the teaching which Jesus imparts; but "nothing is hidden unless it is to be disclosed" (4:22), and after the resurrection the disciples remember. For Percy, then, the origin of the idea of the messianic secret lies in the contrast between the time before and the time after the resurrection. Mark's gospel reflects a belief in the Messiahship of Jesus which was changed by the cross and resurrection. "Mark still stood too near this change to be able to place the earthly life of Jesus on the same plane as the message of the risen one; but on the other hand he stood far enough away from historical actuality to be able to impress upon the Jesus tradition his revelational scheme."<sup>80</sup> This he does by means of the messianic secret, which bears witness to a deepening of the Church's messianic faith.

The importance of Percy is that he goes much further than Boobyer

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79 It should be added that this does not commit Percy to the view that Mark is a Paulinist. In a lengthy footnot (ibid., 295-296) he points to a number of differences between Mark's teaching and Paul's. For example, in the gospel Jesus is the conqueror of the demons during his earthly life, but Paul thinks of the victory as taking place in the crucifixion and resurrection (Col.2:15). Probably for this reason H. Räisänen prefers to call Percy's understanding of the messianic secret not the Pauline but "die offenbarungsgeschichtliche Interpretation". See Das "Messiasgeheimnis" im Markusevangelium, 42-44.

80 "Mk stand dieser Umwandlung noch allzu nahe, als dass er das Erdenleben Jesu auf dieselbe Ebene wie die Botschaft von dem Auferstandenen hätte stellen können; anderseits stand er aber der geschichtlichen Wirklichkeit fern genug, um der Jesusüberlieferung das Schema seiner offenbarungsgeschichtlichen Auffassung aufdrücken zu können." Percy, op.cit.; 299.

towards fulfilling Ebeling's demand for a genuinely kerygmatic interpretation of the messianic secret. In doing so, however, he moves away from Ebeling's own position and returns in the direction of Wrede's in that, like Wrede, he views the theme of secrecy as uniting two stages of the tradition. But for Percy the union is between a tradition about Jesus which was messianic from the beginning and a developing understanding of the significance of the cross and resurrection. Percy's interpretation is sensitive to the relationship which exists between the messianic secret and the passion, a theme which, as we shall see, becomes more and more prominent in the on-going discussion.

Meanwhile, only two years after Die Botschaft Jesu, there came a notable attempt to understand the messianic secret not as a special Markan idea but as a very deep-rooted element in the tradition, which ultimately belonged to the history of Jesus himself. By seeking to establish a link between Mark's theme of secrecy and the concept of the hidden, pre-existent Son of Man in the Similitudes of Enoch and 2 Esdras, E.Sjöberg argued in Der verborgene Menschensohn in den Evangelien that the messianic secret was implicit in the very title "Son of Man".

#### E. Sjöberg and the Son of Man

Sjöberg had first investigated the apocalyptic background in a previous volume, Der Menschensohn im Äthiopischen Henochbuch (1946). He maintained there that in the circles from which the Similitudes of Enoch stemmed the Son of Man was believed in as a heavenly reality, subordinate to God but pre-existent with him before the creation of the world. God had appointed him to a unique eschatological function as the judge of sinners and the saviour of the righteous. Meanwhile, he remained inactive and concealed, waiting to be revealed in the



eschatological situation. Only to the elect was he made known before the eschaton (Enoch 48:7, 62:7).

In Der verborgene Menschensohn in den Evangelien (1955) Sjöberg went on to apply his earlier findings to the problem of the messianic secret. He contends that the apocalyptic concept of the heavenly concealment of the Son of Man lies behind the messianic secret in the gospels, enabling it to be understood as belonging "to the historical actuality of the life of Jesus, the Son of Man".<sup>81</sup>

The messianic secret is ... no secondary construction of Mark or of the community's tradition. It belongs as an integrating factor to the picture of the Son of Man already at work on earth before the last judgment.<sup>82</sup>

According to Sjöberg, Jesus believes himself to be the Messiah and interprets his Messiahship in terms of the apocalyptic Son of Man, who is first concealed and later to be revealed, and this self-identification of Jesus with the Son of Man is the ground for the historical secret. There are clear echoes here of Otto. Somewhat surprisingly, however, Sjöberg expressly rejects Otto's exegesis of Enoch 71:14, which he might easily have welcomed as lending strength to his argument. Otto, as we have seen,<sup>83</sup> takes this verse to mean that the Son of Man is incarnate in Enoch before the latter's exaltation and that Enoch is therefore the concealed Son of Man on earth, but Sjöberg's view is that Enoch becomes the Son of Man only after his exaltation.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless,

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81 "... zur geschichtlichen Wirklichkeit des Lebens Jesu, des Menschensohnes." E. Sjöberg, Der verborgene Menschensohn in den Evangelien, 246.

82 "Das Messiasgeheimnis ist ... keine sekundäre Konstruktion des Mark. oder der Gemeindeüberlieferung. Sie gehört als integrierendes Moment zum Bilde des schon vor dem letzten Gericht auf der Erde wirkenden Menschensohnes." Ibid.

83 See above, 94.

84 See Sjöberg, op. cit., 96 (note 2) and 125 (note 1).

despite his rejection of Otto at this point, Sjöberg still holds that Jesus is the hidden Son of Man on earth: the hiddenness has been transferred from pre-existence to earthly life. "Prior to the revelation at the end of time, Jesus had, in accordance with Jewish presuppositions, to be the hidden Son of Man."<sup>85</sup> Sjöberg points to evidence for the rabbinic conception of a Messiah who lives unknown on earth before the eschaton. He admits that the evidence is late,<sup>86</sup> but he thinks it is nonetheless significant in that it demonstrates that concealment is a necessary attribute of a Messiah who experiences a pre-eschatological earthly existence.

Like Lohmeyer,<sup>87</sup> Sjöberg distinguishes between the authentic messianic secret and what he calls Mark's "sharpening" ("Zuspitzung") of it. Jesus did not, as Mark supposes, make deliberate arrangements to prevent his Messiahship from being known, yet neither did he openly proclaim it.

His Messiahship was concealed, it was a secret which could not readily be perceived and which he too did not make known by means of special instruction and proclamation. But at the same time he did not want it to remain unknown. His words and deeds challenged those who saw and heard to think about them. In them his Messiahship was in fact enclosed. He who could see and hear was in a position to discover it.<sup>88</sup>

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85 "Auf der Erde musste Jesus vor der endzeitlichen Offenbarung gemäß den jüdischen Voraussetzungen der verborgene Menschensohn sein." Ibid., 219.

86 The earliest witness cited by Sjöberg is Justin's Dialogue with Trypho. Ibid., 80-82.

87 See above, 97.

88 "Seine Messianität war verborgen, sie war ein Geheimnis, das nicht ohne weiteres erkannt werden konnte, und das er auch nicht durch besonderen Unterricht und Verkündigung bekannt machte. Aber er wollte doch nicht, dass sie unerkant bleiben sollte. Seine Worte und Taten appellierten an das Nachdenken der Zuschauer und Zuhörer. Darin war tatsächlich die Messianität eingeschlossen. Wer sehen und hören konnte, konnte sie entdecken." Sjöberg, op.cit., 230.



The unexpressed messianic claim is present in Mark 8:38, where Sjöberg explains the apparent distinction between Jesus and the Son of Man by arguing that a secret relationship between them is implied; Jesus expected that he himself would shortly be revealed as the Son of Man, and his use of the title in the third person is part of the messianic secret, at once hinting at and veiling the mystery of his person.

Sjöberg holds that Jesus did not refer to himself in public as the Son of Man. He therefore dismisses Mark 2:10 and 2:28 as unauthentic.<sup>89</sup>

But the predictions of the Son of Man's passion and resurrection are not a problem, for they are spoken to disciples only. Here Jesus the Son of Man initiates the elect into the secret of his messianic destiny, which is : "The hidden Son of Man as the Suffering Servant of God".<sup>90</sup>

There is, then, an authentic messianic secret, which Sjöberg also discerns in certain non-Markan sayings, where Jesus speaks as the Messiah without revealing his identity. But the secrecy theme as it meets us in Mark is secondary. The authentic secret is present, for example, in the healing miracles, in which Jesus acts as the hidden Messiah but is recognized only as a wonder-worker; but the injunctions to silence in 5:43, 7:36 and 8:26 are Mark's inventions, whereby he transforms the historical mystery into an actual secret which must be guarded. In the case of the exorcisms, the commands to silence are not Mark's creations; they belong in the tradition to

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89 F. Gils questions Sjöberg's need to do this, for if "Son of Man" was not a commonly accepted messianic title, Jesus could have used it publicly without betraying his identity. F. Gils, 'Le secret messianique dans les Évangiles: Examen de la théorie de E. Sjöberg', Sacra Pagina II, 111-112. From another point of view T.A. Burkill points out that Sjöberg's suggestion that 2:10 and 2:28 were accidentally taken over from the tradition "would seem considerably to weaken his general contention that the concept of the hidden Son of Man is an apocalyptic presupposition of the materials St. Mark uses". T.A. Burkill, 'The Hidden Son of Man in St. Mark's Gospel', ZNW 52 (1961), 209.

90 "Der verborgene Menschensohn als der leidende Gottesknecht." Sjöberg, op.cit., 245.

the healing of the possessed. But it is clear from 1:34 and 3:12 that Mark now understands them in the sense of his theory of the messianic secret. Again, there are in the tradition a number of parables and word-pictures which issue a challenge to reflection. The parable of the mustard-seed is one such. "But what is meant by the small beginning? Only he can grasp that who has seen in the person of Jesus the hidden Messiah."<sup>91</sup> The parables are not intended to hinder revelation but to facilitate it. However, in 4:11-12 Mark is responsible for distorting the nature of the parables by representing Jesus as deliberately concealing his meaning. The apocalyptic contrast between the recipients of revelation and those outside is sharpened into a theory of intentional hardening.

The most telling of the criticisms which can be made of Sjöberg is that the evidence which we should need to find in the gospels is lacking. He assumes what has to be proved. For example, the motif of pre-existence is an essential feature of the concept of the concealed Son of Man in the apocalypses, but, on Sjöberg's own admission, this motif is absent. Nor is there any clear trace in the synoptic sayings of the Son of Man's concealment. But, in fact, the absence of evidence is not surprising, for in the apocalyptic literature the hiddenness of the Son of Man is a hiddenness in heaven, not on earth. The Son of Man is held in reserve by God against his sudden appearance in judgment. The apocalypses are essentially futurist, and it would be out of character for them to speculate about an earthly phase of the Son of Man's activity.

In the years since the publication of Der verborgene Menschensohn in den Evangelien there has been a spate of writings on the Son of Man question. Suffice it here to draw attention to the

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91 "Aber was ist mit dem geringen Anfang gemeint? Das begreift nur der, der in der Person Jesu den verborgenen Messias gesehen hat." Ibid., 172.



thesis of J.L. Clark, "A Re-examination of the Problem of the Messianic Secret in Mark in its Relationship to the Synoptic Son of Man Sayings" (1962). Clark considers that the corpus of Son of Man sayings in the synoptic tradition is a problem which must be investigated separately before its bearing on the messianic secret can be fruitfully examined, and after a careful appraisal of some of the most important contributions to the discussion, notably those of P. Vielhauer, E. Schweizer and H.E. Tödt, he comes to the conclusion that Jesus proclaimed the Son of Man as another than himself and that it was the community which applied the title "Son of Man" to him in the three major aspects of his work - his earthly activity, his consciousness of the redemptive necessity of his passion, and his expected parousia. If the use of the title bears the marks of a secretly expressed self-appraisal by Jesus, it does so only in the setting of the Markan redaction.<sup>92</sup>

The flood of literature on the Son of Man still shows no sign of abating, and although no consensus has emerged, it seems unlikely that the solution of Sjöberg will be revived. It is apparent in retrospect that his contribution has been less significant in the debate about the messianic secret than the suggestions of the so-called "new quest of the historical Jesus", which was undertaken at about the same time.

#### The New Quest of the Historical Jesus and Early Redaction Criticism

In 1953, at a gathering of former pupils of Bultmann, Ernst Käsemann delivered a now famous lecture on "The Problem of the Historical Jesus". He began by outlining the reasons why the Jesus of history had been eclipsed. Two factors were responsible: the rise of the dialectical theology, which, together with the parallel

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<sup>92</sup> The thesis of M.E. Glasswell, submitted in 1965, arrived independently at very similar conclusions. See below, 193-194.

revival of Reformation studies, revealed "the impoverishment and distortion of the Gospel which takes place wherever the question of the Jesus of history is treated as decisive for theology and preaching";<sup>93</sup> and the work of the form critics, which led to the conclusion that the true bearer and moulder of the Gospel was the Easter faith. Käsemann still accepts that the gospels are kerygmatic books, which are written in the light of the resurrection and are not concerned with the mere "bruta facta" of Jesus' life; at the same time, they owe their genesis and form to interest in the earthly Jesus, however carefully the nature of this interest may need to be defined. The gospels themselves are a safeguard against the danger of reducing Christ to the status of myth. Myth is not allowed to take the place of history, "nor a heavenly being to take the place of the Man of Nazareth".<sup>94</sup> It is certainly true that "the earthly Jesus cannot be understood otherwise than from the far side of Easter";<sup>95</sup> but the converse is also true, that "the event of Easter cannot be adequately comprehended if it is looked at apart from the earthly Jesus".<sup>96</sup>

Similar arguments are advanced by Günther Bornkamm in his Jesus of Nazareth, the first full-length book about Jesus to emerge from the new quest. We find there a like stress on the kerygmatic nature of the gospels, and yet an equal insistence that they not only allow but positively demand enquiry after the historical Jesus. Bornkamm writes: "The Easter aspect in which the primitive Church views the history of Jesus must certainly

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93 E. Käsemann, 'The Problem of the Historical Jesus', Essays on New Testament Themes, 15.

94 Ibid., 25.

95 Ibid.

96 Ibid.



not be forgotten for one moment; but not less the fact that it is precisely the history of Jesus before Good Friday and Easter which is seen in this aspect".<sup>97</sup> The gospels are the rejection of myth. Mythological conceptions do indeed find their way into the thought and faith of the Church, but what matters is that "they are given ... the function of interpreting the history of Jesus as the history of God with the world".<sup>98</sup> However, the gospels' interest in the pre-Easter story is very different in kind from that of modern historical science.

What, then, is the nature of the gospels' concern with the earthly life of Jesus? It must be said at once that the new questers are attempting neither to rehabilitate the historical worth of the gospel tradition nor to prove the truth of the kerygma. Nevertheless, the kerygma itself points backwards to Jesus - "... this Jesus, whom I am proclaiming to you, is the Messiah" (Acts 17:3) - and the purpose of the new quest is to seek answers to questions like: Is there a real continuity between Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the early Christian message? How could the proclaimer himself become the proclaimed? We need some assurance that the life of Jesus was of such a kind as to bear the weight of the kerygma, for although "historical criticism ... cannot supply the grounds of faith, ... it can give a negative answer to the truth of faith".<sup>99</sup> The new questers come to the study of the gospels with an understanding of history as "centring in the profound intentions, stances, and concepts of existence held by persons

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97 G. Bornkamm, Jesus of Nazareth, 22-23.

98 Ibid., 23. Italics mine.

99 Van A. Harvey, The Historian and the Believer, 168.

in the past";<sup>100</sup> and, they claim, in the parables, in the beatitudes and woes, and in the sayings on the Kingdom, exorcism, John the Baptist and the law we have sufficient insight into the intention of Jesus to glimpse his historical action. The working hypothesis of the new quest is that if an encounter with the kerygma is an encounter with the meaning of Jesus, then an encounter with Jesus is potentially an encounter with the meaning of the kerygma. "Our task", says Bornkamm, "is to seek the history in the Kerygma of the Gospels, and in this history to seek the Kerygma."<sup>101</sup> These pupils of Bultmann all seek to give substance to Bultmann's own statement that "Jesus' call to decision implies a christology".<sup>102</sup> They agree that Jesus did not claim to be the Messiah but that nevertheless the Church was accurately drawing out the implications of his preaching by ascribing messianic status to him. The tradition contains what is variously referred to as an indirect or implicit christology or a christology "in nuce".

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100 J.M. Robinson, A New Quest of the Historical Jesus, 39. But Robinson exaggerates the newness of the so-called "new concept of history and the self" (ibid., 66). Some scholars urge that the distinction between an old and a new quest is a false one. The rise of modern historiography occurred in the nineteenth century; historians have subsequently refined their techniques, but the basic principles remain the same. The essential change which has taken place is that twentieth century historians have realized that the gospels are not easy to handle, since they are documents of faith. See T.A. Roberts, 'Gospel Historicity: Some Philosophical Observations', Religious Studies 1 (1966), 185-202.

It may also be, as Schubert M. Ogden suggests, that the alleged newness of the new quest depends too much "upon seeing it against the background of a highly over-simplified and even false impression of Bultmann's own position". See his introduction to Bultmann, Existence and Faith, 13. Ogden considers that what Robinson speaks of as an "undercurrent" in Bultmann's thought (A New Quest of the Historical Jesus, 19) is in fact the main stream; that is, Bultmann has always maintained that there is an essential continuity between Jesus and the kerygma. See further Van A. Harvey and Schubert M. Ogden, 'How New is the "New Quest of the Historical Jesus"?', in The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ.

101 Bornkamm, op.cit., 21.

102 Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 43.



