

Marking a Difference: The Gospel of Mark and the “Early High Christology” Paradigm

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The inference that the deification of Jesus was the culmination of evolutionary processes as different Christ associations adapted their beliefs to changing social circumstances used to be the critical consensus.¹ Beginning in the 1880s, a team of Protestant scholars at the University of Göttingen formed the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule (history of religions school) and aimed to contextualize the Christologies in canonical and non-canonical Christian literature in light of the wider cultic practices of the ancient Mediterranean.² Given the supposed monotheistic scruples of Second Temple Jews, some scholars supposed that the largest leaps in christological thinking occurred in predominantly non-Jewish settings.³ Regarding the relationship between historical criticism and theology, some scholars accused the credal expressions of Christ's dual nature of distorting Jesus' legacy,⁴ while others saw no conflict

¹ For a sample of the scholarship, see James Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (2nd ed.; London: SCM, 1989); Maurice Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God: The Origins and Development of New Testament Christology* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 1991); Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulinist, 1994), 110–41; Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Christ* (2nd ed.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Geza Vermes, *Christian Beginnings: From Nazareth to Nicaea* (London: Penguin, 2012).

² One of their foremost representatives, Wilhelm Bousset, published *Kyrios Christos: Geschichte des Christusglaubens von den Anfängen des Christentums bis Irenaeus* (FRLANT 4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913); ET *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970). I will cite the English translation in this paper.

³ A. E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 154–73; Casey, *Gentile God*, 11–20, 27–38; Vermes, *Christian Beginnings*, xiv–xv, 49.

⁴ Casey, *Gentile God*, 176; Vermes, *Christian Beginnings*, 242–44.

between the growing retrospective evaluation of Jesus' divine identity and traditional Christian dogma.⁵

The landscape of the academic study of Christian origins has shifted. Many exegetes now date a "high Christology" or a form of "christological monotheism" to the formative years of the incipient Jesus movement. In scholarly parlance, a "high" Christology is distinguished from a "low" one often on the basis of whether or not divinity is imputed to Jesus.⁶ On his academic blog, Larry Hurtado recalls how the "Early High Christology Club" (EHCC) was an unofficial moniker coined by the steering committee for the "Divine Mediators in Antiquity Group" program unit at the Society of Biblical Literature in the 1990s. Hurtado names David Capes, Wendy Cotter, Jarl Fossum, Donald Juel, John R. Levison, Carey Newman, PHEME Perkins, Alan Segal, Marianne Meyer Thompson, and himself as participants in the initial group. Subsequently, Clinton Arnold, Loren Stuckenbruck, James Davila, Charles Gieschen, Richard Bauckham, Martin Hengel, April DeConick, Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, and Jörg Frey became associated with the EHCC.⁷ Jarl Fossum has designated the EHCC as a new *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*.⁸

Some might characterize the work of the EHCC as instigating a paradigm shift.⁹ Thomas S. Kuhn elucidates how a paradigm is a broad conceptual framework agreed upon by scholars that consists of both theory and practice.¹⁰ It bears upon the research questions brought to the data and the

⁵ Brown, *Introduction*, 110–41.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷ See Larry Hurtado, "The Early High Christology Club (EHCC)," www.larryhurtado.wordpress.com/2013/02/06/the-early-high-christology-club-ehcc [accessed July 15, 2016].

⁸ Jarl Fossum, "The New *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*: The Quest for Jewish Christology," in *SBL Seminar Papers 1991*, ed. Euguen H. Lovering, Jr., *SBLSP* 30 (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1991), 638–46. For Fossum, the crucial difference is the shift to the Jewish rather than the Hellenistic or Oriental background for the conceptual categories in the New Testament. Unlike the old *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, though, Larry Hurtado notes that the EHCC represents scholars from diverse ethnic, gender, religious, and academic backgrounds in *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 11–18.

⁹ See Jörg Frey, "Eine neue religionsgeschichtliche Perspektive: Larry W. Hurtados *Lord Jesus Christ* und die Herausbildung der frühen Christologie," in *Reflections on the Early Christian History of Religion—Erwägungen zur frühen Religionsgeschichte*, ed. Cilliers Breitenbach and Jörg Frey (*AJEC* 81; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 117–69.

¹⁰ T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2nd ed.; International Encyclopedia of Unified Science, Foundations of the Unity of Science 2/2; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 10–11.

instrumentation for carrying out one's research program. An overarching framework is able to accommodate minor anomalies with ad hoc modifications, but the accumulation of anomalous data leads to a crisis when the prevailing paradigm ceases to be viable.¹¹ Meanwhile, a new paradigm may not be instantly acknowledged at the time of its conception and is shaped before the advancement of the crisis.¹² It may be debatable whether the widespread postulation of an early high Christology and the primary relevance of the Second Temple literature amounts to a "paradigm" in line with Kuhn's definition, but the scholarly pendulum has swung in the direction of the EHCC. Even so, it is the burden of my paper to demonstrate that Mark's Gospel exemplifies an anomalous datum against the early high Christology paradigm. In dialogue with the approach outlined by Richard Bauckham,¹³ I will contend that Mark's depiction of Jesus does not conform to Bauckham's criteria for inclusion within the "divine identity."