The new questers believe that there are three criteria which enable a distinction to be made between authentic sayings of Jesus and creations of the Church. Anything which clearly presupposes the post-Easter situation and reflects the faith of the Church can be regarded as unauthentic; also unauthentic are sayings which can be paralleled in contemporary Judaism; and an authentic saying should exhibit Aramaic features, preferably the characteristics of Aramaic poetry.<sup>103</sup> Applying these criteria, Käsemann draws particular attention to the ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω sayings in the Sermon on the Mount. He comments:

Anyone who claims an authority rivalling and challenging Moses has ipso facto set himself above Moses ... To this there are no Jewish parallels, nor indeed can there be. For the Jew who does what is done here has cut himself off from the community of Judaism - or else he brings the Messianic Torah and is therefore the Messiah.<sup>104</sup>

Similarly, Bornkamm says that in Jesus' attitude to the law, in his ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω sayings, in his calling of the disciples and in his choosing of the Twelve we "meet again and again the claim and secret of his mission".<sup>105</sup> Despite the fact that the gospels reflect the faith of the Church, the person and work of Jesus are nevertheless "shown forth with an originality which ... far exceeds and disarms even all believing understandings and interpretations".<sup>106</sup> According to Hans Conzelmann, Jesus establishes an essential link between his own ministry and the coming of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom, though future, is effectively engaging men already in the word of Jesus himself. It makes itself felt in advance and demands decision

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<sup>103</sup> Needless to say, these criteria have not gone unchallenged. See, for example, M.D.Hooker, 'On Using the Wrong Tool', Theology 75(1972), 570-581.

<sup>104</sup> Käsemann, op.cit., 37.

<sup>105</sup> Bornkamm, op.cit., 170.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 26.

and response. Ernst Fuchs attaches importance not only to what Jesus says but to what he does:

Jesus' conduct was ... the real framework of his proclamation. This conduct is neither that of a prophet nor of a teacher of wisdom, but that of a man who dares to act in God's stead, and who ... draws to himself sinners who, but for him, would have to flee from God.<sup>107</sup>

Jesus dares to affirm the will of God as though he himself stands in God's place. Thus his eating and drinking with publicans and sinners is much more than simple friendliness towards outcasts - it is nothing less than a celebration of the eschatological feast with those whom he has called to the rule of God.

What emerges very strikingly from all these sketches is the apparent lack of concern on the part of Jesus with titles and offices. As Hugh Anderson has said: "Such titles as Christos and Kyrios ... are not so much constitutive for the person and history of Jesus, as his person and history are constitutive for the titles".<sup>108</sup>

No more must we speak of his messianic consciousness, but only of his sense of having a mission from God ("Sendungsbewusstsein").

And for the new quest "this is not a negative conclusion, it is positive in the extreme. For the mere fact that Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah ... is extraordinarily characteristic of him and confirms the authenticity of the historical picture of his life and ministry. This distinguishes Jesus both from the expectations of his Jewish environment, and also from the preaching of the primitive Christian Church."<sup>109</sup> But some commentators have offered the criticism

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107 E. Fuchs, 'The Quest of the Historical Jesus', Studies of the Historical Jesus, 21-22.

108 H. Anderson, Jesus and Christian Origins, 163-164.

109 H. Zahrnt, The Question of God, 266.



that the new questers, like the old questers before them, create Jesus in their own image. The liberal Protestants discovered Jesus the liberal Protestant; the theologians of the new quest seem to have discovered Jesus the existentialist. Dennis Nineham, by no means an unfriendly critic, points out that "most of the scholars in this group have been deeply influenced by the writings of Martin Heidegger, and the Jesus they present to us, with his refusal to make any metaphysical claims or to rely on any external attestation, and his demand for a sheerly existential decision of faith, seems a suspiciously modern, and indeed Heideggerian, figure".<sup>110</sup> It is probably no coincidence that there is also an implausible modernity about the interpretation of the messianic secret by the new quest.

Bornkamm at once dismisses the possibility that the secret is one which the historical Jesus wished to keep. If it were, there would certainly be evidence in the tradition - for example, that Jesus "spiritualized" the traditional conception of Messiahship - but no such evidence exists. But neither are Wrede and Bultmann correct that the history of Jesus was non-messianic, for messianic expectations undoubtedly were awakened during the course of his ministry. The disciples of Jesus "had been hoping that he was the man to liberate Israel" (Luke 24:21), and only the suspicion that he was a messianic claimant can explain the attitude of the Jewish authorities and the verdict of Pilate.

We should, therefore, not speak about Jesus' non-Messianic history before his death, but rather of a movement of broken Messianic hopes, and of one who was hoped to be the Messiah, but who not only

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110 D. Nineham, 'Jesus in the Gospels', in Christ for Us Today, 56-57. Nineham goes on to make the related point - made earlier by H.J. Cadbury - that "the desire to claim an exaggerated degree of originality for Jesus has long been a source of distortion in our picture of him". Ibid., 58.

at the moment of failure, but in his entire message and ministry, disappointed the hopes which were placed in him.<sup>111</sup>

For Jesus himself did not seek to draw attention to the issue of his own identity. Bornkamm's entire treatment in Jesus of Nazareth is governed by the view that "the Messianic character of his being is contained in his words and deeds and in the unmediatedness of his historic appearance",<sup>112</sup> and this is the reason why the chapter called "The Messianic Question" comes at the end of the book. The messianic secret witnesses to the fact that the messianic title becomes appropriate when it is applied to Jesus from beyond the resurrection and that its application to the Jesus of history can only be indirect.

No customary or current conception, no title or office which Jewish tradition and expectation held in readiness, serves to authenticate his mission, or exhausts the secret of his being ... We thus learn to understand that the secret of his being could only reveal itself to his disciples in his resurrection.<sup>113</sup>

Käsemann's interpretation is very similar to Bornkamm's. In Mark's gospel the message of the early Christian hymns about the exalted Christ has been transposed into narrative. "The dawning of God's reign was moved forward from Jesus' exaltation to his earthly life, and liturgical praise was turned into a factual account."<sup>114</sup> "The mythical pattern of the hymns is ... historicized."<sup>115</sup> The Son of God is present on earth, engaged in a cosmic struggle with the powers of evil. But he is present incognito; his epiphanies

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<sup>111</sup> Bornkamm, Jesus of Nazareth, 172.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Käsemann, Jesus Means Freedom, 56.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.



are for the time being secret. Only at Easter, which is the victorious culmination of the cosmic struggle, does the incognito fall away:

... for the present those who know are only the demons, who have to concede that he has conquered them, and in part those who feel his power in them and who are amazed or praise him in awe. They feel that with the reign of God the empire of freedom has dawned out of earthly distress and satanic toils.<sup>116</sup>

The words and deeds of Jesus are an earnest of the glory of the risen Lord.

But the most interesting contribution has been Conzelmann's. The messianic secret is the expression of "a positive understanding of revelation".<sup>117</sup> Faith depends entirely on the resurrection, and yet a continuity exists between the time of Jesus and the present situation of believers in the post-Easter period. Mark demonstrates this continuity by means of the secrecy idea. Referring back to the life of Jesus, he bridges the gap from there by describing an intentional secret and a necessary lack of understanding. Before the resurrection the disciples cannot (not simply do not) fully grasp the meaning of Jesus' person and work. Revelation is seen as present in the period before Easter, made known to some but not understood, concealed from others; only with the resurrection is the revelation discerned. "In retrospect, faith understands that faith itself is possible only by means of revelation that includes the Easter event."<sup>118</sup> Even after Easter the revelation remains veiled from the world. It cannot be grasped except by faith, from within the Church.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>117</sup> Conzelmann, 'Present and Future in the Synoptic Tradition', Journal for Theology and the Church 5 (1968), 42.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 43.

Conzelmann insists that there was no need for the kind of solution proposed by Wrede, which elsewhere he calls "a speculative historical construction" and "a laborious apologetic expedient".<sup>119</sup> Wrede considered that the messianic secret reconciled originally non-messianic material with the faith of the Church; Conzelmann replies that the traditional material was already couched in completely christological terms and that "the kind of materials which we, on the basis of a traditio-historical analysis, discern to be originally non-messianic and those which were originally conceived as messianic (and which are products of the community) are on the same plane, historically and theologically, for [Mark]".<sup>120</sup> It is not, as Wrede thought, non-messianic material which causes the evangelist trouble; on the contrary, his difficulties arise from the fact that he is placing messianic material, such as the christological confession of Peter, in the context of 'a narrative of Jesus' life. It is precisely the messianic secret which enables the difficulties to be resolved. Wrede's explanation is unable to account for the emergence of an entirely new literary form, a "gospel".

The order of events is not that Mark collected material and explained a curious phenomenon found in it by a "theory". Rather, the notion of a secret obviously existed previously as a theological concept, and in turn enabled materials dissimilar (in form!) to be comprehended from a unified point of view. The secrecy theory is the hermeneutical presupposition of the genre, "gospel".<sup>121</sup>

The word "gospel" holds in tension two distinct but complementary ideas.

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119 Conzelmann, An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament, 139.

120 Conzelmann, 'Present and Future in the Synoptic Tradition', Journal for Theology and the Church 5 (1968), 42

121 Ibid., 43.



On the one hand, it expresses the fact that Mark's concern is to expound the Church's kerygma; on the other hand, involving as it does reflection back on Jesus' life, it denotes that Mark attaches real significance to the history of Jesus. "The basic problem of New Testament theology", considers Conzelmann, "is not, how did the proclaimer, Jesus of Nazareth, become the proclaimed Messiah, Son of God, Lord? It is rather, why did faith maintain the identity of the Exalted One with Jesus of Nazareth after the resurrection appearances?"<sup>122</sup>

Conzelmann's observations on the messianic secret are, in effect, a contribution to redaction criticism, the attempt to understand the gospels as theological entities. The theory of the secret is "the personal work of the earliest evangelist".<sup>123</sup> But it turns out that the secret is concerned with the very problem which is the motivation of the new quest, namely, the relationship between history and the Gospel, and it is difficult to suppress the suspicion that it is anachronistic to see the secrecy theory as the answer to questions which contemporary theologians are asking. Conzelmann remarks of Wrede's explanation that it is "much too modern by the standards of early Christian thought".<sup>124</sup> The same might be said of his own.<sup>125</sup>

W. Marxsen, the first of the redaction critics to produce a major study of Mark, protects himself against the charge of anachronism by envisaging a first century situation which could have provoked the emergence of the gospel. He suggests that Mark may have been written to hold in check the gnosticizing of the message of Paul, for "it is

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122 Conzelmann, An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament, xviii.

123 Conzelmann, 'Present and Future in the Synoptic Tradition', Journal for Theology and the Church 5 (1968), 42.

124 Conzelmann, An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament, 139.

125 See also below, 195-196.

at least doubtful whether the Pauline epistles (despite such passages as Phil. 2:5-11 and 2 Cor. 8:9) would have had sufficient weight to counteract the tendency to mythologizing, or to prevent the loss of a historical connection".<sup>126</sup> Mark firmly roots the Pauline kerygma in history by joining it to the more graphic anonymous tradition. According to Marxsen, Mark is "a thoroughly unique theologian",<sup>127</sup> who occupies a crucial position between Paul and the tradition on the one hand and the later evangelists on the other. The danger of Gnosticism is guarded against by the insistence that the past of Jesus contained a secret significance.

In one sense, therefore, the messianic secret underlines the importance of history. And yet in another sense it prevents too much importance from being ascribed to history. For as soon as the separate kerygmatic units are placed alongside each other in historical sequence, the inevitable effect is to record an open manifestation of Jesus' Messiahship. But this is not what Mark wants.

In order that his work as a whole should remain what the separate traditions already were (i.e. kerygma) Mark makes use of his theory. In this way he prevents his work from becoming a historically verifiable sequence of epiphanies; instead we have secret epiphanies which now become manifest as they are proclaimed.<sup>128</sup>

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126 W. Marxsen, Mark the Evangelist, 216. A similar suggestion is made by G. Ebeling: "Might it not be that the necessity of speaking graphically about the earthly life of Jesus and the satisfaction of this desire by the singular literary form of the Gospels were triggered off because, with the definitive separation of Gentile Christianity from Jewish Christianity, the presuppositions for understanding the kerygma which had been given in the Old Testament and late Jewish Apocalypticism now faded away, while at the same time the buttresses against radical Gnostic tendencies which these had provided also crumbled away?" Ebeling, Theology and Proclamation, 133.

127 Marxsen, op.cit., 216.

128 Marxsen, Introduction to the New Testament, 137. L.E. Keck remarks that Mark the Evangelist "would have been stronger had this insight appeared there as well". Keck, 'The Introduction to Mark's Gospel', NTS 12 (1965-1966), 368.



As one would expect, Marxsen agrees with Bornkamm and Conzelmann in denying the necessity for an explanation like Wrede's, for "is it conceivable that anyone in the Christian Church, at the time when Mark wrote his Gospel and almost the whole of the tradition proclaimed Jesus as Messiah, would have been interested in cherishing the remembrance of a 'non-Messianic' life of Jesus?"<sup>129</sup> The Sitz im Leben of the messianic secret is rather the evangelist's present.

"The messianic secret is at issue now, and that in the proclamation! Its content is the μυστήριον, which is disclosed to the community and remains an enigma to those outside."<sup>130</sup> In 4: 10-12 the "others who were round him" with the Twelve represent the community of the evangelist's own time, and the secret which is "given" to them is the knowledge that Jesus is the Messiah.

E. Schweizer is another redaction critic who sees in Mark a theologian who wishes to keep a careful balance between saying that the history of Jesus is important (as a safeguard against an incipient Gnosticism) but that history is not important for its own sake (lest the significance of the resurrection should be obscured). On the one hand, because there was a danger that Jesus might fade "into a mere symbol or a cipher that says nothing",<sup>131</sup> "it is beyond all doubt that Mark wants to emphasize that God's revelation happened in the historical life and death of Jesus, that is, in a real man".<sup>132</sup> On the other hand, "this does not mean that we could see anything which

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<sup>129</sup> Marxsen, Introduction to the New Testament, 137.

<sup>130</sup> "Jetzt liegt das Messiasgeheimnis vor, und zwar in der Verkündigung! Ihr Inhalt ist das μυστήριον, das der Gemeinde offenbart wird und denen draussen ein Rätsel bleibt." Marxsen, 'Redaktionsgeschichtliche Erklärung der sogenannten Parabeltheorie des Markus', ZThK 52 (1955), 270.

<sup>131</sup> "... zu einem bloßen Symbol oder einer nichtssagenden Chiffre." E. Schweizer, 'Die theologische Leistung des Markus', EvTh 24 (1964), 338.

<sup>132</sup> Schweizer, 'Mark's Contribution to the Quest of the Historical Jesus', NTS 10 (1963-1964), 431.

would really help us in the historical Jesus".<sup>133</sup> Indeed, "the so-called Messianic Secret of Jesus is actually a No-trespassing sign for all handing down of the 'historical Jesus', namely for all mere repetition of his sayings or of reports of his deeds which would not be, at the same time, the proclamation of the Christ of faith".<sup>134</sup> The messianic secret testifies that faith is awakened by the kerygma, not by the teaching or the deeds of the historical Jesus.

Schweizer draws attention to the fact that, although Mark considers teaching to be the characteristic activity of Jesus, the content of his teaching is not reported at length. This signifies that "the focus is not on wise sayings that can be recalled from the lips of a teacher and handed down".<sup>135</sup> It is the same with the miracles, where "the commands to silence are precisely prohibitions against proclaiming the 'historical' Jesus".<sup>136</sup> By means of the injunctions to silence Mark intends to convey that "only he who understands what Jesus has to say in 8:31 and 8:34 ff. can really recognize the power of God expressed in Jesus' miracles".<sup>137</sup> 8:31 is a key verse.

The suffering of the Son of Man is the previously hidden, now disclosed secret, and the following verses at once make it unmistakably clear that this can only be understood by him who in following shares the fate of the Son of Man.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 423.

<sup>135</sup> Schweizer, Jesus, 129

<sup>136</sup> "... die Schweigegebote sind geradezu Verbote, den 'historischen' Jesus ... zu verkünden." Schweizer, 'Anmerkungen zur Theologie des Markus', Neotestamentica, 103.

<sup>137</sup> Schweizer, Jesus, 130.

<sup>138</sup> "Das Leiden des Menschensohnes ist das bisher verborgene, jetzt enthüllte Geheimnis, und die anschliessenden Verse machen sofort und unmissverständlich klar, dass auch dies nur von dem verstanden werden kann, der in der Nachfolge das Schicksal des Menschensohnes teilt." Schweizer, 'Anmerkungen zur Theologie des Markus', Neotestamentica, 100.



Mark makes use of the life of Jesus to present "the difficulties ... which the revelation encounters with men".<sup>139</sup> These difficulties are highlighted in the disciples' lack of understanding and in the parables chapter. In the last resort the messianic secret is about the fundamental hiddenness of God in Jesus: "the secret of Jesus will become apparent only on the cross, and one must follow him in the way of the cross to be able to really understand it (see 8:34)".<sup>140</sup>

Discipleship, in fact, is for Schweizer the evangelist's leading theme. He shows in his analysis of the structure of the gospel how each main section of the first half begins with a general description of the activity of Jesus, followed by the call or sending of the disciples (1:14-15, 16-20; 3:7-12, 13-19; 6:6b, 7-13). But the second half in particular is dominated by the idea of discipleship. Jesus speaks of his coming passion and death, the disciples fail to understand, Jesus renews the call to discipleship - three times this sequence occurs (8: 31,32-33,34 ff.; 9: 30-31,32-34,35 ff.; 10: 32-34,35,37,38 ff.). Even the apocalyptic discourse is part of the discipleship theme, for the parousia of the Son of Man "gives both depth and promise to the discipleship that follows the path of Jesus' suffering".<sup>141</sup> In his denial of Jesus Peter demonstrates the consequences of the failure to understand. Peter's desertion (and indeed that of the other disciples) is prophesied by Jesus (14:26 f.), but in the same context there is the promise: "Nevertheless, after I am raised again I will go on before you into Galilee". The same promise is repeated at the end of the gospel by the angel at the tomb. Schweizer comments:

Thus God's grace grants to those who have failed  
Jesus the gift of discipleship, in which they can  
truly recognize him, and in which Jesus' disciples,

<sup>139</sup> "... die Schwierigkeiten ..., denen die Offenbarung bei den Menschen begegnet." Ibid., 103.

<sup>140</sup> Schweizer, The Good News according to Mark, 56.

<sup>141</sup> Schweizer, Jesus, 132.

and with them the whole community of those who believe in him, will follow through the years to come the Lord who goes before them.<sup>142</sup>

Schweizer's contributions to the study of Mark's gospel are suggestive and stimulating, but he, too, cannot be exempted from the charge that he turns the evangelist into a twentieth century theologian. The modern echoes which can be heard in Schweizer are echoes of Karl Barth. When Schweizer declares that the messianic secret means that "recognition of God earnestly begins with the recognition of the hidden God",<sup>143</sup> he is quite consciously referring to Barth,<sup>144</sup> and, although he may well be drawing out the legitimate implications of the secret as far as systematic theology is concerned, he is not using language which would have occurred to Mark. There are many other Barthian echoes in Schweizer's books and articles. For example, when Peter confesses his faith that Jesus is the Messiah but then immediately refuses to accept that Jesus must suffer, Schweizer comments:

Again the infinite difference between God and man is shown. No transition from one to the other seems possible. There is the world of God, τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ, and there is the world of man, τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, and even the first of the disciples belongs to this one, not to that one. The radical Johannine separation between above and below, Spirit and flesh, Logos and cosmos, God and Satan is even surpassed.<sup>145</sup>

H. Räsänen justly remarks that "the dialectical theology of Karl Barth forms the background of Schweizer's exegesis".<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Schweizer, 'Mark's Contribution to the Quest of the Historical Jesus', NTS 10 (1963-1964), 431.

<sup>144</sup> The reference is to Barth's Church Dogmatics, vol.2, part 1, 183.

<sup>145</sup> Schweizer, 'Mark's Contribution to the Quest of the Historical Jesus', NTS 10 (1963-1964), 428. Cf. The Good News according to Mark, 174.

<sup>146</sup> "Den Hintergrund der Exegese Schweizers ... bildet die dialektische Theologie von Karl Barth." H. Räsänen, Das "Messiasgeheimnis" im Markusevangelium, 10.



The fact that redaction criticism did not emerge into the full light of day until the 1950s, although it was foreshadowed in Wrede at the beginning of the century, is probably explained by the form critics' estimate of the evangelists as primarily collectors. But for the writers whom we are considering in this section Mark is much more than a mere collector - he is a theologian. Conzelmann, for example, views the gospel as a quite deliberate construction "in which theological elaboration and literary fashioning are inextricably linked together",<sup>147</sup> and the messianic secret itself as "the vantage point from which, for the first time, the diverse materials of the synoptic tradition were consciously comprehended as a unity".<sup>148</sup>

But to what extent does Mark's gospel in fact constitute a consistent conception? In the next section I group together a number of scholars, writing mainly in the 1960s, who give different answers to this question.

T.A. Burkill, G. Minette de Tillesse and Others

The views of T.A. Burkill, presented initially in scattered articles, are conveniently gathered together in a single volume, Mysterious Revelation: An Examination of the Philosophy of St. Mark's Gospel (1963), a systematic attempt to understand the evangelist's intention. Burkill's starting-point is his contention that "for St. Mark ... there is but one sufficient ground or explanation of the words and deeds of the Master, namely, the fact that he is the Messiah and stands in a unique filial relationship to God".<sup>149</sup> Nevertheless, as a matter of plain historical fact the people failed to

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<sup>147</sup> Conzelmann, 'Present and Future in the Synoptic Tradition', Journal for Theology and the Church 5 (1968), 41.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 42

<sup>149</sup> T.A. Burkill, Mysterious Revelation, 1.

recognize him. The difficulty which arises is met by the idea of secrecy. "By resorting to the conception of the secret, St. Mark is able to maintain the apostolic belief in the Messiahship without denying the plain facts of the historical traditions."<sup>150</sup> The evangelist is facing the very problem with which Paul is grappling in Romans 9-11. While Paul argues that God dulls the faculties of the Jewish people, Mark takes the view that Jesus speaks in parables to conceal his meaning and enjoins silence concerning his true identity because his messianic status is a pre-ordained secret.

Thus far Burkill is expounding the apologetic theory. But, as his sub-title indicates, it is also his belief that Mark has a "philosophy". To be precise, it is a philosophy of history. "The historical realization of God's plan of salvation"<sup>151</sup> has four stages. The first is the period of preparation, culminating in the coming of John the Baptist; the second is the earthly ministry of Jesus, which is marked by obscurity and suffering; the third is the post-resurrection proclamation of the Messiahship (for with the resurrection the period of obscurity gives way to the period of enlightenment); and the fourth will be the open parousia of the Son of Man. Mark's primary concern is with the period of Jesus' life, and the fact that he ends his gospel with the story of the empty tomb perhaps means that he regards the resurrection appearances as "falling outside the scope of his work".<sup>152</sup>

The first half of the gospel is about "the secret fact of the Messiahship"<sup>153</sup> and is characterized by the total failure of men to perceive the truth about Jesus. Throughout this first half the only beings to recognize him are the demons, who fulfil a function similar

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 7.



to that of the heavenly voice in 1:11: "they can give articulate expression to the truth and thus provide a mode of supernatural testimony to the reality of the Messiahship".<sup>154</sup> But Mark represents Jesus as enjoining silence upon them because he wishes to prevent their knowledge from reaching the ears of the people. "The Lord deliberately intends that men should not discover his divine status and accept him for what he really is - the Messiah, the Son of God."<sup>155</sup> His intention is the same when he speaks to the crowd in parables, which in Mark's view are designed not to make plain but to obscure. Burkill is well aware that Mark's conception is radically opposed to the natural assumption that the purpose of the parables must have been to assist understanding, but, he argues, it is "a natural consequence of his doctrine of the messianic secret"<sup>156</sup> - and to some extent a consequence, too, perhaps, of the fact that in the early Church the parables, detached from their original contexts, were not always easy to interpret. As for the miracles of the Messiah, they are presented by Mark not as public manifestations of the truth but as esoteric indications of a secret which for the time being must be kept. In the first half of the gospel, then, the Messiahship of Jesus is a fact, but the time has not yet come for it to be openly proclaimed.

"The mysterious meaning of the secret fact"<sup>157</sup> is the theme of the second half, which begins with Peter's affirmation that Jesus is the Messiah. Hitherto Mark has contrasted the knowledge of the demons and the ignorance of men, but from now on the demons recede into

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 143. The titles of the two parts of Mysterious Revelation clearly derive from R.H. Lightfoot. See Lightfoot, History and Interpretation in the Gospels, 77.

the background and the contrast is between the uninitiated crowd and the disciples, to whom the secret is revealed but who are given strict orders to keep it. The confession of Peter is a turning-point in the narrative - not in any biographical sense but in that it provides a basis for further instruction. It is "the ... presupposition of the subsequent teaching of verses 31 ff.",<sup>158</sup> enabling Mark to introduce his readers to the fundamental doctrine of the necessity of the passion, which after 8:29 is expressed in the form of Jesus' own explanation to the disciples of the meaning of his secret Messiahship. The disciples themselves, however, even though they are now in possession of the secret, continue to betray a strange lack of understanding. And yet their obtuseness is not to be understood as frustrating God's purpose.

St. Mark leaves us with the impression that it has already been divinely determined that they should not yet comprehend the significance of such instruction. Their spiritual sight is dim, and so it must remain until the Son of Man rises again from the dead.<sup>159</sup>

Meanwhile, they can retain the teaching of Jesus "as part of a priceless tradition, and can thus prepare themselves for the propagation of the gospel in the world".<sup>160</sup>

According to Burkill, "St. Mark's thought is essentially bipolar".<sup>161</sup> The main problem of apostolic christology was to effect a synthesis between the humiliation of Jesus on the one hand and his exaltation on the other. In Mark's view the suffering and the glory belong to different epochs. "Heavenly exaltation is the reward of self-abnegation."<sup>162</sup> This is Mark's "primary philosophical position".<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Burkill, op.cit., 151.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 322.



But at the same time there is evidence in the gospel that he "is not wholly satisfied with his doctrine of the secret and that he is feeling his way after a mode of representation analogous to that of the fourth evangelist",<sup>164</sup> namely, that "the incarnation is not a concealment but an open revelation of the Messiah's true nature (to which, however, the enemies of Jesus are blind)".<sup>165</sup> This countertendency militates against the bipolarity of Mark's basic point of view. Burkill draws attention to certain passages where he thinks that tension is particularly evident. They mostly occur against the background of the impending passion. In the story of the transfiguration, for example, Jesus "is disclosed ... in the glory of his real nature and in the form in which he will appear to the world at the parousia",<sup>166</sup> for at this point, just after the first prediction of the passion, Mark evidently feels that the situation demands a convincing demonstration of the reality of the Messiahship. However, it is only Peter, James and John who are present. Again, in the narratives of the entry into Jerusalem and the anointing at Bethany, "the evangelist's belief in the reality of the Messiahship is apparently pressing for overt recognition ..., thereby putting great strain on the requirement of secrecy".<sup>167</sup>

In three passages, Burkill contends, the strain proves too great. The first is 10:46-52, where Bartimaeus calls upon Jesus as "Son of David", a messianic title, and is not rebuked. The secret thus comes to the ears of the crowd. Then, in 12:1-12, Jesus seems deliberately to provoke the chief priests, lawyers and elders. His scarcely veiled meaning is that he himself, the Messiah, will be put to death

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 322.

and that God will vindicate him in some wonderful way (for Psalm 118: 22-23 came to be understood by the early Church as a prophecy of the crucified Messiah's resurrection or exaltation). Mark refers to the story of the wicked husbandmen as a parable, but it is really an allegory, which is recognized by the Jewish leaders as being aimed at them. Here, therefore, "there is a temporary disclosure of the fact of the Messiahship outside the circle of the initiated".<sup>168</sup> Finally, Jesus' own "I am" in 14:62 is "the most impressive illustration in the gospel of the persistent tendency to transcend the general conception of the messianic secret and to delineate the earthly life of Jesus directly in terms of the church's belief in the heavenly glory of his essential status".<sup>169</sup>

Burkill, then, sees Mark as creating his own inconsistencies. The evangelist's "fundamental attitude"<sup>170</sup> is that Jesus is the hidden Messiah: at first the secret Messiahship is known only to the demons, then it is revealed to the disciples, and only after the resurrection can it be made public. But at times Mark tends "to overstep the limits prescribed by his doctrine of the secret".<sup>171</sup> He cannot make up his mind; "conflicting motifs are continually competing for dominance . . . , and this considerably weakens the formative power of his thought to weld the multifarious traditions he presents into a consistent

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168 Ibid., 203.

169 Ibid., 209. Burkill states more than once that the countertendency is reinforced by the wish to ascribe to the Jews responsibility for the crucifixion, a motive which is present here in 14:62 and probably also in 12:12. But in one place (ibid., 123) he writes: "In so far as [Mark] is concerned to emphasize the culpability of the Jews, he tends to contravene the requirement of his more general doctrine of the messianic secret by allowing the real nature of Jesus to come out, as it were, into the light of day". Here Burkill seems to be saying that it is Mark's desire to inculcate the Jews which is actually the origin of the countertendency.

170 Ibid., 321.

171 Ibid., 322.



pattern of ideas".<sup>172</sup>

But G.H. Boobyer, in his second contribution to the discussion,<sup>173</sup> maintains that Mark does not contradict himself. "Might it be, not that the evangelist is so inconsistent, but that the critics have failed to discern the true nature of the problem?"<sup>174</sup> The secrecy motif is in fact only one of three strands of which the problem is woven, the others being publicity and revelation; and the secret of the Messiahship is but one aspect of the secrecy motif. Boobyer claims that a careful examination of the gospel in the light of these correctives shows that Mark is not inconsistent. Miracles openly performed and the publicity which ensues are nowhere understood as disclosures of the Messiahship. Only after his arrest does Jesus apply messianic titles to himself in public. Before then the Messiahship is revealed only to the disciples, who are told not to divulge the secret.

Boobyer cites 2:10, 2:28, 5:1-20, 8:38 and 10:47 f. as problems, for they appear to be open revelations of Jesus' Messiahship, which according to the strict requirement of the secrecy theme should be reserved for disciples alone. In fact, however, 2:10 and 2:28 are best understood as asides addressed to Mark's Christian readers or hearers, "which were originally perhaps what Dibelius called 'sayings out of sermons'".<sup>175</sup> In the story of the Gerasene demoniac the disciples are apparently the only onlookers; the messianic confession is the unclean spirit's, not the man's, who does not necessarily

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>173</sup> Boobyer, 'The Secrecy Motif in St. Mark's Gospel', NTS 6 (1959-1960), 225-235. Boobyer is not, however, replying directly to Burkill.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 228. Boobyer first made this suggestion in 'Mark 2:10a and the Interpretation of the Healing of the Paralytic', HThR 47 (1954), 115-120.

become aware of Jesus' identity himself; and in any case (here Boobyer follows Wrede) the command to go εἰς τὸν οἶκόν σου is tantamount to a demand for secrecy, not publicity. In 8:38, where certainly the Son of Man is openly referred to, he is nevertheless not identified with Jesus. In his discussion of 10:47 f., where Bartimaeus calls Jesus "Son of David" in the presence of the crowd, Boobyer attempts to meet the difficulty which this presents by suggesting, in the light of 10:52, that Mark thinks of Bartimaeus throughout the story as one of the disciples. As such he is in possession of the secret. The people in the crowd, on the other hand, are "those who are outside". They themselves silence Bartimaeus, making it unnecessary for Jesus to do so.

Having concluded that Mark does not introduce contradictions into his narrative, Boobyer goes on to propose an explanation of the purpose of the secrecy motif. He claims to detect in the gospel "two distinct but overlapping conceptions".<sup>176</sup> The first is that the resurrection inaugurates a new period in the historical process of Christian revelation. This conception is evinced in 4:22 and 9:9, and it illuminates Mark's otherwise puzzling insistence on the persistent inability of the disciples to understand. Boobyer states his position cautiously: "The writer of the Gospel might have intended more than one type of secrecy passage to convey this idea - at least in part".<sup>177</sup> Here, of course, Boobyer is repeating his previous suggestion, though in a muted tone - he does not, for example, strengthen his case with the argument that fundamental to apostolic thought is the belief that Christ manifests himself to the world in four stages, all of them discernible in Mark. The reason for Boobyer's reserve is that he now wishes to place his main emphasis on the second of the "two distinct but overlapping conceptions", namely, that not only are there two periods, but there are

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<sup>176</sup> Boobyer, 'The Secrecy Motif in St. Mark's Gospel', NIS 6 (1959-1960), 233.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.



also two classes of people - οἱ περὶ αὐτὸν σὺν τοῖς δώδεκα , to whom the secret of the Kingdom of God is revealed, and οἱ ἔξω , from whom it is quite intentionally concealed. Johannes Weiss "seems to have been entirely right ... that Mark was using most of the secrecy passages in the service of this doctrine as expressed in 4:11 f."<sup>178</sup> (8:12 and 11:33 are supporting texts.) But in St. Mark and the Transfiguration Story Boobyer had dismissed the apologetic theory on the ground that the crucifixion "was not a problem requiring some makeshift explanation".<sup>179</sup> He avoids the necessity to retract by making use of a subtle distinction - the various secrecy passages, though not intended to explain the rejection of Jesus by the Jews, are ways of giving repeated expression to the rejection of the Jews by God. That the divine judgment on Israel should prevail, the Jews were not to know that Jesus was the Messiah, and so Jesus himself, in fidelity to the divine decision, took active steps to conceal from them the truth.

G. Minette de Tillesse is another scholar who argues that to admit the presence of "contradictions" is in reality the confession of failure to penetrate Mark's intention. "If it is true ... that the messianic secret, as it is now presented, is a theme which has been systematically developed by Mark, ... one can be a priori almost certain that there is a solution to the puzzle."<sup>180</sup> And why should that solution be hard to find if Mark was writing for simple people?

The first part of Le secret messianique dans l'Evangile de Marc

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>179</sup> Boobyer, St. Mark and the Transfiguration Story, 54.

<sup>180</sup> "S'il est vrai ... que le secret messianique, dans sa présentation actuelle, est un thème systématiquement développé par Marc, ... on peut être à peu près certain a priori qu'il existe une solution à l'énigme." G. Minette de Tillesse, Le secret messianique dans l'Evangile de Marc, 34.

(1968) consists of four chapters in which Minette de Tillesse surveys in turn the miracles, exorcisms, controversies and parables and finds that the theme of the messianic secret pervades them all. He lists fourteen miracle stories, twelve of which precede Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi. Four of the twelve (1:40-45, 5:21-43, 7:32-37 and 8:22-26) contain injunctions to silence, the rest do not; but the strategic position of the injunctions, at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the series, situates all the stories in an atmosphere of "secret epiphany". The two sides of Dibelius' paradox must be equally stressed. On the one hand, Mark certainly believes that the power of Jesus manifests the coming of the Kingdom; on the other hand, he depicts Jesus as anxious to veil the manifestation as much as possible. The contradiction between the desire for concealment and the immediate violation of the command to silence is very evident in 1: 40-45, which is dealt with at greatest length. Minette de Tillesse even calls the leper "the first missionary of the Gospel",<sup>181</sup> for he goes out κηρύσσειν πολλὰ καὶ διαφημίζειν τὸν λόγον , terms which elsewhere in Mark refer to the Church's preaching of its message. But Jesus has insisted that the man should say nothing to anybody. The evangelist is fully aware of the tension; indeed, "it is precisely in this dialectical tension that Mark's message resides".<sup>182</sup> But for the time being he offers no explanation.

In the context of exorcisms there are three explicit injunctions to silence (1 :25, 1:34 and 3:12). According to Bauernfeind the shouts of the demons are an attempt to gain power over Jesus by uttering his name, and the injunctions to silence are to be understood as interrupting the apotropaic formula before it is complete.<sup>183</sup> But Minette de Tillesse

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181 "... le premier missionnaire de l'Évangile." Ibid., 68.