Divine Identity Christology: A Preliminary Assessment

Some scholars maintain that the range of intermediary agents in Second Temple sources did not compromise their monotheistic orientation.¹⁴ This creates obstacles for conceiving how a "high Christology" could have been planted on first-century Palestinian soil. Superseding the representation of Jesus as a supra-terrestrial messianic figure in the primitive Palestinian community,¹⁵ Wilhelm Bousset locates a full-fledged cultus to the *κύριος* (Lord) among the Hellenistic communities in Antioch, Damascus, and Tarsus.¹⁶ Maurice Casey begins his sociological study on why Christians broke Jewish monotheistic strictures by

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 77–90.

¹² *Ibid.*, 86.

¹³ See Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

¹⁴ For a sample of studies, see Dunn, *Christology*, 13–21, 67–81, 132–35, 149–58, 168–75, 215–29; Casey, *Gentile God*, 78–96; Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (2nd edition; London: T&T Clark, 1998), 17–92; Bauckham, *God of Israel*, 13–17, 165–72. Alan F. Segal (*Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* [Leiden: Brill, 1977], 159–219) dates a Jewish belief in two complementary divine powers back to the first century, but, by classifying it as a "heresy" (cf. *Two Powers*, ix), he implies the existence of an "orthodox" Jewish counterpart.

¹⁵ Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, 49–52.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 119–32. Bousset downplays the impact of the ruler cult on the *κύριος* title, preferring to credit it to the influence of the local mystery cults.

generalizing that Second Temple Jews shared eight key identity factors: ethnicity, Scripture, monotheism, Sabbath, circumcision, dietary restrictions, purity laws, and festivals.¹⁷ Correlating the request of Gamaliel II for a benediction to be formulated against the *minim* at the council of Yavneh (*b. Ber.* 28b–29a) with the expulsion of Christians from the synagogue (ἀποσυνάγωγος) in John 9:22, 12:42–43, and 16:2,¹⁸ Casey paints the Johannine community as filled with assimilating Jews and non-Jewish converts. Detached from their heritage, they adopted a “Gentile self-identification” by envisaging “the Jews” (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) *en masse* as the Other, and the deified Christ provided social cohesion for the break-away sect.¹⁹ A flaw in Casey’s thesis is that John’s Gospel does not hide the Jewish origins of the community (cf. 1:47, 49; 4:9, 22) nor adopts ἔθνικός (“Gentile”) as a positive self-identifier (cf. 3 John 7).²⁰ Even so, his theory that John’s theological rhetoric was forged out of the crucible of conflict has some plausibility (cf. John 8:56–59; 10:24–39). Anthony Harvey, on the other hand, holds the deification of Jesus to be unattested until Ignatius’s epistles (cf. *Smyrn.* 1:1; *Eph.* 1:1; 7:2; 18:2; 19:3; *Rom.* 3:3; 6:3).²¹

Reconstructions of antique Jewish “monotheism” that hold it to be a constraining force on the religious imagination may entrench essentialist assumptions. For example, the rabbis demean Elisha ben Abuya or “Aher” (“other”) and an unnamed *min* for revering the angel Metatron as a second power in heaven and as worthy of worship (*b. Hag.* 14a; *b. Sanh.* 38b).²² Granted, these references date to the Amoraic era and either reveal a controversy

¹⁷ Casey, *Gentile God*, 12. Casey adopts a loose dictionary definition of the term “ethnicity” as a social group within a larger cultural or social system which exhibits or is perceived to exhibit a complex of common traits (p. 13).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 31. For a review of the influential reading of the Johannine expulsion passages in light of the *birkat ha-minim* advocated by J. Louis Martyn and the classic Martynian tradition, see Jonathan Bernier, *Aposynagōgos and the Historical Jesus in John: Rethinking the Historicity of the Johannine Expulsion Passages* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 28, 46–49.

¹⁹ Casey, *Gentile God*, 11–20, 27–38.

²⁰ James McGrath, *John’s Apologetic Christology: Legitimation and Development in the Johannine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 12–13. Hurtado (*Lord Jesus Christ*, 43–44 n. 54) also counters that second-century “Gentile” Christian apologists were often more invested in defending their reverence for a single supreme divine being as opposed to the Graeco-Roman pantheon than in hammering out a coherent Christology.

²¹ Harvey, *Constraints of History*, 158, 158 n. 29.

²² See further Segal, *Two Powers*, 60–67; Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 128–47.

sparked by an innovative cultic practice²³ or signify the exclusion of what was hitherto permitted.²⁴ Daniel Boyarin leans toward the second option, explicating that “[t]wo Powers in Heaven became the primary heresy for the Rabbis, and Modalism, the Christian heresy par excellence, became the only ‘orthodox’ theology allowed to Jews.”²⁵ Regardless, the rabbis’ interlocutors did not cease to be Jewish for entertaining different ideas about worship. Jonathan Z. Smith’s polythetic taxonomic system, in which a class consists of a large number of properties that are not all possessed in equal measure by all its members, should replace essentialist models of “identity.” Isolating circumcision as an item of discrimination for cross-cultural comparison, Smith reviews the varied Jewish attitudes toward it: upholding it as the quintessential sign of the covenant (Gen 17:9–14; Exod 12:43–49); admitting that it was a custom shared with other ethnic minorities (Josephus, *Ant.* 1.214; Philo, *Spec. Laws* 1.2); or discarding its literal application (1 Macc 1:15; Jub 15:33–34; Philo, *Mig.* 89–93).²⁶

There was no prevailing “orthodoxy” during the Second Temple era or the aftermath of 70 CE. It took centuries for the rabbis to wield influence over the synagogues in Palestine, much less the ones in the Diaspora. The earliest indisputable reference to the *birkat ha-minim* is in the mid-third century in Tosefta Berakhot 3.25, while the accounts of its Yavnean origins in the Bavli (*B. Ber.* 28b–29a) are of a legendary character.²⁷ At most, the rabbis utilized the *birkat ha-minim* to disqualify a precentor who erred in reciting it in third-century Israel, but it does not mention a formal mechanism for excommunication to be relevant to the text of John.²⁸ Justin Martyr may attest to

²³ Hurtado, *One God*, 32.