182 "C'est dans cette tension dialectique que réside très précisément le message de Marc." Ibid., 41.

183 See Bauernfeind, Die Worte der Dämonen im Markusevangelium.



agrees with Percy<sup>184</sup> that there is no reason to think that the demon's incantation in 1:24 is not complete, and he therefore prefers the explanation that in the original narratives the cries of the possessed were simply intended to underline, by contrast, the power of the exorcist. The injunctions themselves are Mark's own redaction. 1:34 expresses very clearly the evangelist's doctrine: "He would not let the devils speak, because they knew who he was". Here once again we meet a strange mixture of manifestation and secrecy. The exorcisms, like the miracles, proclaim the presence of the messianic Kingdom. Jesus "acts as the Messiah, but he does not wish his name to be pronounced".<sup>185</sup> But why? "That is not yet said. The remainder of the gospel will make it plain."<sup>186</sup>

Minette de Tillesse notes that, although only chapters 4 and 13 give the teaching of Jesus at any length, the gospel abounds in stories of controversy between him and the Jews. This is because the controversy, "in its atmosphere of incomprehension and ambiguity",<sup>187</sup> suits the evangelist's purpose. Beneath their outward similarity to rabbinic debates the controversies are in reality "secret epiphanies". The hidden reason why Jesus acts in a revolutionary way is that the Kingdom of God has appeared. But the Jews are blind witnesses of the messianic revelation. The conduct of Jesus provokes violent discussion, but he emerges from each confrontation without having revealed his identity.

In the case of the parables, too, the key to their right understanding is the recognition that in the activity of Jesus the Kingdom

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184 Percy, Die Botschaft Jesu, 275-277.

185 "... agit comme Messie, mais il ne veut pas qu'on en prononce le nom." Minette de Tillesse, op.cit., 83.

186 "Cela n'est pas encore dit. Le reste de l'évangile l'explicitera." Ibid.

187 "... dans son climat d'incompréhension et d'ambiguïté." Ibid., 122.

of God is dawning. "As in the controversies ... Jesus acts and speaks 'as if' something entirely new had just irrupted into the world."<sup>188</sup>

We may take it that the parables were in fact intended to provoke their hearers to thought, but in the interests of the theory of the messianic secret Mark says that it was Jesus' set purpose to conceal his meaning. But the reason why he speaks obscurely is not yet given.

The messianic secret, then, is the theme which gives Mark's work its unity. "Take away the messianic secret and at once his gospel becomes a set of disparate traditions."<sup>189</sup> Minette de Tillesse goes on in the second part of his book to uncover the "theology of the secret".<sup>190</sup> He reaches the heart of his argument in his full discussion of 8:27-33. The dialogue between Jesus and Peter is not about two opposing views of Messiahship - the authentic conception of Jesus and Peter's mistaken idea, which, just because it is mistaken, must not be divulged. A comparison of 8:29 with 1:34 and 3:11 shows that Peter is right, not wrong; and the point of the injunction to silence in 8:30 is rather that nothing must be said for the time being - to be precise, as it soon emerges in 9:9, until the Son of Man has risen from the dead. For first the Son of Man must suffer (8:31). The reason for the messianic secret, therefore, is the necessity of the passion. The secret is the expression of the obedience of Jesus to the divine will that he should suffer. "It is because he himself knows that such is God's plan that he hides the glory which is his as Son of God."<sup>191</sup> On the one hand, the people

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<sup>188</sup> "Comme dans les controverses ... Jésus agit et parle 'comme si' quelque chose d'entièrement neuf venait de faire irruption dans le monde." Ibid., 216.

<sup>189</sup> "Que l'on supprime le secret messianique et aussitôt son évangile devient un ramassis de traditions disparates." Ibid., 221.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>191</sup> "C'est parce qu'il sait, lui, que le plan divin est tel, qu'il cache sa gloire de Fils de Dieu." Ibid., 325.



must not recognize Jesus as the Messiah before he has suffered. On the other hand, "it is as the Messiah that he must die".<sup>192</sup> Therefore, as the passion inexorably advances and the cross becomes unavoidable, "the veil of the secret is lifted".<sup>193</sup> That there are limits to the secrecy within Mark's gospel itself is one of Minette de Tillesse's particular emphases. If in 10:46-52 Jesus allows the secret to escape (for he does not silence the blind man), it must be because the need for secrecy is no longer as urgent as it was. In 12:1-12 it is probably Mark himself who has allegorized the original parable; 12:12 is certainly redactional, and here, despite 4:10-12, Mark explicitly says that the Jewish leaders "saw that the parable was aimed at them". Finally, Jesus openly proclaims his Messiahship (14:61-62). "This crowning disclosure will no longer be an obstacle to the passion; indeed, it will become the very ground of the verdict (14:64)."<sup>194</sup> The Messiah goes to his death, and immediately after he dies the pagan centurion makes his confession.

Minette de Tillesse is willing to concede that there is a sense in which the theme of the messianic secret is inspired by an apologetic motive, for in the eyes of the Jews the crucifixion of Jesus was the conclusive proof that he was not the Messiah. But there is no question of an attempt to explain away the failure of Jesus' mission; the theme is rather the result of a positive process of reflection by the Church upon the meaning of the Messiah's death. At first it was the resurrection which dominated the thinking of the early Christians, but gradually their attention shifted to the passion, which they came to see, not as

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192 "... c'est en tant que Messie qu'il doit mourir". Ibid., 326.

193 "... le voile du secret se soulève." Ibid.

194 "Cette révélation suprême n'empêchera plus sa passion; bien plus, elle deviendra le motif même du verdict (14:64)." Ibid.

a failure, nor as an accident, nor even as simply the wicked deed of men, but as the very plan of God himself. To this plan Jesus obediently submitted himself by voluntarily embracing his necessary suffering, delaying the open announcement of his Messiahship until his death was certain. The messianic secret, then, is "one of the oldest forms in which the first Christians sought to express the positive content, the theological mystery of the passion".<sup>195</sup>

In the end, however, Mark has constructed his gospel round the theme of the messianic secret not for christological or apologetic reasons but "out of a pastoral concern".<sup>196</sup> At the close of his introduction Minette de Tillesse refers with approval to the remark of G. Strecker that, if we had more information about Mark's community and the problems which confronted it, we should be better able to understand the message which its pastor is addressing to it,<sup>197</sup> and he goes on to say that he is himself convinced that "an attentive analysis of the secret will disclose the features of the people to whom the message is directed".<sup>198</sup> Sometimes the ecclesiastical dimension is obvious. 4:14-20, for example, is clearly an allegorical application of the parable of the sower to the situation of the community. More often, however, allusions to the community are indirect. Above all, there are ecclesiastical overtones in the many references throughout the gospel to the disciples. Jesus is continually represented as speaking to them  $\kappa\alpha\tau' \dot{\iota}\delta\iota\kappa\upsilon$  or  $\dot{\epsilon}\nu \omicron\iota\kappa\omega$ . In most cases the "house" cannot be identified and seems to be a theological term, denoting a place of retreat from the crowds where messianic revelation is given to the privileged group.

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195 "... l'une des plus anciennes formes par laquelle les premiers chrétiens ont essayé d'exprimer le contenu positif, le mystère théologique de la passion." Ibid., 322.

196 "... par souci pastoral." Ibid., 278.

197 See G. Strecker, 'Zur Messiasgeheimnis im Markusevangelium', Studia Evangelica III, 104.

198 "... une analyse attentive du secret révélera le visage des destinataires." Minette de Tillesse, op.cit., 34.



But time and again the disciples have to be reproached by Jesus for their lack of understanding. This repeated incomprehension, says Minette de Tillesse, is "a classic method of alerting the understanding of the reader!"<sup>199</sup> In part it serves to underline, by contrast, the transcendent nature of the revelation, but also it warns the reader that there is a message of challenge or encouragement for him. Mark makes use of the disciples to convey to his readers a theology of Christian discipleship in their own situation.

At the beginning of his ministry Jesus summons Simon and Andrew and James and John to "follow" him. But where is he going? The theological implication of "following" begin to emerge in the section which extends from 8:27 to 10:52. Sounding like a knell throughout this section are the three prophecies of the passion; but the disciples are intent upon arguing among themselves as to which of them is the greatest, Peter wants to know what they can expect as the reward of renunciation, and James and John ask for seats on the right and left of Jesus in his glory. They fail to understand that first they must share his passion; it is only by way of the cross that they will come to share his glory. In 8:35 and 10:29 the phrase ἐνεκεν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου confirms that Mark is addressing himself to the community, for τὸ εὐαγγέλιον in Mark, as 13:10 shows, is always the message proclaimed by the Church; and in all three contexts "the situation envisaged is that of Christians who are exposed to persecution".<sup>200</sup> The members of Mark's community, then, are suffering persecution, and, what is more, not a few are falling away (4:14-20). It is against this background that the messianic secret must be seen. "The ultimate point of the messianic secret is not christological, dogmatic, but pastoral."<sup>201</sup> What Jesus asks of the disciples is the reflection of

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199 "...un procédé classique pour éveiller l'intelligence du lecteur!" Ibid., 228.

200 "...la situation envisagée est celle de chrétiens en butte à la persécution." Ibid., 405..

201 "La pointe ultime du secret messianique n'est pas christologique, dogmatique, mais pastorale." Ibid., 417.

what God asks of him; Christians are not to expect a different destiny from that of their Lord.

Le secret messianique dans l'Evangile de Marc is in effect a commentary on the entire gospel. In important respects it breaks new ground, notably in its insistence that Mark's theme is worked out without inconsistencies and in its emphasis on the pastoral dimension of the secret. But there is one major criticism to be made. Throughout his 500 pages Minette de Tillesse is constantly stressing that he is talking at the level of Mark's redaction.<sup>202</sup> But then, in a brief section on "Mark and History" at the end of the book, he suddenly reveals that the authenticity of the bulk of Mark's material need not be doubted. Certainly Mark has reinterpreted the tradition of the facts about Jesus, but "that reinterperetation assumes, from beginning to end, the authenticity of the facts thus reinterpreted",<sup>203</sup> which the readers of the gospel would know by heart. In particular, the historical Jesus must have imposed silence. But the question then arises: What was his motive? It transpires that Minette de Tillesse has already given the answer in his earlier discussion of 8:27-33. The historical secret was inspired by "the fidelity of Jesus to the divine plan: salvation will be accomplished by the cross".<sup>204</sup> What had seemed to be a description of Mark's christology now turns out to be the real attitude of the Jesus of history. "What Mark thought" imperceptibly becomes "what Jesus thought". Minette de Tillesse produces a solution which in the last resort must be classed among the historicizing theories which he deprecates in his introduction, except that his Jesus acts not out of prudence with regard to the Roman authorities

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202 See, for example, ibid., 186, 279, 292, 354-355, 372.

203 "... cette réinterprétation suppose, d'un bout à l'autre, l'authenticité des faits ainsi réinterprétés." Ibid., 511.

204 "... la fidélité de Jésus au plan divin: le salut s'accomplira par la croix." Ibid., 514.



but in obedience to God. In the light of the main trend of the argument this attempt to root the secret in history is altogether too cursory. At one point there is a remarkably frank confession that, to Protestant eyes, the conclusions of Catholic research seem "dictated in advance".<sup>205</sup> One hesitates to level this charge against Minette de Tillesse himself, for only the imprimatur identifies his work as Catholic. Nevertheless, it has to be said that he fails to justify what inevitably appears as a last minute volte-face. He claims to know too much about the intentions of Jesus.

It is paradoxical, therefore, that Minette de Tillesse should deal so harshly with his compatriot, E. Trocmé, for being an historicizer.<sup>206</sup> Trocmé, like T.W. Manson, questions the necessity for a "global interpretation"<sup>207</sup> of the secrecy data.

In fact all these cases are very different from one another: in some places the passages are drawn from tradition, in others they are editorial notes; in some episodes the silence imposed is a question of the technique of the healer, in others it is a matter of the aim of the mission; some again simply reflect the presence of a group of disciples around Jesus and some are connected with the mystery surrounding the person of the Messiah.<sup>208</sup>

Trocmé dissolves the messianic secret away, and it is consistent with this approach that he also minimizes the significance of the christological titles in Mark, even including "Son of God", which is "a divine utterance (1:11; 9:7) which men have no right to imitate

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205 "... dictées d'avance." Ibid., 483.

206 See ibid., 19-21.

207 E. Trocmé, The Formation of the Gospel according to Mark, 156 (note 1).

208 Ibid., 124 (note 1). Cf. Trocmé's essay, 'Is there a Markan Christology?', in Christ and Spirit in the New Testament, 9-10.

(3:11-12; 5:7-8)",<sup>209</sup> and "Son of Man", "which the evangelist found somewhat unsatisfactory and did not really make his own".<sup>210</sup> Mark objects to any christology which would "pin down Jesus and bring him under the control of men",<sup>211</sup> preferring "a christology of awe based on the θεῖος ἄνθρωπος image of Jesus found in the miracle stories".<sup>212</sup> The proper attitude of men towards Jesus is one of stupefaction and fear. Trocmé is led to the surprising conclusion that "to the evangelist the question in 4:41, asked in fear and trembling by the disciples, was a better expression of genuine christological faith than the solemn statement in 8:29".<sup>213</sup>

The same conclusion is reached by K. Tagawa, whose research, published as Miracles et Évangile (1966), was supervised by Trocmé. Tagawa, too, claims that the so-called "messianic secret" is really no more than an artificial gathering together of several quite different features of Mark's gospel. The injunctions to silence after miracles are a means of emphasizing Mark's chief concern, which is "the spreading of the news of what Jesus has done".<sup>214</sup> But the commands to the demons and the injunction in 8:30 are indicative of "the evangelist's indifference towards these christological titles".<sup>215</sup> For Jesus transcends any definition that might be applied to him. This is the implication of the astonishment and fear, stressed throughout, which are evoked not only by the mighty works of Jesus but also by his teaching, his journey to suffering and death and his resurrection.

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209 Trocmé, 'Is there a Markan Christology?', in Christ and Spirit in the New Testament, 7.

210 Ibid., 8.

211 Ibid., 11.

212 Ibid., 12.

213 Ibid.

214 "... la diffusion de la nouvelle de ce que Jésus a fait." K. Tagawa, Miracles et Évangile, 171.

215 "... l'indifférence de l'évangéliste à l'égard de ces titres christologiques." Ibid., 173.



Astonishment is, in fact, one of the two leading themes of the gospel; the other is the disciples' lack of understanding, which Tagawa interprets as a polemic against the Jerusalem Church.

The five scholars under discussion in this section demonstrate that during the 1960s the debate about the messianic secret was by no means nearing an end. There is a fundamental difference of view between, on the one hand, Burkill, and, on the other hand, Boobyer and Minette de Tillesse. Burkill considers that the doctrine of the secret is subjected to a strain which at times it cannot withstand, with the result that Mark's gospel contradicts itself; Boobyer and Minette de Tillesse deny that any "strain on the secret" exists. But although the two latter scholars agree in what they deny, they themselves differ in what they affirm, Boobyer maintaining that the messianic secret is strictly kept until Jesus himself divulges it after his arrest, whereas Minette de Tillesse holds that the secret is, little by little, quite intentionally relaxed. Trocmé, supported by Tagawa, actually declares that, "under close scrutiny, the theory of the Messianic Secret simply vanishes for lack of evidence".<sup>216</sup> Minette de Tillesse is surely right to reply that "to wish to take away from Mark's gospel its messianic secret is to tear out its heart",<sup>217</sup> but Trocmé can at least be said to be raising the legitimate question whether the secrecy theme should properly be called the messianic secret.

#### Recent British Work

It was during the 1960s that British scholarship at last began

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216 Trocmé, 'Is there a Markan Christology?', in Christ and Spirit in the New Testament, 10.

217 "... vouloir enlever à l'évangile de Marc son secret messianique, c'est lui arracher le coeur." Minette de Tillesse, Le secret messianique dans l'Évangile de Marc, 21.

to explore paths other than the one mapped out for it by Vincent Taylor and T.W. Manson. R.S. Barbour noted the change of direction in an article which appeared in 1968.<sup>218</sup> He began by outlining the view of Mark's gospel which was widely held by British scholars in the 1950s. But now the consensus had shifted, "largely due to the fact that the findings of German scholarship have had a considerable influence in this country".<sup>219</sup>

C.K.Barrett is a striking example of a scholar in whose work the influence of German opinion has been plainly visible. The early Barrett stands solidly in the tradition of Taylor and Manson. In The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition (1947) the historicity of the messianic secret is not doubted: Wrede's explanation is considered to be "mistaken",<sup>220</sup> and it is Schweitzer who is Barrett's guide. The need for secrecy is realized by Jesus at the time of his temptation, a turning-point "whose theme is the meaning of Messiahship".<sup>221</sup> He knows that from now on it is God's will that he should follow the way of humility and weakness. "At first the secret is kept from everyone; then it is revealed to the Twelve; but only in the trial before the High Priest does Jesus make an open avowal of his claim."<sup>222</sup> The messianic secret is the reason why Jesus says so little about the Spirit: "to have claimed a pre-eminent measure of the Spirit would have been to make an open confession of Messiahship, if, as seems to have been the case, there was a general belief that the Messiah would be a bearer of God's Spirit".<sup>223</sup> Part of his messianic poverty is the absence of the signs of the Spirit.

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218 R.S.Barbour, 'Recent Study of the Gospel according to St.Mark', ET 79 (1967-1968), 324-329.