²⁴ McGrath, *Apologetic Christology*, 73; Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 123.

²⁵ Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 138. James McGrath (*The Only True God: Early Christian Monotheism in Its Jewish Context* [Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009], 81–96) contends that the earliest rabbinic reports of the so-called “Two Powers” heresy were directed against dualistic, demiurgical theological systems.

²⁶ Jonathan Z. Smith, “Fences and Neighbours: Some Contours of Early Judaism,” in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism: Volume Two*, ed. William Scott Green (Chicago: Scholars, 1980), 1–5, 10–15.

²⁷ Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 68–69; Ruth Langer, *Cursing the Christians? A History of the Birkat HaMinim* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 18–20, 33–35, 39. For instance, the Babylonian Talmud comments on how “Samuel the Little” forgot the wording of the malediction that he was entrusted with fixing in the *amidah*.

²⁸ Stephen G. Wilson, *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians, 70–170 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 179–80; Langer, *Cursing*, 29; Bernier, *Aposynagōgos*, 45–46.

a garbled version of the malediction,²⁹ though his repeated charge that Jews curse Christians occurs just four times in the synagogue (cf. *Dial.* 16.4, 47.5, 96.2, 137.2) and once in a liturgical context *after* the prayer (137.2).³⁰ Justin may have reacted against informal, ad hoc curses in heated exchanges between some Jews and Christians.³¹ Incidentally, the term *min* means “type” or “kind” and, while they could have a Jewish Jesus follower in their sights (*t. Hull.* 2.22–23; 2.24b), the rabbis specify that there were 24 sectarian factions (*y. Sanh.* 10.6.29c). The *minim* could encompass apocalypticists, Hellenizers, dualists, and other threats to rabbinic hegemony.³² Reuven Kimelman’s lexical study shows that the term was restricted to Jews in the Palestinian Amoraic literature, and it was not until the Bavli that the meaning shifts in the remark about a “*min* among the nations” (*b. Hull.* 13b) as the Christianized Roman Empire was converted into the heterodox Other.³³ Epiphanius (*Pan.* 29.9) and Jerome (*Comm. Amos* 1.11; *Comm. Isa.* 5.18) corroborate that “Nazarenes” was added to the benediction around this time; it is doubtful that the term was part of the original wording or else the benediction might have been entitled the *birkat ha-notzrim*.³⁴

The premise that Christology evolved along a unilineal trajectory further fails to account for the elevated christological language in creedal or liturgical material embedded in the earliest extant sources (e.g. Rom 10:9, 13; 1 Cor 11:23–25; 16:22; Phil 2:6–11; Col 1:15–20). Hurtado extracts a constellation of dyadic devotional practices consisting of prayers, hymns, confessions, cultic meals, baptismal rites, prophecies, and doxologies in the Pauline Epistles as well as the anecdotes about baptisms, healings, and exorcisms in Jesus’ name in the book of Acts.³⁵ Bousset disallows that the cultic invocation of the Lord in the

²⁹ Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 182.

³⁰ Reuven Kimelman, “Birkat Ha-Minim and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity,” in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition: Volume Two*, ed. E. P. Sanders, A. I. Baumgarten, and Alan Mendelson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 233–34; cf. Langer, *Cursing*, 29–30.

³¹ Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 71–73; Langer, *Cursing*, 30, 38; Bernier, *Aposynagōgos*, 32.

³² Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 177; Langer, *Cursing*, 4, 22, 25, 26, 27, 59.

³³ Kimelman, “Lack of Evidence,” 229–32; Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 220; Langer, *Cursing*, 26.

³⁴ Kimelman, “Lack of Evidence,” 233–34, 237–38; Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 180; Langer, *Cursing*, 31–32, 39, 57–58, 269 n. 84. Wilson’s conjecture that the term *notzrim* was added shortly after the Bar Kochba revolt cannot be substantiated by the surviving textual evidence (cf. *Related Strangers*, 182–83).

³⁵ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 137–57, 197–206. However, see also the nuanced interaction with Hurtado’s thesis of a Christian dyadic devotional pattern in James Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus? The New Testament Evidence* (London:

transliterated phrase *μαράναθά* (1 Cor 16:22; cf. Rev 22:20; *Did* 10:6) derives from Aramaic-speaking circles in Judaea, preferring to ascribe the petition to hypothetical bilingual circles in northern Syria.³⁶ Similarly, Geza Vermes sets aside the “Philippian hymn” (Phil 2:6–11) as a scribal interpolation without warrant in the manuscript evidence.³⁷ Instead of letting our theoretical frameworks screen out inconvenient data, the data must inform our etic classifications. Paul probably relied on older traditions and, along with his contacts in Judaea (1 Cor 1:12; 9:5; 15:3–7; Gal 1:18–2:14; 1 Thess 2:14), is one crucial witness to the Judaeian Christ congregations in their first few decades.³⁸