219 Ibid., 324.

220 C.K.Barrett, The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition, 119.

221 Ibid., 159.

222 Ibid., 119.

223 Ibid., 158.



Twenty years later, in Jesus and the Gospel Tradition, Barrett faced questions "from which for years I had been running away".<sup>224</sup> The answers which he now gives bear eloquent testimony to the impact upon him of the post-Bultmannians. For example, Barrett echoes Bornkamm when he claims that Jesus aroused messianic hopes and fears:

The ministry of Jesus formed a battle-ground on which was fought out a struggle for the leadership of Judaism. It is impossible that such a struggle should not have involved messianic ideas; that is, even if Jesus did not himself intend to raise the issue of messiahship it will almost certainly have been raised by others as a result of his actions. This seems in fact to have occurred; and there were elements in the teaching and work of Jesus that led directly to it.<sup>225</sup>

One such element of implicit christology was Jesus' intense awareness that God was his Father, "attested not only by the accounts of his prayers but also by his quiet assumption that what he says expresses fully and authoritatively the will of God";<sup>226</sup> another was the close connection which existed between Jesus' own person and work and the Kingdom of God, from which it was later possible to draw the conclusion that he was the messianic King. For Barrett no longer believes that Jesus' ministry was controlled by his consciousness of being Messias passurus and Messias absconditus. It was the early Church which made him the Messiah in order to argue his place within Judaism. The process was risky, in that it could easily have been derogatory to Jesus' greatness, but at the same time it was inevitable. "The historical tradition was obliged to go beyond history, sometimes even to falsify

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<sup>224</sup> Barrett, Jesus and the Gospel Tradition, ix.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 30.

history, precisely because it was historical."<sup>227</sup> This statement would seem to imply that Barrett would now say (though there is no explicit treatment in Jesus and the Gospel Tradition) that the messianic secret is a device which at once distorts history and is true to history. It distorts history in that during the ministry there was not in fact any concealment of a discovered Messiahship, and yet it is true to history in that the introduction of messianic categories into the story of Jesus was a correct deduction from what was latent in his life.

R.H. Fuller is another British scholar who has been strongly influenced by work in Germany.<sup>228</sup> The Fuller of The Mission and Achievement of Jesus, published in 1954, believes that the messianic secret belongs to Jesus' history.

The reaction of Jesus to Peter's acknowledgement of him [in Mark 8: 29-31] is distinctly reserved. He neither accepts it unqualifiedly (as one would expect him to accept it, if the episode were intended to be a post-Resurrection appearance), nor rejects it out of hand. Instead, he charges Peter to tell no man 'of him' (viz., that he is the Christos), and goes on at once to speak of the suffering of the Son of Man. Jesus seems to imply that the title 'Christos' is in some sense predicable of him (it is Peter's word, not his own, but it is correct as far as it goes, and in a certain sense). Everything however turns, not upon the title, but the content. And the title cannot be filled with content until a certain history has been accomplished: 'The Son of man must suffer many things.'<sup>229</sup>

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227 Ibid., 34.

228 Fuller has admittedly been teaching in the U.S.A. since the mid-1950s. But his teachers were Hoskyns and Creed, to whose memory The Mission and Achievement of Jesus is dedicated.

229 Fuller, The Mission and Achievement of Jesus, 109-110.



Jesus knows himself to be the unique Son of God, he understands his earthly vocation as the fulfilment of the rôle of the Suffering Servant, and he acts proleptically as the one who is destined to be the triumphant Son of Man.

But the later Fuller denies that the messianic secret can be historical fact. If it were, it would certainly be contained within the pre-Markan pericopes, whereas in fact the secrecy motif is invariably found not in the tradition but in Mark's redactional additions. What, then, is the purpose of the injunctions to silence, the disciples' lack of understanding and the theory of parables, which are the most prominent features of Mark's redaction and which together supply the key to his theology? Fuller's answer is essentially that of Conzelmann and Marxsen: the messianic secret tones down the christology of the pre-Markan tradition. The secrecy theme is rendered necessary by the combination of the isolated units of tradition with the narrative of the passion and resurrection. For the individual pericopes were already thoroughly impregnated with post-Easter christology and would be used in the Church's preaching as open proclamations of the risen Christ; but in linking them to the story of the passion Mark needs to qualify the impression that the works and words of Jesus are in themselves direct revelations of his messianic glory.

By his device of the Messianic secret and by using the pericopes as a preface to the passion narrative Mark himself has sought to tone down the epiphany motif in the interest of his own kerygma of the cross and resurrection.<sup>230</sup>

Mark's gospel is "a powerful reassertion, in terms of a 'life of Jesus',

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<sup>230</sup> Fuller, The Foundations of New Testament Christology (Fontana edition), 228. Cf. Fuller, The New Testament in Current Study, 95.

of the Pauline kerygma of the cross".<sup>231</sup> The messianic secret is really an aside to the reader.

He is intended to see that the miracles, along with the other disclosures of Jesus in his ministry, are revelations of the risen Christ addressed to him, the reader. As revelations during the earthly life of Jesus they are mysterious, indirect, paradoxical in character.<sup>232</sup>

A younger British scholar, M.E. Glasswell, also sees the correct line of interpretation as that which runs from Wrede, through Bultmann, to Conzelmann, and he himself quite consciously stands in that tradition. Glasswell's basic standpoint is that Mark's narrative is intended "to reveal the relation between history and the gospel in the person of Jesus himself".<sup>233</sup> History is neither more nor less than the presupposition of the Gospel, which the Gospel has to explain.

Mark is concerned primarily with the Gospel and not simply with history. His use of the tradition, with its context in the church's kerygma, serves that concern. His account is not meant to take the place of the Gospel but to show its origin, basis and presupposition.<sup>234</sup>

In the setting of a "life of Jesus" the function of the theme of secrecy, which is a secondary interpretative device of the evangelist, is that it "relates history to the gospel but does not identify them".<sup>235</sup>

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231 Fuller, A Critical Introduction to the New Testament, 110.

232 Fuller, Interpreting the Miracles, 76.

233 Glasswell, 'The Beginning of the Gospel: A Study of St. Mark's Gospel with regard to its First Verse', in New Testament Christianity for Africa and the World, 40.

234 Glasswell, 'The Use of Miracles in the Markan Gospel', in Miracles: Cambridge Studies in their Philosophy and History, 154.

235 Glasswell, 'The Beginning of the Gospel: A Study of St. Mark's Gospel with regard to its First Verse', in New Testament Christianity for Africa and the World, 40.



Glasswell's view of the circumstances of Jesus' life is that in all probability messianic expectations were aroused in the disciples. Jesus may well have rejected their belief in his Messiahship, looking instead for the Kingdom of God and a coming Son of Man. "He probably did in fact die on the false charge of being a messianic pretender",<sup>236</sup> messianic claims by some of his followers having been the pretext for his arrest and crucifixion. But the messianic secret as we have it in Mark does not belong to this background. Rather it is the resurrection which brings the idea of the secret into being.

What is involved is the whole issue of belief in Jesus as Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man, as proclaimed by the post-Resurrection Gospel (see 9:9), set against history and Jesus' own eschatological preaching and activity, which history has put in question.<sup>237</sup>

As the Church looks back from the resurrection, it now appears that history itself cannot reveal the identity of Jesus. Mark 8:29 f. shows that this would be true even if as a matter of fact it had been suggested that Jesus was the Messiah. It would still be true even if Jesus had claimed Messiahship for himself. As far as Mark is concerned, Jesus could not adequately be the Messiah in history; a valid perception of his Messiahship depends upon his passion and resurrection. The idea of a secret enables Mark to take account of the difficulties of history concerning any ascription of Messiahship to the historical Jesus. The crucifixion made of Jesus' life a riddle, for how could a crucified man be the Messiah? But the cross was in turn negated by the resurrection, and the presentation of the identity of Jesus which meets us in Mark's gospel is the fruit of reflection,

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<sup>236</sup> Glasswell, 'The Concealed Messiahship in the Synoptic Gospels and the Significance of this for the Study of the Life of Jesus and of the Church', unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Durham University, 1965), 125.

<sup>237</sup> Glasswell, 'The Use of Miracles in the Markan Gospel', in Miracles: Cambridge Studies in their Philosophy and History, 161.

in the light of the resurrection, upon the fact that Jesus had been crucified. The incognito of Jesus "is derived from the passion".<sup>238</sup> The gospel itself grew backwards from the narrative of the passion, and, throughout, it is the passion which is the ground of the secret. The death of Jesus was historically contradictory of belief in his Messiahship, and yet that death is central to the reinterpretation of Messiahship by Mark. Beyond the resurrection both the eschatological expectation of Jesus himself (which itself remained unfulfilled at the time of his death) and the messianic hopes of the disciples are reinterpreted in terms of Jesus as the Son of Man.

In his treatment of the Son of Man material Glasswell contends that, within the context of Jesus' life, Jesus and the Son of Man can only have been distinguished. 8:38 shows that, though they are closely related, they are not identified; but 8:31 reveals that their common identity has been established beyond the resurrection. The use of the Son of Man title in 8:31, 9:9, 12, 31, 10:33, 45, 14:21 and 41 "can only be explained on the basis of the later identification of the crucified and risen Jesus with the Son of Man, not as a historical mode of speech".<sup>239</sup> For "it is as difficult to identify a historical person with the Son of Man as to identify a crucified man with the Messiah. But the Gospel does both together; and this is the explanation of the secrecy-theme in Mark."<sup>240</sup> The evangelist employs the Son of Man title in order to present the Christian view of Jesus' Messiahship. The point of 8:31 is that suffering, death and resurrection are the means by which Jesus is the Messiah. The so-called predictions of the passion are in fact ex eventu kerygmatic pronouncements which stress

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<sup>238</sup> Glasswell, 'The Concealed Messiahship in the Synoptic Gospels and the Significance of this for the Study of the Life of Jesus and of the Church', unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Durham University, 1965), 227.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.



the central importance in Mark's account of the passion and resurrection as the basic presupposition of the Gospel. The juxtaposition of Son of Man sayings and the theme of secrecy is Mark's own interpretative work. During his life Jesus silences all acclaim of him as the Messiah and questions the validity of historical Messiahship (12:35f.); only in the immediate context of his passion does he affirm the messianic title, but even then he does so with his eyes fixed on the future (14:62). The conception of Jesus as the Son of Man is deliberately set over against the notion of historical Messiahship. "Mark is not concerned with Jesus' historical identification as the Christ... but with Jesus' identification as the Christ for faith, as he is proclaimed in the Gospel."<sup>241</sup>

Christian faith is on the basis of the passion and resurrection, and the purpose of the messianic secret is to guard against the danger that an account of the words and deeds of the historical Jesus might be considered the equivalent of the preaching of the Gospel.

Mark's work, in its apparent reflection back on Jesus's life, making use of the Church's kerygmatic tradition, must illustrate the identity of the one proclaimed but not make a false appeal to history to demonstrate the truth of the Gospel ...

... The Church's christology answers the questions raised by Jesus' life ... But the answer does not come directly from Jesus' life itself. The signs of the kingdom have become signs for faith in Jesus. The theme of the messianic secret is an inner necessity of Mark's presentation of this development in terms of an account of the historical Jesus.<sup>242</sup>

The messianic secret safeguards the distinction between history and

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<sup>241</sup> Glasswell, 'The Use of Miracles in the Markan Gospel', in Miracles: Cambridge Studies in their Philosophy and History, 157.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 161.

the Gospel, and yet at the same time it points to "a real relation ... between the historical Jesus, whose historicity is a necessary precondition of the Gospel, and the Gospel itself".<sup>243</sup> History is not presented as other than it is but neither is it emptied of all significance.

Glasswell's understanding of the messianic secret requires us to suppose that Mark himself made a careful distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith.

Thus the theme of the messianic secret in Mark, which terminates at the resurrection (Mark 9:9), should be seen to differentiate between the historical question about Jesus and the question of faith so far as the type of answer which is possible in each case is concerned, but yet allow that both questions can be answered in respect of one and the same person. The question, "Whom [sic] do you say that I am?", is a question asked about the historical Jesus, but it can only be answered adequately from faith and beyond the circumstances of Jesus' life (see Mark 8: 27 ff.; 9:1 ff.).<sup>244</sup>

But it is highly improbable that the distinction between history and faith is one which would or even could have occurred to Mark. He "does not understand the Jesus-tradition to be one thing and the Christ-kerygma another".<sup>245</sup> "The secret ... is not at all a device for bringing together two disparate views of Jesus. Mark knows only one Jesus: the Messiah-Son of God."<sup>246</sup> The distinction which Mark does make is between the humiliated Jesus and the exalted Jesus. The Mark who emerges from Glasswell's investigation lacks plausibility

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Glasswell, 'Jesus Christ', Theology 68 (1965), 562-563.

<sup>245</sup> L.S. Hay, 'Mark's Use of the Messianic Secret', JAAR 35 (1967), 27.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 26.



as a man of the first century and appears to be concerned with the problems that vex theologians of the twentieth.

Glasswell is an interesting example of a British scholar whose principal debt is to continental research, but, of course, his work is not widely known outside the scholarly world. The man who has probably done more than any other to bridge the gap between Britain and the Continent for the interested reader is D.E. Nineham, for, as Robert Morgan has remarked, it is only since the appearance of his St. Mark in 1963 that "the methods and results of Wrede's research have become readily available to non-specialists in this country".<sup>247</sup> Nineham's teacher at Oxford was R.H. Lightfoot, who, at a time when New Testament scholarship in Britain was dominated by the triumvirate of Dodd, Taylor and T.W. Manson, conveyed to his pupils doubts about the tenability of some of their conclusions. Nineham himself has recently written: "Like everyone else who knew him, I was deeply impressed by Lightfoot's integrity and painstaking thoroughness; so when I myself began to teach it was natural that I should feel compelled to explore further his doubts about the 'received' position".<sup>248</sup> Nineham's own early work, therefore, was a conscious dialogue with Dodd and Taylor in particular. In 1955 he subjected to a critical scrutiny Dodd's hypothesis that the Church preserved an outline account of Jesus' ministry which governed the order of events in Mark's gospel;<sup>249</sup> and in 1956, in a review of The Life and Ministry of Jesus, he questioned Taylor's assumption that it was Mark's intention to write a book in which the course and development of the life of Jesus could be traced.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> R.Morgan, '"Negative" Criticism of the Gospels?', Religious Studies 6 (1970), 77.

<sup>248</sup> D.E.Nineham, 'Introduction', Explorations in Theology 1, 2.

<sup>249</sup> Nineham, 'The Order of Events in St.Mark's Gospel - an Examination of Dr.Dodd's Hypothesis', in Studies in the Gospels. This essay is reprinted in Explorations in Theology 1.

<sup>250</sup> Nineham, 'The Gospels and the Life of Jesus', Theology 59 (1956), 97-103.

Then, in a series of articles on "Eye-witness Testimony and the Gospel Tradition", he stated his own view that "if it is possible to place a plausible historical interpretation on Mark's account, it is also possible... to place a doctrinal interpretation upon it. And many feel that such an interpretation arises more naturally out of Mark's own language, and involves less straining of the evidence."<sup>251</sup>

The fundamental question which Nineham is asking in these early explorations is: What is a gospel? If the issue of historicity is raised too soon, the way to an appreciation of Mark's intention is obstructed. Nineham warns against the danger lest "in the effort to derive from the Gospels truths (however important) which ... they were not primarily designed to convey, we should lose some precious drops of that truth which it was their first aim to communicate".<sup>252</sup> He justifiably complains that it is misleading to use the word "sceptical" in a pejorative sense to refer to the view that the attempt to write history fell outside the immediate interests and purposes of the evangelists.

It is no surprise, therefore, that when, in his commentary, Nineham comes to discuss the messianic secret, he is quick to acknowledge the historical difficulties and to see the secret, including the theory of parables, as the doctrine of Mark. But he does not advance beyond Lightfoot's interpretation - that the messianic secret is the answer to a problem:

The question had apparently been raised: if Jesus was indeed the Messiah, why did he not claim the title earlier and more outspokenly, and why was his Messiahship not more fully and enthusiastically recognized during his

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<sup>251</sup> Nineham, 'Eye-witness Testimony and the Gospel Tradition' 'I', Explorations in Theology 1, 36.

<sup>252</sup> Nineham, 'The Gospels and the Life of Jesus', Theology 59 (1956), 103.



earthly life, at any rate by his disciples?<sup>253</sup>

There is no hint here that the theme of secrecy has positive, rather than merely defensive, theological content. Nineham seems unaware of the contributions of early redaction criticism towards the understanding of Mark's gospel. Marxsen, for example, does not appear in the index, but Dibelius (the mentor, significantly, of Lightfoot) is referred to frequently. Nineham's St. Mark, then, is a popularization of pre-war continental scholarship; for a commentary influenced by post-war work on the Continent it was necessary to wait until the publication in 1976 of Hugh Anderson's The Gospel of Mark.

It is certainly not the case that Nineham's commentary received a universal welcome in Britain. In a lengthy critique in Vindications, entitled "The Quandary of Historical Scepticism", A.T.Hanson claimed to detect an unexamined assumption that "virtually no trustworthy historical information can have survived the period of oral transmission".<sup>254</sup> Nineham was able to reply by pointing to explicit statements of his own to the contrary, such as that "we can often be virtually sure that what the tradition is offering us are the authentic deeds, and especially the authentic words, of the historic Jesus".<sup>255</sup> Hanson himself is guilty of fathering upon Nineham the false assumption that an "explanation" in terms of religious significance rules out an "explanation" in terms of historical authenticity. However, Nineham is fully prepared to concede that there is a difference of emphasis between himself and Hanson concerning the function of a commentary. Nineham

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<sup>253</sup> Nineham, St. Mark, 31.

<sup>254</sup> A.T.Hanson, 'The Quandary of Historical Scepticism', in Vindications, 75. The words are italicized by Hanson.

<sup>255</sup> Nineham, '... et hoc genus omne - an Examination of Dr. A.T.Hanson's Strictures on Some Recent Gospel Study', in Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox, 202. The reference is to Nineham's St. Mark, 51.

cannot share Hanson's "intense historical preoccupation";<sup>256</sup> the commentator's primary task is to elucidate the gospel's religious message. In any case, Hanson greatly over-simplifies the nature of the historical problem: "his view appears to be ... that either an incident happened as St. Mark relates or else he (or his predecessors) 'invented' it".<sup>257</sup> This is an inappropriate antithesis: in practice the evidence is often such that the historian has no choice but to suspend judgment on the question of historicity and return a verdict of non liquet. If this is "historical scepticism", then, asks Nineham elsewhere, what would the contributors to Vindications desire to see in its place?

Not presumably "historical credulity" - perhaps they would use some such expression as "historical realism", or "a sober historical approach". What would that consist in? I imagine it would be said: "in applying the historical method to the Bible in a reasonable way". And what does that mean? In practice it often seems to mean believing what the biblical text says unless there are quite overwhelming reasons for questioning it. Professor John Knox has noted the frequency with which in writings on the gospels we meet such expressions as "there seems no need to doubt what the evangelist says at this point". But if this is how theologians understand the application of historical method, it must be said at once that it is not an understanding any competent historian would accept for one moment.<sup>258</sup>

Hugh Anderson's commentary can be seen as a vindication of Nineham

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256 Nineham, '... et hoc genus omne - an Examination of Dr.A.T.Hanson's Strictures on Some Recent Gospel Study', in Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox, 210.

257 Ibid., 212.

258 Nineham, 'History and the Gospel', Explorations in Theology 1, 77.



against Vindications! Anderson, too, affirms that the commentator's chief concern must be to uncover the theological intention of the evangelist; the onus of proof falls squarely on those who persist in the view that "Mark presents a fairly straight report of Jesus' life".<sup>259</sup> Anderson and Nineham are in agreement that the evangelists were unlike modern historians in that they had different standards of accuracy with regard to the past and different purposes in writing about it. What might satisfy a modern historian as an historical account of the life and death of Jesus would have seemed to the evangelists inadequate to express the truth about him, if not even a falsification: a good narrative tradition would be one which brought out the full truth. Anderson suggests that "it is both helpful and liberating to think of Mark as writing two-dimensionally or as telling two stories".<sup>260</sup> The first, "the story of Jesus' way with the world of his time and place",<sup>261</sup> is historical-descriptive and "may very well convey solid information about Jesus";<sup>262</sup> the second, "the story of God's ongoing way with the world in this Jesus",<sup>263</sup> is theological-interpretative. Nineham, too, has made use of the idea of two stories, while recognizing that the evangelists would not have been aware of the distinction, which "presupposes ideas derived from the Enlightenment".<sup>264</sup>

In his discussion of the messianic secret Anderson marks an advance upon Nineham in seeing it as much more than a defensive device. Already this was the case in Jesus and Christian Origins (1964), which, though

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259 H. Anderson, The Gospel of Mark, 6.

260 Ibid., 22.

261 Ibid., 40.

262 Ibid., 22-23.

263 Ibid., 40.

264 Nineham, The Use and Abuse of the Bible, 181.

it appeared only a year after Nineham's St. Mark, displayed an acquaintance with the latest continental work which was lacking in Nineham. Here Anderson interprets the messianic secret as doing justice to Mark's equal emphasis on the kerygma and history. The old liberals' quest of a plain biographical portrait of Jesus was rooted in their failure to perceive the kerygmatic nature of the sources; certain more recent theologians run the opposite risk of divorcing the kerygma from history. But Mark the evangelist holds history and the kerygma in tension - and the messianic secret is the means by which he does so. On the one hand, the secret "indicates Mark's conviction that the reality of the Son of God, 'Christ', is present already in the historical way and appearance of the Son of Man, 'Jesus'";<sup>265</sup> on the other hand, "inasmuch as the reality of 'Christ' is provisionally concealed in the earthly way of 'Jesus', and neither Peter nor the other disciples are idealized as in any full sense believers in the 'Christ', Mark's interest in the 'secret' is a sign of his undoubted respect for the history of Jesus of Nazareth".<sup>266</sup> There is the clear danger here of depicting the evangelist as "enunciating abstract truths about history",<sup>267</sup> but Anderson guards against this by stressing what he calls "the concreteness of the Marcan eschatology".<sup>268</sup> Following Marxsen and J.M. Robinson, he underlines the importance of chapter 13 in Mark's total scheme. The Church has the comfort of knowing that the parousia cannot be long delayed; meanwhile it must face the challenge "to endure with fortitude, even as Jesus himself endured, the toil and travail of a world in which the warfare between the Spirit and Satan goes on".<sup>269</sup>

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265 Anderson, Jesus and Christian Origins, 244.

266 Ibid.

267 Ibid., 246.

268 Ibid.

269 Ibid., 247.



Anderson's commentary maintains the same "dynamic" approach. If any change of emphasis is discernible, it is that he now brings the messianic secret into the closest possible relationship to the passion and death of Jesus: "the 'secret' allows Mark to proclaim the good news that God has acted in 'hiddenness' in his Son, whose way is the lowly way of the cross".<sup>270</sup> The centurion's confession is specifically a response to the death of Jesus.

Precisely there, in the obscurity, lowliness, and humiliation of the cross, and not in any miraculous display of power such as an unbelieving world demands in proof of God's presence, the God of Jesus confronts men. Only in and through his death on the cross can it become known who Jesus really is, the one in whom God seeks out men to fulfil his saving purpose with them. Then and only then too can true discipleship to this Jesus become possible.<sup>271</sup>

Anderson is at pains to emphasize that Mark is not interested in christological reflection for its own sake: "what is decisive about Jesus is his suffering and death and call to men to follow him",<sup>272</sup> and part of the gospel's purpose 'is to campaign against "balcony-type Christians who are too high for the mission and discipleship that in Mark's terms necessarily involves cross-bearing and self-sacrifice".<sup>273</sup>

It is tempting to say that Anderson's "theological" reading of the secret is now the normative one in Britain, but that would be to claim too much. The "conservative" view continues to convince not a few British scholars. J.D.G. Dunn brings three objections against Wrede.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Anderson, The Gospel of Mark, 7.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 348.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>274</sup> In 'The Messianic Secret in Mark', Tyndale Bulletin 21 (1970), 92-117.

In the first place, he unduly narrows the scope of the secrecy motif: the injunctions after healing miracles, for example, have nothing to do with a specifically messianic secret. Secondly, Wrede gives insufficient weight to "a counter-balancing publicity-revelation theme".<sup>275</sup> Thirdly, Dunn singles out four incidents - the feeding of the 5,000, Peter's confession, the entry into Jerusalem and the trial and condemnation of Jesus - "whose historicity is well grounded and whose central significance is pre-eminently Messianic".<sup>276</sup> Having concluded that the messianic character of the tradition belongs to history, Dunn goes on to offer an historical explanation of the messianic secret proper. "The command to silence [at Caesarea Philippi] is given not so much because Jesus' Messiahship is secret, but because it is misunderstood."<sup>277</sup> Throughout his ministry Jesus must constantly have been confronted by the dilemma - "could He accept or use simpliciter titles which meant one thing to Himself and something very different to His hearers?"<sup>278</sup> C.H. Dodd adopts the same explanation. "Beneath the sharp interchange [between Jesus and Peter] lies a profound difference of view."<sup>279</sup> The title "Messiah" was an embarrassment to Jesus, "and he preferred that it should not be used publicly, until at last his hand was forced".<sup>280</sup> C.F.D. Moule, in his main contribution to the discussion,<sup>281</sup> while he claims to analyse the material relating to secrecy "without begging the question of historicity",<sup>282</sup> clearly favours a position similar to that of Dunn and Dodd: Jesus

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275 Ibid., 98.

276 Ibid., 110.

277 Ibid., 111.

278 Ibid.

279 C.H.Dodd, The Founder of Christianity (Fontana edition), 112.

280 Ibid., 111.

281 'On Defining the Messianic Secret in Mark', in Jesus and Paulus (Kümmel Festschrift).

282 Ibid., 251.



enjoined silence concerning his Messiahship to forestall false interpretations of it. Moule reiterates this view in his recent The Origin of Christology, where, in opposition to the suggestion of D.Flusser that the messianic secret can be explained by the Jewish idea that no man can claim to be the Messiah until he has achieved his messianic task,<sup>283</sup> he argues that "it seems to be closer to the evidence to say, not that Jesus refused or even postponed the claim to be Messiah, but, rather, that, when offered the title, he reinterpreted it".<sup>284</sup> Moule admits that this is "an absurdly old-fashioned conclusion",<sup>285</sup> but in his opinion it fits the evidence best.

What Anderson's commentary demonstrates is that his correction and refinement of Wrede is capable of meeting Dunn's three objections. In the first place, Anderson accepts that the "messianic secret" is a misnomer and he usually refers instead to "the 'secret'",<sup>286</sup> but he is still able to maintain that most of Wrede's data do belong to a single theme. The injunctions after healing miracles, for example, to quote the comment on 7:36, represent "Mark's warning to his readers that the miracle itself is not the decisive thing, and that admiration for Jesus merely as a wonder-worker does not come near the truth that waits to be revealed (when his way to the cross is complete)".<sup>287</sup> That truth is the paradox that "God's victorious purpose is achieved through lowliness and humiliation".<sup>288</sup> Secondly, Anderson makes the point that it is

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<sup>283</sup> See D.Flusser, 'Two Notes on the Midrash on 2 Sam.7', IEJ 9(1959), 99-109. Flusser's suggestion is taken up by R.N.Longenecker in 'The Messianic Secret in the Light of Recent Discoveries', EQ 41(1969), 207-215. A similar view is advanced by J.C.O'Neill in 'The Silence of Jesus', NTS 15(1968-1969), 153-167. O'Neill writes (page 165): "I suggest that most Jews at the time would understand that the Messiah would not be able to claim Messiahship for himself, but must wait for God to enthrone him. If this theory is right, Jesus' silence is part of his messianic role."

<sup>284</sup> C.F.D. Moule, The Origin of Christology, 34-35.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>286</sup> See, for example, Anderson, The Gospel of Mark, 94, 155, 192 and 216.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 216.

precisely those who hold that the "secret" belongs to Jesus' history who are in difficulties with the publicity theme, for they are forced to account for the fact that Jesus sometimes performs miracles publicly. From Anderson's own point of view it is not a problem that revelation and concealment exist side by side. "One can understand why in the Gospel narrative there can be no complete suppression of Jesus' supernatural authority: because it is of God, it must show itself."<sup>289</sup> But the close connection between the secret and the cross is not affected by the fact that some miracles are public and that sometimes Jesus' command to silence is ignored. Thirdly, Anderson does not deny, for example, that Peter did in fact confess Jesus as the Messiah. He is quite prepared to say: "The political implications of the title probably explain why Jesus does not appear to have appropriated it during his ministry and why ... he severely reprimanded Peter for using it".<sup>290</sup> But, having said that, Anderson is at pains to make a necessary distinction between tradition and redaction so that justice may be done to the standpoint of Mark himself. "Mark knew retrospectively that the secret of who Jesus was from the very beginning of his career was only finally disclosed in his passion and death",<sup>291</sup> and the function of the secret is "to preserve the integrity of the historic earthly way of Jesus ... as a movement toward the denouement of the cross".<sup>292</sup> Anderson is able to make convincing sense of the secrecy material as it meets us in Mark; indeed, the entire commentary is a very satisfying presentation of Mark's total witness.

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<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 214-215.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.



### Some American Contributions

So far in this account there have been only occasional mentions of American scholarship, for the main emphasis has quite deliberately been upon the contrast between British and continental approaches to the problem of the messianic secret. But no history would be complete without some consideration of the important contributions which have come from America during the last twenty years.

We begin with James M. Robinson's The Problem of History in Mark (1957), where it is argued that the history of Jesus is seen by Mark as the embodiment of a cosmic struggle between the Spirit and Satan, a struggle which continues in the life of the Church until the eschatological reign of God, inaugurated in Jesus' work of teaching and healing, finally comes in its fulness. This basic point of view leads Robinson (following Bauernfeind) to interpret the silencing of demons as the rejection by Jesus of their hostile self-assertion; it is not the case that Jesus silences them because they know his true identity. Robinson contends that "the variety in form and mood"<sup>293</sup> of the injunctions to silence in Mark (there is no hostility, for example, in 5:43 and 7:36) calls in question Wrede's assumption that they are all to be understood in the same way. The Problem of History in Mark therefore contains no further treatment of the messianic secret.

But A New Quest of the Historical Jesus (1959) marks a change of mind. Robinson now sees the centrality of the secret and adopts Conzelmann's explanation: the "kerygmatic meaning of the 'historical section' is constitutive of the Gospel as a literary form".<sup>294</sup> He reiterates this view in a later article on the "new quest":

Prior to Mark, the oral tradition had already become messianic or Christological. Mark's

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293 J.M. Robinson, The Problem of History in Mark, 38n.

294 Robinson, A New Quest of the Historical Jesus, 55.

work consists in superimposing upon this Christological tradition his own paradoxical understanding of the kerygma, explicated in terms of the secretness of the messiahship. Thus, two kerygmaticizing phases are involved. The congregation made use of the Jesus-tradition to present its Christology. But this Christology seemed inadequately kerygmatic to Mark. So, rather than returning to the Pauline alternative of proclaiming only the cross, Mark accepted the principle that the Jesus-tradition must itself present the true kerygma. Accordingly, he corrected the Jesus-tradition to bring it into line with the true kerygma, thereby producing the Gattung "gospel".<sup>295</sup>

Robinson goes on to suggest a concrete context in which the idea of the secret Messiahship served a vital purpose. He posits a background of controversy similar to that with which Paul was contending in 2 Corinthians: Jesus was being presented by certain evangelists as a  $\theta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omicron\varsigma \ \acute{\alpha}\nu\eta\rho$ . Paul was able to meet this threat by recourse to the kerygma alone; but, as the  $\theta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omicron\varsigma \ \acute{\alpha}\nu\eta\rho$  Jesus-tradition continued to circulate, his solution proved increasingly difficult to maintain, and Mark was obliged to confront the heresy on its own ground. This he did by means of the messianic secret, with which he superimposed upon the tradition "the paradox of Christian existence, the theology of the cross".<sup>296</sup>

The fullest attempt to relate Mark to christological controversy is that of a pupil of Robinson, T.J. Weeden, who argues that a theios-aner christology was "the heresy that necessitated Mark's

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295 Robinson, 'The Recent Debate on the "New Quest"', JBR 30 (1962), 202.

296 Ibid., 204.



gospel".<sup>297</sup> Weeden maintains that the gospel evinces a struggle between two conflicting christologies: a theios-aner christology, which was being upheld by a group within the Markan community, and the evangelist's own suffering Son of Man christology.

In all likelihood the Markan heretics claimed that their position went back to the disciples themselves. Against such a formidable claim Mark's only recourse in his attempt to save the faith of his community was to call upon a higher authority than the disciples - Jesus! Thus he enacts the dispute raging in his community by staging it before the reader in the conflict between Jesus and the disciples.<sup>298</sup>

Weeden claims that the original readers of the gospel "would have instinctively turned to the Markan characters, their portrayal, and the events which engulfed them as the starting point for understanding the composition".<sup>299</sup> In a knowledge of Hellenistic literary hermeneutics he believes that he has found "a positive frame of reference ... that places one in the thought patterns of a reader in the first century".<sup>300</sup>

Weeden's interpretation of Mark is entirely controlled by his theory that the portrayal of the disciples is a literary device in the service of a bitter polemic. One result is that the secrecy theme breaks up. For example, the disciples' blindness clearly cannot be said to be intended to point up the significance of Easter. Again,

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297 This is the title of the article in which Weeden first propounded his theory. See ZNW 59 (1968), 145-158.

298 Weeden, 'The Heresy that Necessitated Mark's Gospel', ZNW 59 (1968), 155.

299 Weeden, Mark: Traditions in Conflict, 18.

300 Ibid., 12.

Weeden denies that, since the time of messianic revelation is only inaugurated with the resurrection, all messianic titles are suppressed during the ministry; on the contrary, Jesus publicly identifies himself as the Son of Man, which is the true christology (see 2: 10,28; 8: 31-32; 14: 62). As for the command to silence in 9: 9, which Wrede regarded as the hermeneutical key, it "has no more profound function than to serve as an explanatory remark to the reader, explicating why the resurrection story of the evangelist's opponents [namely, the transfiguration narrative] could not have been a bona fide resurrection experience".<sup>301</sup> The remaining aspects of the secret, notably the silencing of demons and the refusal of Jesus to allow the healed to speak of their cure, are also made by Weeden to subserve Mark's polemic against the theios-aner christology. Weeden argues that in both these instances Mark is appropriating his opponents' own secrecy motif and using it against them. For there is evidence in chapter 4 (see verses 11-12, 14-20 and 34) that the heretics claimed to be in possession of a secret Gospel, for which their term was ὁ λόγος. Mark discredits their claim in 8: 32: "by stating that he spoke the word παρησίᾳ (openly), Mark, in opposition to the esoteric claims of his enemies, stresses the unambiguous, unconcealed character of Jesus' christological teaching".<sup>302</sup> Furthermore, 15: 39 shows that it is an outsider, not an initiate, who at the climax of the gospel makes a correct confession; and he does so "by virtue of witnessing the living out of Son-of-man christology".<sup>303</sup>

Weeden's theory has a certain attractiveness in that Mark seems to come sharply into focus against a plausible first-century background. However, the view that the essential clue to the gospel is that a

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 156.



heresy is being opposed is, in the end, little more than a guess; it remains possible to interpret the evidence without postulating the existence within the Markan community of an heretical group. There is in fact no reason to think that Peter's confession in 8: 29 is wrong, though certainly it is inadequate. Weeden illustrates the danger that the redaction critic can let his imagination run away with him. Despite his careful remarks about methodology at the beginning of Mark: Traditions in Conflict, where he professes to be on his guard against "the hermeneutical snare of reading into the Gospel preconceived ideas that do violence to the author's intent",<sup>304</sup> Weeden gives the impression of having forced his theory upon the material. C.J.A. Hickling makes the telling point that Weeden's treatment presupposes that Mark used the tradition for his own ends, whereas the greater likelihood is that he served it.<sup>305</sup>

A related criticism is brought by M.D. Hooker against Norman Perrin, who has made a number of contributions towards the interpretation of Mark. Miss Hooker refers with surprise to a comment by Perrin concerning E. Best's The Temptation and the Passion: The Markan Soteriology: "a strange book in that the author combines redaction criticism with the assumption 'that Mark believes that the incidents he uses actually happened'!"<sup>306</sup> Hooker remarks: "The twentieth-century critic must not build the first-century evangelist in his own image, and assume that because he himself has despaired of discovering certainty regarding the historicity of his material, and has come to terms with this by placing more and more emphasis

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>305</sup> See Hickling, 'A Problem of Method in Gospel Research', Religious Studies 10 (1974), 345.