To account for the lofty christological sentiments expressed in some early sources, Second Temple literature has been combed through in the search for parallels for a heavenly viceroys among the divine hypostases, chief angels, or apotheosized humans.³⁹ Hurtado partially concurs that the concept of divine agency supplied a precedent, except with the caveat that there is no proof of a Jewish cult devoted to an intermediary agent.⁴⁰ Bauckham draws a firmer line separating the God of Israel from all other reality and dismisses the relevance of the Jewish intermediary figures. Bypassing the modern taxonomy of ontological versus functional divinity, he introduces the category of “divine identity.” The “divine identity” is defined by creational and eschatological monotheism; everything that exists has been created and is governed by the God of Israel.⁴¹

Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 7–28, 29–53; McGrath, *True God*, 23–37. They particularly note that Jesus was not the recipient of sacrificial worship nor was the metaphorical language relating to the cult (e.g. *λατρεία*, *λατρεύειν*) directed toward Jesus.

³⁶ Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, 129.

³⁷ Vermes, *Christian Beginnings*, 108–109.

³⁸ Rightly emphasized in Hurtado, *One God*, 3–5; idem, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 79–86.

³⁹ See Jarl E. Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985); Peter Hayman, “Monotheism—A Misused Word in Jewish Studies,” *JJS* 42 (1991): 1–15; Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God* (London: SPCK, 1992); Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (AGJU 42; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 51–122; Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 89–147; Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (New York: HarperOne, 2014), 47–84, 252–53; Crispin Fletcher-Louis, *Jesus Monotheism Volume 1, Christological Origins: The Emerging Consensus and Beyond* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 167–291.

⁴⁰ See Hurtado, *One God*, 17–92. See also the chapter on worship in Bauckham, *God of Israel*, 127–40.

⁴¹ Bauckham, *God of Israel*, 6–11, 30–31.

Through creative scriptural exegesis (e.g. Ps 110 and Isa 40–55), Bauckham theorizes that Jesus came to be esteemed as the creator and ruler of all things and, hence, was included in the “divine identity.”⁴² The proof-texting of Ps 110 to validate Jesus’ cosmic lordship is pervasive in Christian writings (Mark 12:36 par; Acts 2:33–34; 5:31; 7:55–56; Rom 8:34; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20; 2:6; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12–13; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22; Rev 3:21; *1 Clem.* 36:5; *Barn.* 12:10). Jesus appears as the agent through whom the universe was fashioned in a handful of New Testament verses (John 1:1–3, 10; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:15–17; Heb 1:2). Bauckham is familiar with textual depictions of Lady Wisdom or the Word (*λόγος*) serving as royal advisors (e.g., *Sir.* 24:4; *Wis.* 9:4, 10; *1 En.* 84:2–3; Philo, *Quest. Gen.* 4.110–11) and participating in creation (e.g., Ps 33:6; Prov 8:22–31; *Sir.* 24:3–6; 42:15; *Wis.* 7:22; 8:1; Philo, *Spec.* 1.81) and deems them, therefore, to be intrinsic to the “divine identity” (cf. *2 En.* 33:4).⁴³ Scholars are divided over whether the wisdom corpus and Philo of Alexandria were simply speaking about divine immanence in creation with figurative language or moving beyond the personification of divine attributes to envision semi-independent entities who blurred the boundary between the Creator and the creation (e.g. Prov 8:22 LXX; Philo, *Ques. Gen.* 2.262; *Heir* 206).⁴⁴ If the former position is correct, Wisdom and Logos Christology might lend the strongest support to the thesis that Jesus was incorporated within the “divine identity” by some of his devotees.

As for divine sovereignty, Bauckham contests the evidence that other intermediary agents were enthroned in heaven. The multiple thrones in Dan 7:9 and the thrones pledged to Jesus’ disciples (Matt 19:28; Luke 22:30; Rev 20:4; cf. 3:21) may be part of an eschatological courtroom scene on earth,⁴⁵ but the Christ followers in Laodicea were promised a seat on Jesus’ own throne in the same way

⁴² *Ibid.*, 5–57, 152–81, 191–232.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 16–17, 165–66. The appendix of Gordon D. Fee’s magisterial study of Pauline Christology excludes any trace of wisdom traditions in 1 Cor 8:6, 2 Cor 4:4–6, and Col 1:15–18 (cf. *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007], 594–617). However, Fee’s standards for precise verbal identity does not rule out the possibility of allusion. It seems to me that Fee’s apprehension of wisdom Christology is due to the specter of an Arian reading of Prov 8:22 LXX and his view of pre-existence Christology as an unparalleled revelation (cf. pp. 595–96, 598 n. 12, 602).

⁴⁴ For the former view, see Dunn, *Christology*, 163–76, 213–30; *idem*, *Worship*, 76–84; Hurtado, *One God*, 41–50; Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 607–609. For the latter view, see Fossum, *Name*, 345–46; Gieschen, *Angelmorphic*, 89–114, 107–12; McGrath, *Apologetic Christology*, 76; *idem*, *True God*, 56–57; Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 89–147.

⁴⁵ Bauckham, *God of Israel*, 161–63.

that Jesus was seated on his Father's throne (Rev 3:21).⁴⁶ Bauckham reduces the dream of Moses' heavenly enthronement in the *Exagōgē* of Ezekiel the Tragedian (67–90) to a symbolic picture of Moses' leadership role over Israel (cf. Gen 37:9–10) and prophetic role as the deity's spokesperson to Pharaoh (cf. Exod 7:1).⁴⁷ Even if his exegesis is sound, this scene could be in dialogue with beliefs about Moses' literal ascension (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 4.325–26; *b. Yom.* 4a).⁴⁸ Lastly, Bauckham grants that the apocalyptic “son of man” (*1 En.* 61:8; 62:2, 5; 69:27, 29) and, much later, Metatron (*b. Hag.* 15a) were exceptions to the rule.⁴⁹ Bauckham does not tone down the worship of the human-like figure in the *Similitudes* (*1 En.* 46:5; 48:5; 62:6, 9) nor entertains the modernist distinction between the public deference of a head of state from the private religious adoration of a divinity.⁵⁰ Conversely, Hurtado differentiates paying obeisance or prostrating (προσκυνεῖν) before a high ranking officer (*1 En.* 48:5; 62:6–9; cf. Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 40.3.3–8; Josephus, *Ant.* 11.331–35; *Life of Adam and Eve* 12–16) from cultic worship and adds that the imagined scenes of literary fiction do not compare to the embodied praxis of a living congregation.⁵¹ On this point, Michael Peppard cautions about the

⁴⁶ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 47 n. 66.

⁴⁷ Bauckham, *God of Israel*, 166–69.

⁴⁸ Hurtado, *One God*, 59.

⁴⁹ Bauckham, *God of Israel*, 169–72.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 16, 170–71.

⁵¹ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 38–42. It may be true that the praxis attested in the Pauline Epistles and the book of Acts evolved beyond Jewish precedents and that an exact analogue for the full constellation of binitarian devotional practices has not been discovered in the Second Temple period. On the other hand, the worship practices might not have been uniform across the Christ congregations and, for the purposes of this paper, Mark furnishes little evidence for a dyadic devotional pattern. The Gerasene demoniac prostrated (προσεκύνησεν) before Jesus, as did the Roman soldiers in mockery (Mark 5:6; 15:19), with both incidences involving non-Jewish subjects. No one is baptized in Jesus' name, though the sons of Zebedee are metaphorically baptized into his fate of martyrdom (10:29). Jesus commissions the disciples to conduct a campaign of healing (6:7, 13) and an exorcist casts out demons in Jesus' name (9:37–39), but the latter case is not so different from the sons of the priest Sceva who adjure demons in the name of the Jesus preached by Paul (Acts 19:13). The Passover commemorated in Mark 14:22–25 differs from the memorial meal mystically presided over by the Lord at Corinth (1 Cor 10:21; 11:20–34). It could be objected that binitarian worship was generated by Jesus' post-Easter exaltation, but other Synoptic Gospels could move these practices back into Jesus' lifetime. As Hurtado observes (cf. *Lord Jesus Christ*, 337–38, 337 n. 196), Matthew's redaction of Mark 6:52 implies that the disciples recognized Jesus' divine sonship during

methodological pitfalls in trying to discern the intentions of ancient subjects when they bowed before political authorities or divinities.⁵²

Bauckham has provided an innovative and ground-breaking contribution to the academic study of Christology. Nevertheless, I have some theoretical reservations regarding his project. He underscores that “the earliest Christology was already *in nuce* the highest Christology” and “the highest possible Christology—the inclusion of Jesus in the unique divine identity—was central to the faith of the early church even before any of the New Testament writings were written, since it occurs in all of them.”⁵³ The drive to date a “high Christology” as early as conceivable seems to be a reaction against the deprecation of it as a late, syncretistic phenomenon by other scholars.⁵⁴ There ought to be less anxiety about the theological implications of this investigation, for the validity of creedal affirmations within confessional communities need not depend on the historical questions of “when” and “where” they were first formulated.⁵⁵

The concentration on an exclusively Jewish genealogy for Christology also appears to insulate it from the contamination of Greco-Roman influences, before scholars frequently take the next step that Christology transcended an essentialized and static “Judaism” and belongs in a class of its own (*sui generis*).⁵⁶ Without analogy or precedent, Christology stands out as unique as if in a cultural vacuum. This seems to be a desire to capture the originary, fixed essence of “Christian” beliefs and practices that “preceded the external world of

his ministry and worshipped (προσεκύνησεν) him accordingly (Matt 14:33). More seems to be implied by Peter’s gesture of kneeling and pleading with the Lord to leave him since he was a sinful man in the Lukan *Sondergut* (Luke 5:18).

⁵² Michael Peppard, *The Son of God in the Roman World: Divine Sonship in its Social and Political Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 25.

⁵³ Bauckham, *God of Israel*, 19, 184, 235.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Casey, *Gentile God*, 176; Vermes, *Christian Beginnings*, 242–44.

⁵⁵ Hurtado (*Lord Jesus Christ*, 9) rightly aims to defuse misplaced apologetic or anti-apologetic concerns.