<sup>306</sup> Hooker, 'In his own Image?', in What about the New Testament? Essays in Honour of Christopher Evans, 36. Perrin's comment occurs in What is Redaction Criticism?, 83.

on its theological meaning, the evangelists did the same".<sup>307</sup> For the evangelists, in fact, the events which they wrote about were historical and theological at the same time.

However, perhaps Perrin's exclamation mark should be seen as a momentary lapse, for he has helpful observations to make about what he calls "the literary Gattung 'gospel'", which he defines as "a narrative of an event from the past in which interests and concerns of the past, present and future have flowed together".<sup>308</sup> His characteristic stress is on the early Christians' present experience of the risen Jesus, "without which the future would have appeared barren and the past would have been soon forgotten".<sup>309</sup> It is the experience of the present reality of Jesus as risen which, argues Perrin, has given rise to the entire Son of Man tradition. That tradition is the product of the Church's theological reflection on Dan. 7: 13 in the light of the resurrection.

Perrin's last writings view Mark as "the apocalyptic drama".<sup>310</sup> "Mark can allow past, present, and future to merge in his narrative since the time represented is the apocalyptic time of history hurrying to its climax and end."<sup>311</sup> There is "a consistent movement in the gospel through the passion, including of course the resurrection, to the parousia".<sup>312</sup> Perrin sees the transfiguration as an anticipation of the parousia; and it is the parousia, not the resurrection,

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307 Hooker, art. cit., 37-38.

308 Perrin, 'The Literary Gattung "Gospel" - Some Observations', ET 82 (1970-1971), 7.

309 Perrin, What is Redaction Criticism?, 77.

310 This is the sub-title of the chapter on Mark in The New Testament: An Introduction.

311 Perrin, The New Testament: An Introduction, 145.

312 Ibid., 148.



which is referred to in 14: 28 and 16: 7.

Fundamentally, Mark is an apocalypse in its purpose. For all that he writes realistic narrative, the intent of the evangelist is precisely that of the apocalyptic seers in the discourses in Mark 13 and its parallels or that of John of Patmos in the book of Revelation.

He addresses his readers, whom he sees standing between the passion and the parousia of Jesus, to prepare them for the imminent parousia.<sup>313</sup>

Mark is mimetic narrative, which involves the readers as participants in the story as a whole. They are caught up into the narrative, led from Galilee via Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem, and, in a deliberately open-ended climax, left standing with the women at the empty tomb.

Mark's purpose is to bring his readers to a true understanding of christology and to the realization that they are being challenged to discipleship against the coming of Jesus as the Son of Man.

This is the context in which Perrin interprets the messianic secret. At the beginning of the gospel Mark's readers learn that the demons recognize Jesus as the Son of God. But Mark knows that "to understand him as Son of God, one has to interpret that concept by means of the nuances that can only be expressed by a development of the Son of Man symbolism: authority and suffering".<sup>314</sup> Hence the necessity for secrecy. Mark depicts Jesus as refusing to allow the title "Son of God" to be applied to him until the conditions for its proper use have been fulfilled. In other words, the messianic secret is a literary device rendered necessary by the fact that Mark is writing didactic narrative. Some of Wrede's evidence is judged by Perrin to be irrelevant to the Markan theme. Thus the commands to

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<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>314</sup> Perrin, 'Towards an Interpretation of the Gospel of Mark', in Christology and a Modern Pilgrimage: A Discussion with Norman Perrin, 49.

silence in 5: 43 and 7: 36 are said to be no more than "part of the dramatic technique of presenting the power of the wonder-worker in such stories".<sup>315</sup> Despite this failure to integrate these injunctions after miracles with the theme as a whole,<sup>316</sup> and even if it should be thought that Perrin overstates his apocalyptic case, his understanding of the messianic secret, standing as it does in recognizable continuity with Wrede's, is certainly preferable to that of Weeden, who refers disparagingly to "the Wredian interpretation",<sup>317</sup> which he clearly thinks has led New Testament scholarship astray.

Another advocate of the view that Mark is an apocalypse is H.C.Kee. His purpose in Community of the New Age is to determine the nature of the community which produced the gospel. He comes to the conclusion that "the Markan community regarded itself as an eschatological covenant people called into being by Jesus, the eschatological prophet, and charged by him to carry forward its mission in the world".<sup>318</sup> Its task is, through its message and its life, to summon others to join it in joyful anticipation of the imminent public disclosure of Jesus as the Son of Man. The community "lives in confidence that the God who gave assurance of the eschatological vindication of Jesus by raising him from the dead will vindicate his covenant community as well and at the same time".<sup>319</sup> The "secret" serves to reinforce the community's confidence that its hopes will be realized; "in the midst of suffering and potential martyrdom, it rejoices that God has vouchsafed to it the secret of his purpose".<sup>320</sup> Kee attaches particular significance to those sayings in which private instruction is

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>316</sup> See above, 20-22, for how this can be done.

<sup>317</sup> Weeden, Mark: Traditions in Conflict, 65.

<sup>318</sup> Kee, Community of the New Age, 145.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.



given to the disciples about the secret of the Kingdom (chapter 4) and about Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection (8: 31, 9: 31, 10: 33f.). The members of the Markan community understand that, as Jesus suffered, they must suffer, but they endure with patience because they have been given the insight to understand the goal of their suffering; they have the promise of Jesus that soon God will vindicate both himself and his followers (13: 1ff., 8: 38).

For Kee, then, the "secret" is the possession of an apocalyptic community, sustaining it during the present time of waiting. L.E. Keck, on the other hand, in his interpretation of Mark, shifts the emphasis away from expectation to ongoing discipleship. He agrees with E. Grässer that Mark's concern in chapter 13 is not with the end itself but with "the delay of the end".<sup>321</sup> And yet "it is not simply the fact of the delay that dominates Mark but the demeanour of the church that must wait longer",<sup>322</sup> and Keck goes on to maintain that "Mark xiii emphasizes suffering for the sake of the εὐαγγέλιον just as do Jesus' earlier words to the disciples".<sup>323</sup> This characteristic stress on discipleship informs Keck's understanding of the "messianic secret", which he prefers to call the "secret Sonship".<sup>324</sup>

While Wrede and Bultmann are right in associating this with the awareness that the Christian understanding of Jesus is traceable only to the resurrection, they are not right in treating Mark as an attempt to explain this. Mark is not trying to explain the secret Sonship but the secret Sonship is the inevitable result of writing about Jesus as Son of God at all if one does not want to put down a collection of epiphanous

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321 Keck, 'The Introduction to Mark's Gospel', NTS 12 (1965-1966), 366 (note 6 from page 365).

322 Ibid.

323 Ibid., 367.

324 Ibid., 368.

acts of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ, That Mark takes up precisely such traditions is clear; equally clear is the fact that he balances and limits them by means of the secrecy and the call to suffer with Jesus.<sup>325</sup>

One of the most persuasive aspects of Keck's contributions to Markan research is his scepticism of all attempts to make the gospel "articulate a continuous point of view".<sup>326</sup> On the one hand, he wishes to see Mark as the "prophetic interpreter"<sup>327</sup> of the Church's tradition; on the other hand, he recognizes that Mark's own theological emphases must be allowed to some extent to exist in tension with the tradition. A similar tension is preserved in the thesis of J.L. Clark, "A Re-examination of the Problem of the Messianic Secret in Mark in its Relationship to the Synoptic Son of Man Sayings". Clark, too, gives due weight to the tradition which Mark received, arguing that, although certainly the Markan secrecy theme is to be understood in the light of the resurrection, it was nevertheless suggested by elements already present in the tradition, such as withdrawals by Jesus from the crowds, injunctions to silence in stories of exorcisms and healings, esoteric instruction, and incomprehension on the part of the disciples. Viewed separately in the context of isolated segments, these features did not necessarily suggest a general theory of secrecy; viewed together in the context of the editorial attempt to combine the segments to form a gospel, they did.

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Keck, 'Mark 3: 7-12 and Mark's Christology', JBL 84 (1965), 358.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid. Cf. 'The Introduction to Mark's Gospel', NTS 12 (1965-1966), 369, where Keck writes: "Mark is not simply a literary precipitate of the tradition-growing church, but a bold attempt to address the church through its own tradition. Mark is not to be viewed anachronistically as an 'editor' so much as he is to be viewed historically as one of the early Christian prophets with a 'word' for his church."



In other words, Mark did not read into his material a conception which was quite foreign to it; rather the "messianic secret" was an inference from the pre-Markan materials themselves, as is demonstrated by the motif's very lack of uniformity.<sup>328</sup>

L.S. Hay is another scholar who, like Clark, is at pains to emphasize that the raw materials for the messianic secret came to Mark in the tradition. Originally the various motifs of secrecy had other senses: the silencing of the demons represented Jesus' rebuttal of their attempt to prevent their own expulsion; the commands not to tell of a miracle implied only that Jesus preferred not to be known as a wonder-worker; and the prohibitions in 8:30 and 9:9 meant that "Jesus did not wish the confidential disclosure of his fate to be recklessly spread about".<sup>329</sup> However, Hay accepts that, although these traditions antedate Mark, the evangelist has understood them in a new way, making connections between them and transforming them into a messianic secret concerning Jesus' identity. Hay is convincing when at the beginning of his article he criticizes the Wrede-Bultmann and Conzelmann - J.M. Robinson understandings of the secret, successfully challenging their common assumption that Mark was concerned with the modern problem of the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. "A Gospel did not appear in order to provide a link between opposing views of Jesus; we have no evidence that the evangelist knew of such a problem."<sup>330</sup> But when at the end Hay offers his own interpretation, he disappoints: "the secret points to the simple fact that the church alone knows who Jesus really is - which is to say, only the church has faith".<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> See especially the final section of Clark's thesis, 'The Conclusion of the Study', on pages 293-296. Cf. above, 14 (note 7).

<sup>329</sup> L.S. Hay, 'Mark's Use of the Messianic Secret', JAAR 35 (1967), 22.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., 26.

Here the messianic secret's vital pastoral connection with costly discipleship, so strongly maintained by Keck, is severed.

The connection is restored by W.C. Robinson, Jr. Having argued that only 1: 34, 3: 12 and 8: 30 are relevant to the "messianic secret" - "if that term may properly still be used"<sup>332</sup> - Robinson concludes: "I think Mark related the demon's [*sic*] knowledge and the disciples' ignorance as a means for insisting on relating Christology and the theology of the cross in order to emphasize the pastoral aspects of discipleship".<sup>333</sup> In the crucial central section (8 :27 - 10: 52) Mark's concern is "the issue of living one's life in a way commensurate with understanding one's reality from the theological interpretation of Jesus' death".<sup>334</sup> Robinson claims to be doing here what he charges Wrede with failing to do - namely, demonstrating how the secrecy data (even though Robinson drastically reduces their number) actually function in the gospel of Mark. Wrede's failure was due to the fact that he was more interested in reconstructing the history of earliest Christian dogma than in discovering what Mark wanted to say to his readers.<sup>335</sup>

This review of some American contributions shows plainly that there is yet no agreed solution to the problem of the "messianic secret". Another theory, for example, is that of F.W. Danker, who contends that Mark uses the secret to point up the hostility of the Jewish authorities and to insist that Jesus himself chooses the place of the final confrontation - "the cross, at the appropriate time".<sup>336</sup> There is certainly no reason to think that in the immediate future fresh suggestions will not continue to be advanced.

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<sup>332</sup> W.C. Robinson, Jr., 'The Quest for Wrede's Secret Messiah', Interpretation 27 (1973), 29.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 26. Italics mine.

<sup>335</sup> Cf. above, 64.

<sup>336</sup> F.W.Danker, 'Mark 1:45 and the Secrecy Motif', CTM 37(1966), 497-498.



### Recent Work on the Continent

There is variety, too, in recent continental attempts to discover the theology of the "messianic secret", and this last section reviews some of the most interesting among them.

Johannes Schreiber agrees with Bultmann that Mark's purpose is "the union of the Hellenistic kerygma about Christ, whose essential content is the Christ myth as we know it from Paul (especially Phil.2 : 6ff.; Rom. 3: 24), with the tradition of the story of Jesus".<sup>337</sup> Schreiber argues that Mark unifies his material by presenting Jesus in terms of the Gnostic myth of the heavenly redeemer, who is pre-existent with God, descends to earth and is subsequently exalted; Mark's originality is that he understands the crucifixion as the moment of exaltation and cosmic victory. A necessary aspect of this presentation is the messianic secret, which Schreiber explains against the background of 1 Cor. 2: 8, where "the redeemer goes about in the earth like a man, in obscurity, and for that reason is crucified by the supernatural powers, who do not recognize him ... Jesus issues the commands to silence in order not to be recognized as the redeemer."<sup>338</sup> But Schreiber's critics point to the lack of hard evidence that the Gnostic scheme is present in the gospel: "Mark knows neither the preexistence of Jesus nor the ascent of the Redeemer from the cross".<sup>339</sup>

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337 "... die Vereinigung des hellenistischen Kerygma von Christus, dessen wesentlicher Inhalt der Christusmythus ist, wie wir ihn aus Paulus kennen (bes. Phil 2, 6ff.; Röm 3,24), mit der Tradition über die Geschichte Jesu." Schreiber, 'Die Christologie des Markusevangeliums' ZThK 58 (1961), 155-156. The reference is to Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition. Cf. above, 87.

338 "... geht der Erlöser in Verborgenheit wie ein Mensch über die Erde und wird deshalb von den Mächten, die ihn nicht erkennen, gekreuzigt. Jesus gibt die Schweigegebote, um als Erlöser unerkant zu bleiben." Schreiber, art. cit., 156.

339 W.G. Kümmel, Introduction to the New Testament, 67.

The gospel similarly fails to corroborate Schreiber's explanation of the secret. According to Mark it is precisely the demons who, on the contrary, do recognize the identity of Jesus; and the crucifixion is brought about not by supernatural forces but by human beings.

The interpretation of P. Vielhauer has affinities with Schreiber's in that he too sees the death of Jesus as his enthronement as world ruler. Vielhauer advances the hypothesis that underlying the gospel are the three stages of an old Egyptian enthronement ritual: apotheosis, presentation or proclamation, and enthronement. In Mark the first stage is Jesus' adoption at his baptism (1: 11); the second occurs during the transfiguration (9: 7); and, thirdly, the acclamation of the centurion (15: 39) interprets the crucifixion as the enthronement itself. In all three places Jesus is identified by the royal designation "Son of God". "The evangelist, by arranging and punctuating the disparate material of the Jesus-tradition by means of the ritual of enthronement, construes the history of Jesus from the baptism to the crucifixion as a process of enthronement, through which Jesus is installed as the eschatological King, the heavenly cosmo-crator."<sup>340</sup> Mark's presentation of this process is controlled by his theory of the secret, which in turn is determined by his theologia crucis. Thus the christological confessions of the demons, though in substance correct, are regarded as illegitimate since they are premature; "according to Mark Jesus is not yet the Son of God in the full sense as a result of the baptism, but he only becomes so at the crucifixion".<sup>341</sup> The meaning of the earthly history of Jesus is that

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<sup>340</sup> "Indem der Evangelist den disparaten Stoff der Jesustradition durch das Inthronisationsritual zusammenhält und zäsuriert, deutet er die Geschichte Jesu von der Taufe bis zur Kreuzigung als Inthronisationsvorgang, durch den Jesus zum eschatologischen König, zum Kosmokrator im Himmel eingesetzt wird." Vielhauer, 'Erwägungen zur Christologie des Markusevangeliums', in Zeit und Geschichte (Bultmann Festschrift), 168.

<sup>341</sup> "... nach Mk Jesus nicht schon durch die Taufe Gottes Sohn im Vollsinn ist, sondern erst bei der Kreuzigung wird." Ibid.



it is saving event.

Another contributor who takes seriously Mark's concern with the history of Jesus is G. Strecker. He too can say that the evangelist depicts "saving event as saving history".<sup>342</sup>

Mark attempts to write the life of Jesus as a self-contained event, not in the form of a critical view of history, but nonetheless from an historical point of view, inasmuch as one may characterize the awareness of the distance between past and present ... as 'historical' thinking.<sup>343</sup>

Like Wrede, Strecker sees 4: 21-23 and 9: 9 as the crucial texts.

The resurrection is the dividing-line between two periods: the time of Jesus and the time of the community, which has the task of openly proclaiming what was formerly concealed. Mark's theory of the messianic secret is used in the service of his presentation of the time of Jesus; it "portrays Jesus as the eschatological saviour who reveals himself to his own, who expresses his intention to remain hidden, and who constantly meets with misunderstanding".<sup>344</sup> Strecker finds the same motifs of revelation, secrecy and misunderstanding in the context of the predictions of the passion and resurrection. "They too are directed toward a certain point in time - the death and resurrection of Jesus. They are valid before this date, but after they have

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342 "... das Heilsgeschehen als Heilsgeschichte." Strecker, "Zur Messiasgeheimnistheorie im Markusevangelium", Studia Evangelica III (1964), 103.

343 "... Markus das Leben Jesu als ein in sich geschlossenes Geschehen zu schreiben versucht, nicht in Form einer kritischen Geschichtsschau, aber doch in historischer Sicht, sofern man das Bewußtsein um die Distanz von Vergangenheit und Gegenwart ... als 'historisches' Denken bezeichnen darf." Ibid.