⁵⁶ See the criticisms lodged by Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 44; James Crossley, “Mark’s Christology and a Scholarly Creation of a Non-Jewish Christ of Faith,” in *Judaism, Jewish Identities and the Gospel Tradition: Essays in Honour of Maurice Casey*, ed. J. G. Crossley (London and Oakville: Equinox, 2011), 119–20; M. David Litwa, *IESUS DEUS: The Early Christian Depiction of Jesus as a Mediterranean God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 16–18.

accident and succession.”⁵⁷ An external stimulus from outside the historical chain of causality is practically required.⁵⁸ On sociological *and* theological grounds, a new revelation has to communicate in the recipients’ linguistic and conceptual interpretive grid. If the inspired exegesis promoted by a few interpreters caused major modifications of pre-existing interpretive frameworks, then opposition to these innovations should be expected from other quarters of the Jesus movement.⁵⁹

Finally, there is a risk of treating antique Jewish and Christian texts as univocal on the subject of “monotheism.” Paula Fredriksen urges scholars to retire “monotheism” as an anachronistic concept and contends that ancient Jews, Christians, and “Pagans” had more in common in positioning the highest divine being on top of a hierarchy of lesser divinities (e.g., Exod 22:28 LXX; 1 Cor 8:5–6; Gal 4:8–9).⁶⁰ This is not to say that the aniconic and exclusive cultic devotion to the supreme deity of Israel enshrined in the Shema (Deut 6:4) was not a widely held cultural value among many Second Temple Jews and Christ followers.⁶¹ Still, we cannot assume that what composes the “divine identity” and to what extent intermediary figures could take on divine functions or receive limited forms of worship was a matter of unanimous consent. Boyarin developed a wave-length theory model, where an assortment of Judaeo-Christian dialects across the spectrum from the Marcionites to non-Christian Jews developed into clusters through diffusion and steadily organized into the “official” forms of Rabbinic Judaism and Nicene Christianity.⁶² The rest of this paper will compare Mark’s representation of Jesus to the rubric delineated by Bauckham for sharing in the “divine identity” in order to illustrate that Mark’s Gospel stands out as different from other theological strands in the New Testament.

⁵⁷ See Michael Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology, Volume 2*, ed. James Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley et al (London: Penguin, 2000), 374.

⁵⁸ To be fair, Bauckham does not actually specify the causal mechanism behind the novel exegesis of Christian interpreters. Larry Hurtado, on the other hand, proposes that visions of the heavenly worship of Jesus generated the distinctive shape of Christian binitarian devotion (cf. *One God*, 114–23; *Lord Jesus Christ*, 72–74).

⁵⁹ See Fletcher-Louis, *Jesus Monotheism*, 152–55.

⁶⁰ Paula Fredriksen, “Mandatory Retirement: Ideas in the Study of Christian Origins Whose Time Has Come to Go,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 35 (2006): 241–43.

⁶¹ See the debate between Hurtado (*Lord Jesus Christ*, 37–42) and McGrath (*True God*, 28–30) over the *type* of worship that could be accorded to lower spiritual beings, with McGrath drawing the line at sacrificial worship.

⁶² Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 18–19.

The Markan Jesus as the Creator of All Things?

It is easy to point out that neither Mark, nor the rest of the synoptic tradition, explicitly narrates Jesus' pre-cosmogonic state (contra John 1:1–3). It may be more fruitful to ask whether Mark presupposes an incarnational Christology. Hurtado objects that Mark's silence on Jesus' pre-existence does not necessitate that the evangelist was ignorant about a doctrine that had been in circulation in the previous decades.⁶³ Simon Gathercole insists that pre-existence was taken for granted in the synoptic "I have come" sayings, featuring a form of the verb ἦλθον (I have come) followed by a purpose expressed in an infinitive formula (cf. Mark 1:24, 38; 2:17; 10:45; Matt 10:34/Luke 12:51; Matt 5:17; 8:29; 10:35; Luke 12:49; 19:10). After inspecting the potential parallels, he decides that the sayings are analogous to the announcements of heavenly visitors who have traveled from one locale (i.e. heaven) to another (i.e. earth).⁶⁴ James Dunn and Adela Collins have issued cogent rebuttals to Gathercole's thesis.⁶⁵ Gathercole eliminates sayings that do not match his criteria, in spite of the prospect that they might shed light on the idiom. John the baptizer anticipates that a stronger one is "coming" to baptize with the spirit (Mark 1:7–8 par), John has come to restore all things (Mark 9:12–13) or turn people to the way of righteousness (Matt 21:32), and Jesus and John came preaching asceticism or open commensality (Matt 11:18–19/Luke 7:33–34). Gathercole makes too fine a distinction between the sayings that have a single event in mind as opposed to summing up a person's entire purpose in life to exclude the parallel that Josephus had come to bring good tidings to Vespasian (*War* 3.400).⁶⁶ Some Markan examples present one-time events such as destroying the demons inhabiting an individual (1:24), launching his public ministry in select Galilean towns (1:38), and calling sinners to repentance by extending table fellowship with them (2:17). The idiom denotes

⁶³ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 323.

⁶⁴ Simon J. Gathercole, *The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 113–45; W. R. Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 167; Timothy J. Gedder, "The Implied Yhwh Christology of Mark's Gospel: Mark's Challenge to the Reader to 'Connect the Dots,'" *BBR* 25 (2015): 335–36.

⁶⁵ The arguments in this paragraph summarize some of the points in James Dunn, "Review of *The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark and Luke*," *RBL* 4 (2007), www.bookreviews.org/pdf/5607_6160.pdf [accessed July 15, 2016]; Adela Collins and John J. Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 124–26.

⁶⁶ Gathercole, *The Pre-existent Son*, 95–96.

a sense of commission, whether a human or angelic envoy, and does not have to entail pre-existence. On a related note, there is no qualitative difference between the sending of the servants and of the beloved son in the parable of the tenants (12:1–9 par), unless the reader brings an *a priori* lens to the parable.⁶⁷

Other Markan pericopae like the sea and feeding miracle doublets (4:35–41; 6:34–44; 6:45–52; 8:1–9) may exhibit an epiphanic quality. Extraordinary humans such as Moses and Rabbi Eliezer commanded the natural elements to obey their will (Philo, *Moses* 1.55–58; *b. Baba Metzia* 59b).⁶⁸ Moses and Elijah were famously remembered for dividing the waters (Exod 14:21–29; 2 Kings 2:8) and multiplying food (Exod 16:1–36; Num 11:1–9; 1 Kings 17:14–16) and Mark may echo the paradigmatic event of the exodus and the miraculous provision of manna in the wilderness.⁶⁹ The difficulty is that, in the biblical stories, a path is carved out through the water to pass through on dry ground. Richard Hays determines that the exodus allusions in Ps 77:19, Isa 43:16, and Isa 51:10 are also not pertinent as Yahweh passes through the sea rather than walks upon it.⁷⁰ When Jesus strides across the sea (Mark 6:48–51), many scholars are reminded of Yahweh trampling upon the waters of chaos (cf. Job 9:8; 38:16) and Jesus' utterance of the divine name ἐγώ εἰμι (I am) and intent "to pass by" (παρελθεῖν) may imitate a theophany (cf. LXX Exod 33:17–23; 34:6).⁷¹ Alternatively, ἐγώ εἰμι could be rendered "it is I" and Jesus may have planned to go ahead of the disciples so that they might follow after him.

⁶⁷ Contra Gathercole, *Pre-existent Son*, 188.

⁶⁸ Crossley, "Christ of Faith," 136.

⁶⁹ Paul J. Achtemeier, "The Origin and Function of Pre-Markan *Miracle Catenae*" *JBL* 91 (1972): 202–204; Adela Collins, "Rulers, Divine Men, and Walking on the Water" in *Religious Propaganda and Missionary Competition in the New Testament World: Essays Honoring Dieter Georgi*, ed. Lukas Bormann, Kelly Del Tredici, and Angela Standhartinger (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 215; Richard Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 104–105.

⁷⁰ Richard Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), 24.

⁷¹ Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (London: T&T Clark International, 1992), 144–45; Collins, "Divine Men," 212–13; Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 160–62; Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 285–86; Gathercole, *Pre-existent Son*, 62–64; Bauckham, *God of Israel*, 265; M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary* (New Testament Library; London: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 189–90; Hays, *Figural Christology*, 24–26; Geddert, "Connect the Dots," 332–34. For a similar portrayal of Greek and Roman divinities exercising power over the sea, see Collins, "Divine Men," 214.

J. R. Daniel Kirk and Stephen L. Young have uncovered that Ps 89:25 (LXX Ps 88:26) extends the power to restrain the tumultuous sea to the Davidic ruler.⁷² The sole rebuttal that I have come across is in a blog post by Andrew Perriman and he interprets Ps 89:25 as restating the ideal size of David's dominion to be from sea to sea (cf. Ps 71:8; 79:12).⁷³ It still seems to me that Ps 89:9–10 sets the context in the ancient Near Eastern combat myth where the celestial potentate subdues the forces of chaos symbolized in the raging waters and establishes order. By setting David's hand on the sea, the human monarch exercises control over this extensive, newly ordered realm in Yahweh's stead. Richard Horsley is incredulous that Mark replicated an imperial myth,⁷⁴ but Mark has no issue transferring imperial titles and imagery to Jesus. Other emperors could boast of their ability to control the sea. Xerxes ordered that the Hellespont be scourged when it did not comply with the Persians' efforts to cross it, and the eventual crossing was mythologized (cf. Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.35, 56; Dio Chrysostom 3.30–31); the pretensions of Alexander the Great (cf. Menander frg. 924 K) and Antiochus IV "Epiphanes" (cf. 2 Macc 9:8) to walk upon the waters became the subject of satire.⁷⁵ Mark combines a Mosaic and a royal Davidic Christology in this episode.

The transfiguration might also be an epiphany. Most exegetes agree that a Sinai typology undergirds Mark 9:2–8 based on the six-day time frame, the setting on a mountain, the three witnesses, the transformed appearance of the protagonist, the voice from a cloud, and the imperative to "listen to him" (cf. Exod 24; 34:29–35; Deut 18:15).⁷⁶ Rudolf Pesch's finding that this was a

⁷² Daniel Kirk and Stephen L. Young, "I Will Set his Hand to the Sea: Psalm 88:26 (LXX) and Christology in Mark" *JBL* 133 (2014): 333–40; cf. J. R. Daniel Kirk, "Idealized Human or Identified as God? A Narratological Assessment of Mark's Christology in Conversation with Jewish Precedents" (Atlanta, SBL 2015), 16–17. I had access to this excellent unpublished paper since I was part of the panel on Christology in the "Mark Seminar."

⁷³ Andrew Perriman, "Jesus and the Sea: Arguments about Divine Identity," www.postost.net/2015/11/jesus-sea-arguments-about-divine-identity [accessed July 15, 2016].

⁷⁴ Horsley, *Whole Story*, 105.

⁷⁵ Collins, "Divine Men," 218–20; Adam Winn, *The Purpose of Mark's Gospel: An Early Christian Response to Roman Imperialism* (WUNT 2.245; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 112.