344 "... zeichnet Jesus als den eschatologischen Heilbringer, der sich den Seinen offenbart, der die Absicht ausspricht, verborgen zu bleiben, der ständig dem Unverständnis begegnet." Strecker, 'Die Leidens- und Auferstehungsvoraussagen im Markusevangelium', ZThK 64 (1967), 37.

been fulfilled they possess only an 'historical' significance."<sup>345</sup>

Strecker's position is reminiscent of Percy's and also Conzelmann's.

Mark has a particular understanding of revelation: along with the parables-chapter and the predictions of the passion and resurrection, the chronological and geographical aspects of his redaction are

intended to present revelation "as an event which from the author's viewpoint is in the past".<sup>346</sup> The result of Mark's redactional work

is not, of course, a biography in the modern sense, "but a qualified story".<sup>347</sup> And yet Mark's concern with history does not in fact

contradict his kerygmatic purpose; his gospel is "not merely 'message', nor even 'message and report', but 'message as report'".<sup>348</sup>

Not surprisingly, the miracles have figured prominently in recent discussion of the secrecy theme. According to Ulrich Luz, the messianic secret proper is to be clearly distinguished from what he calls a "Wundergeheimnis",<sup>349</sup> which has a different thrust.

Following H.J. Ebeling, Luz argues that Mark's emphasis in the miracle-stories is upon the fact that the commands to silence are disobeyed; the disobedience points up the fact that the power of Jesus cannot be concealed. Luz claims that the disciples recognize Jesus as the

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345 "Auch sie weisen auf einen bestimmten zeitlichen Termin, auf Tod und Auferstehung Jesu voraus. Sie besitzen vor diesem Zeitpunkt Gültigkeit, nach ihrer Erfüllung aber nur noch 'historische' Bedeutung." Ibid., 38.

346 "... als ein vom Verfasser aus gesehen vergangenes Geschehen." Strecker, 'Zur Messiasgeheimnistheorie im Markusevangelium', Studia Evangelica III (1964), 100.

347 "... sondern eine qualifizierte Geschichte." Strecker, 'Die Leidens- und Auferstehungsvoraussagen im Markusevangelium', ZThK 64 (1967), 39.

348 "... nicht allein 'Botschaft', auch nicht 'Botschaft und Bericht', sondern 'Botschaft als Bericht'." Strecker, 'Zur Messiasgeheimnistheorie im Markusevangelium', Studia Evangelica III (1964), 104.

349 Luz, 'Das Geheimnismotiv und die markinische Christologie', ZNW 56 (1965), 17.



Messiah on the basis of his miraculous power, which is that of a Hellenistic θεῖος ἄνθρωπος, and that Mark thus views the miracles positively. The messianic secret itself appears only in the exorcisms and the narrative of Peter's confession, where the injunctions to silence are intended to guard the secret of Jesus' Messiahship, and its purpose is to show that the nature of that Messiahship "must be understood kerygmatically, that is, in the light of the cross and resurrection".<sup>350</sup> The conclusion at which Luz arrives is not unlike the position of Leander Keck, except that Luz sees Mark not as correcting the θεῖος ἄνθρωπος christology but rather as interpreting it in terms of the kerygma of the cross.

D.A. Koch, however, rejects the distinction which Luz makes between the messianic secret and a "Wundergeheimnis". Koch himself sees a clear thematic connection between the injunctions to silence in 8: 30 and 9: 9 and the commands for secrecy after miracles: "valid confession first becomes possible in the passion. Before Easter and without the passion there can be no proper understanding of Jesus' person and work."<sup>351</sup> There is no contradiction in the fact that in some miracle-stories a command to silence and the infringement of the command exist side by side, for, although miracles are pointers to the authority of Jesus, they are ambiguous. A clear revelation of his person must await the cross, and the commands after miracles therefore have the effect of qualifying the portrayal of Jesus as a worker of miracles. As for the exorcisms, Mark is chiefly interested in the essential correctness of the demons' christological confessions.

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350 "... kerygmatisch, d.h. von Kreuz und Auferstehung her verstanden werden muß." Ibid., 28.

351 "Gültiges Bekenntnis ist erst in der Passion möglich. Vor Ostern und ohne die Passion gibt es kein angemessenes Verstehen von Jesu Person und Werk." Koch, Die Bedeutung der Wundererzählungen für die Christologie des Markusevangeliums, 186.

"That signifies that in his gospel Mark not only wishes to depict the passion of the Son of God but seeks also to represent the earthly activity of Jesus as the work of the υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ."<sup>352</sup> Koch's overall contention is that Mark has brought into a unity two separate traditions concerning the miracles and the passion, and that it is the conception of the messianic secret which has enabled him to do so.

The fullest recent study is H. Räisänen's Das "Messiasgeheimnis" im Markusevangelium. The fact that Räisänen encloses the word "Messiasgeheimnis" in inverted commas is in itself an anticipation of the conclusions to which he comes in his final chapter. He considers that it is only the injunctions to demons and to the disciples which comprise the actual messianic secret. The commands to silence after miracles are a separate issue. When they are disobeyed, the emphasis is on the fact that "the marvellous deeds of Jesus are quite unable to remain concealed";<sup>353</sup> when they are kept (5: 43, 8: 26), another motif comes into play: Jesus seeks to avoid the consequences of too much publicity. Räisänen also dissociates the theory of parables from the messianic secret. 4: 11f. is "a foreign body"<sup>354</sup> in Mark. "In the background there lies the experience of the negative attitude of the Jews to the message of the Gospel."<sup>355</sup> The disciples' lack of understanding, however, does have a clear point of contact with the messianic secret, although what is chiefly

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<sup>352</sup> "Das bedeutet, daß Markus in seinem Evangelium nicht nur die Passion des Gottessohnes darstellen will, sondern daß er auch bestrebt ist, das irdische Wirken Jesu als das Wirken des υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ darzustellen." Ibid., 190.

<sup>353</sup> "... die wunderbaren Taten Jesu gar nicht verborgen bleiben können." Räisänen, Das "Messiasgeheimnis" im Markusevangelium, 159.

<sup>354</sup> "... ein Fremdkörper." Ibid., 160.

<sup>355</sup> "Dahinter wird die Erfahrung von der negativen Einstellung der Juden zur Botschaft des Evangeliums stecken." Ibid. See further Räisänen's earlier work, Die Parabeltheorie im Markusevangelium.



characteristic of the former theme is that Mark uses it to subserve his own paraenetic concerns.

Räsänen takes the view that the messianic secret proper is a redactional conception which Mark has constructed out of items which came to him in the tradition. The command to the three disciples on the way down the mountain (9: 9) was probably traditional, and "in 8: 30 Mark seems to have generalized this command";<sup>356</sup> and 1: 32-34 and 3: 11f. show that Mark has imposed his own interpretation upon another traditional command (1: 25), which was originally no more than a feature of the exorcism. In his closing pages Räsänen asks the question: "Why has Mark developed his special construction of the (actual) messianic secret out of various traditional elements?"<sup>357</sup> His answer is that, of all the principal explanations which have been advanced, it is a modified version of what he calls the "offenbarungsgeschichtliche" interpretation<sup>358</sup> which is the one least beset with difficulties. But he is not particularly interested in winning support for his own solution. "Whoever claims to know exactly what Mark was aiming at with the theory of the secret probably renders himself guilty of a considerable degree of hubris."<sup>359</sup> Räsänen is much more interested in the implications of his analysis as far as Mark's redaction is concerned. If it is indeed the case that the secrecy theme is a mixture of traditional and editorial motifs, then it follows that recent redaction criticism has erred in

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356 "In 8: 30 scheint Markus dieses Gebot verallgemeinert zu haben." Räsänen, Das "Messiasgeheimnis" im Markusevangelium, 161.

357 "Warum hat Markus aus verschiedenen traditionellen Elementen seine besondere Konstruktion des (eigentlichen) Messiasgeheimnisses entwickelt?" Ibid., 162.

358 Cf. above, 146 (note 79).

359 "Wer behauptet, er wüsste genau, worauf Markus mit der Geheimnistheorie zielte, macht sich wahrscheinlich einer ansehnlichen Hybris schuldig." Räsänen, op. cit., 162.

making Mark "into a great, original and independent theological thinker".<sup>360</sup> Räisänen comments: "In my opinion the new picture urgently needs correcting".<sup>361</sup>

If any consensus emerges from the foregoing summaries, it is that "the passion and death of Jesus stand in the center [sic] of the Marcan theology".<sup>362</sup> But Räisänen's study is a warning against expecting to find in Mark a consistently articulated theological point of view, which cannot be obtained "without forced artifice on the part of the interpreter".<sup>363</sup>

### Conclusion

In the 1940s and 1950s the gap remained wide between British and continental scholarship. British scholars continued to advance the solution that the messianic secret was to be located in the purpose of the historical Jesus. They did so, I have suggested, because it was a matter of theological importance for them that there should be a trustworthy historical account of the life of Jesus.

On the Continent the demand of H.J. Ebeling for a kerygmatic interpretation of the secret was recognized by the early redaction critics, though their results reflected their concern with the modern question of the relationship between faith and history. Nevertheless, they represented the main line of interpretation. A "conservative" approach like that of E. Sjöberg was against the prevailing trend.

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360 "... zu einem grossen, originalen und selbständigen theologischen Denker." Ibid., 167.

361 "Das neue Bild bedarf meines Erachtens dringend einer Korrektur." Ibid.

362 H.-D. Knigge, 'The Meaning of Mark', Interpretation 22 (1968), 68.

363 "... ohne gewaltsame Kunstgriffe des Interpreten." Räisänen, op. cit., 168.



He attempted to demonstrate that the secret belonged ultimately to the history of Jesus himself; it was implicit, he argued, in the apocalyptic title, "Son of Man", which Jesus applied to himself. The difficulty with Sjöberg's approach was that his findings in Jewish apocalyptic were of very questionable relevance to the gospel of Mark.

E. Trocmé challenged the very existence of the "messianic secret". Though his challenge failed, subsequent scholarship came increasingly to recognize that the traditional term was a misnomer, since a specifically messianic secret was present only in a narrow area. That Jesus was the Messiah was not the only aspect of the secrecy theme. It was for this reason that Glasswell maintained that the Gospel was the unveiling of the secret of Jesus' entire life. In Glasswell, and in certain other British scholars at work in the 1960s and 1970s, notably Hugh Anderson, the gap between British and continental scholarship was bridged.

There was no dearth of new suggestions from American contributors, although some of them were open to the charge that they fathered their own highly subjective theories upon Mark; the sophistication of the critic transferred itself to the evangelist. The discussion continued to be carried on vigorously on the Continent, where in general interpreters manifested a sensitivity to the relationship between the messianic secret and the passion, evinced earlier in E. Percy's Die Botschaft Jesu. Mark was seen as a theologian of the cross.

## CONCLUSIONS



## CONCLUSIONS

What has the history of research into the "messianic secret" to say about New Testament exegesis in general? This is the question to which earlier I undertook to address myself at the end.<sup>1</sup> But first let me recapitulate the argument of the thesis. I have tried to show that, to quote some words of Stephen Neill which in their context refer to the work of philosophers, "each generation comes with its own questions; and, more than we perhaps care to realize, the answer is already determined by the nature of the questions that we put".<sup>2</sup> I accept that more detailed consideration of individual writers is needed than I have been able to give.<sup>3</sup> I claim only that there is enough evidence to suggest that further study would yield results.

In the introduction to his translation of Wrede J.C.G. Greig quotes me as saying that "there is a secret of a kind in the historical life of Jesus in that a Christology was implicit, not explicit, in his preaching. Later, after the open confession of Jesus' Messiahship in the post-resurrection church and when it became necessary to write a life of Jesus as the Messiah, the implicit character of the Christology within the ministry was re-expressed in retrospect [sic] in terms of a specifically Messianic secret. Paradoxically, history is falsified in the interests of historical verisimilitude!"<sup>4</sup> This now seems to me to be a modernizing statement, motivated by the attempt to effect

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1 See above, 10.

2 S. Neill, The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861-1961 (Oxford Paperbacks edition), 337. But Neill betrays his own presuppositions when he declares that "William Sanday said all that really needs to be said about Wrede"! Ibid., 248 (note 1).

3 Cf. above, 9.

4 Wrede, The Messianic Secret, xix-xx. The quotation is from a letter to Greig. Cf. my 'The Purpose of the Messianic Secret: A Brief Survey', ET 80 (1968-1969), 310.

a reconciliation between the traditional British and continental emphases. However, my chapter one, "The Secret Identity of Jesus in Mark's Gospel", makes clear that I remain in basic agreement with Wrede that the secret is only rightly understood in the light of the Church's proclamation of the crucified and risen Lord. It was this which, for the greater part of the period under review, British scholarship was unable to see, always insisting that the secret belonged to the life of Jesus. R.S. Barbour has pointed out that it is in fact possible to hold that Jesus "as a matter of history"<sup>5</sup> refrained from making messianic claims because they would be misunderstood and at the same time to admit that "much of Wrede's theory about Mark could still be true".<sup>6</sup> But the majority of British scholars would entertain no such compromise. The explanation lies, I have suggested, in their own theological and philosophical presuppositions, particularly in the area of history. They believed that Mark's gospel was essentially an historical document, and they asked questions of it which it was not intended to answer. It now appears that scholars like C.H. Dodd, Vincent Taylor and T.W. Manson unconsciously narrowed the gap between the twentieth century and the first. As D.E. Nineham has said:

For all their genuinely good intentions, Christian interpreters of the New Testament, because they believed themselves to be faced with a twofold task, have tried to face two ways, have halted between two opinions. They have been aware of the peril of modernizing Jesus and the early church, yet they have been loth to search them out in their full particularity and pastness for fear that in that form they would not speak directly to our condition. Thus they have interpreted New Testament accounts of the past as if they had been written by men who

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5 R.S. Barbour, 'Recent Study of the Gospel according to St. Mark', ET 79 (1967-1968), 327.

6 Ibid.



shared our attitude to the past.<sup>7</sup>

One might apply to them the criticism which T.A. Roberts makes of the liberal Protestants who went in search of the Jesus of history: their misconception was "the belief, betrayed by their methods and conclusions, that the documents of the Faith are a legitimate field for the full and unfettered exercise of the methods of historical investigation."<sup>8</sup>

And yet those who accepted Wrede's insight that the "messianic secret" was a theological conception were also capable of reading Mark through modern spectacles. The correct recognition of the theme's theological character was no sure safeguard against interpretations which were anachronistic. The early redaction critics, for example, caused Mark to think in the categories of a twentieth-century professor of theology and to make distinctions which could not have occurred to a first-century writer. Subsequent redaction criticism, despite the claim to be letting Mark speak for himself, has come up with a great variety of interpretations, revealing the ease with which the critic can father his own ideas upon the evangelist.

What progress, then, has been made? I should want to argue that, despite the demonstrable influence of twentieth-century presuppositions, New Testament scholarship has nevertheless had some success in thinking the thoughts of the biblical authors after them. Gradually, as a result of a growing understanding of the nature of the material, the right questions have been framed - and framing the right questions is a precondition of finding appropriate answers. But the lesson of three quarters of a century's study of the "messianic secret" is that the right questions are not necessarily susceptible of conclusive answers.

For example, one of the "right questions" to have emerged in the

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<sup>7</sup> D.E. Nineham, 'New Testament Interpretation in an Historical Age, Explorations in Theology 1, 164.

<sup>8</sup> T.A. Roberts, History and Christian Apologetic, 173.

course of the study of Mark's gospel is: What were the particular problems of the Markan community? But our only material for an answer to that question is the gospel itself, and it must be frankly admitted that this in itself is not enough to provide a definitive answer; a confident answer like that of T.J. Weeden depends just as much on reading between the lines as did the liberals' reconstructions of the psychological development of Jesus.

Another "right question" is: What is Mark's distinctive theology? But this, too, is not a question which it is easy to answer, if only because Mark is the earliest gospel. In any case, it is a mistake to suppose that Mark's theological purpose was so clear that he allowed no inconsistencies to remain. H.J. Cadbury once warned that "there is scarcely any thorough-going theological theory that permeates the whole narrative, and many things remain that a single unified theory would hardly have selected or left unexpurgated".<sup>9</sup> More recently L.E. Keck has repeated the warning: "one must be exceedingly skeptical of all attempts to simplify the christological outlook in the Gospel of Mark by making the entire book articulate a continuous point of view".<sup>10</sup> He goes on:

The texture of the Markan theology is uneven because divergent materials have been taken up into it. Markan research can make progress only if steady attention is paid to the distinction between tradition and redaction, and if the differences are allowed to stand in a certain amount of tension.<sup>11</sup>

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9 Cited in Nineham, St. Mark, 30.

10 Keck, 'Mark 3: 7-12 and Mark's Christology', JBL 84 (1965), 358.

11 Ibid. Cf. a similar observation in Keck, 'The Introduction to Mark's Gospel', NTS 12 (1965-1966), 369: "it is clear that much more attention must be paid to the relation between the structure of Mark's thought and the structure of his text".



It is therefore likely that in the immediate future the recent stress on Mark as theologian will receive a corrective. "Perhaps we should think not of an author but of an artist creating a collage."<sup>12</sup>

I conclude that in general terms the history of research into the "messianic secret" should be seen as constituting a caution against too much dogmatism concerning matters which cannot be settled for lack of evidence. The very fact that the theme to which Wrede drew attention is still the subject of lively debate nearly eighty years after he wrote should warn us not to expect "assured results". To a much greater extent than has normally been the case scholars should acknowledge "the degree to which New Testament scholarship is, and must continue to remain, in a state of ignorance".<sup>13</sup>

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12 E. Best, 'Mark's Preservation of the Tradition', in L'Évangile selon Marc, ed. M. Sabbe, 33.

13 J. Bowden, 'Great Expectations? The New Testament Critic and his Audience', in What about the New Testament? Essays in Honour of Christopher Evans, 7.

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