⁷⁶ Dunn, *Christology*, 47; Marcus, *Way of the Lord*, 81–83; Candida Moss, "The Transfiguration: An Exercise in Markan Accommodation," *Biblical Interpretation* 12 (2004): 72–73; Collins, *King and Messiah*, 131; Simon S. Lee, *Jesus' Transfiguration and the Believers' Transformation: A Study of the Transfiguration and Its Development in Early Christian Writings* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 17–22; Litwa, *IESUS DEUS*, 123. It is hard to explain why Mark 9:3 departs from Exod 34:29–35 in depicting Jesus'

revelation of the Son of Man's glory (cf. *1 En.* 70) is less probable.⁷⁷ Mark 8:38 and 13:26–28 do not describe the clothing of this exalted figure, whereas Rev 1:14 blends his appearance with that of the Ancient of Days (cf. Dan 7:9, 13–14). It is Matthew that prefaces the transfiguration with a logion about the *παρουσία* (coming) of the Son of Man (16:28). Could Mark have been equally indebted to Hellenistic epiphany tales? Candida Moss highlights a striking example of how the goddess Demeter throws off her disguise as an elderly woman and her splendor radiates from her robes (Homeric Hymn II [To Demeter] 275–80).⁷⁸

Simon Gathercole and Simon S. Lee view Jesus' metamorphosis into a luminous form and accompaniment by heavenly beings like Moses and Elijah as a glimpse of the otherworldly nature of Jesus veiled beneath human flesh.⁷⁹ Although Lee deduces from the transfiguration that Jesus' divine sonship is ontological as well as functional,⁸⁰ Moss is careful to clarify that Mark is not preoccupied with Jesus' pre-existence or essence (*ousía*).⁸¹ Certainly, as M. David Litwa documents, "[e]lements like blinding light, terror, and the response of worship were cultural common coin in the ancient Mediterranean world."⁸² The evangelist could have drawn on epiphanic imagery prevalent in his or her Hellenized milieu to portray Jesus as exceeding Moses in mirroring the divine grandeur on the theophoric mountain.⁸³ The framing of the episode in Mark's literary context, however, indicates that this standard imagery is re-deployed in a proleptic vision of Jesus' future glory at the eschaton. Sandwiching the transfiguration between a logion about the advent of the kingdom (Mark 9:1) and a resurrection prediction (9:9), Mark contextualizes it in an eschatological frame of reference and Jesus resembles the glorified saints (Dan 12:3; *1 En.*

glistening garments rather than his shining face (contra Matt 17:2), but Lee goes too far in taking this as a subtle clue that Mark superseded the Mosaic typology.

⁷⁷ Rudolf Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (HTK; Freiburg: Herder, 1977), 2.73–74.

⁷⁸ Moss, "Markan Accommodation," 75–79; cf. Collins, *King and Messiah*, 131–32.

⁷⁹ Gathercole, *Pre-existent Son*, 48–49, 276; Lee, *Transfiguration*, 23.

⁸⁰ Lee, *Jesus' Transfiguration*, 24–30, 31 n. 73.

⁸¹ Moss, "Markan Accommodation," 85.

⁸² Litwa, *IESUS DEUS*, 120. Litwa documents how a range of divinities and rulers appear in dazzling light and shining clothes and evoke responses of terror and worship on pp. 121–22, 129–37.

⁸³ Litwa (*IESUS DEUS*, 125–29) appeals to the noetification of Moses so that he might enter God's incorporeal intelligible realm in Philo's philosophy. I am more hesitant to impute the complex Platonic categories of an Alexandrian Jewish intellectual to Mark's populist Gospel narrative. It is more plausible that there was a common stock of images widely used to depict the radiance of deities, demi-gods, and super-humans.

91:38; 108:11f; 1 Cor 15:51–53; Phil 3:21; Rev 3:4; 2 Bar. 51:3, 5, 10).⁸⁴ His white clothing may symbolize ritual purity (Dan 11:35; Josephus, *War* 2.123; cf. Isa 1:18; 6:1–7).⁸⁵ On the whole, Mark seems to exemplify an exaltationist rather than an incarnational Christology.

The Markan Jesus as the Ruler of All Things?

It is more obvious that, for Mark, Jesus is destined to be the heir to the vineyard of Israel (12:7–10) and partake in the divine sovereignty over the cosmos (12:35–37; 14:63). There is a reference in Mark 1:11 to a royal coronation psalm (Ps 2:7) and a possible allusion to the Isaianic Servant (Isa 42:1; cf. Matt 12:18).⁸⁶ At his baptism, Jesus is endowed with the Spirit to undertake the duties of his office (Mark 1:10; cf. Judg 3:10; 1 Sam 10:6, 10; 11:6; 16:13; Isa 42:1; 61:1). The intertextual biblical echoes are underestimated in Peppard’s superb study of the Roman background to the title υἱὸς θεοῦ (son of god).⁸⁷ Regardless, he complements this analysis by highlighting the use of the verb εὐδοκέω (I choose, consent, take pleasure in) in Roman adoption contracts and the role of bird omens in portending a victorious battle or an emperor’s ascension (Seutonius, *Aug.* 94; 96; *Claud.* 7; *Dom.* 6).⁸⁸ Legal adoption may be the means by which imperial power was perpetuated and transferred to the emperor, the supreme benefactor in the Roman world.⁸⁹ The most well-known illustration is how Octavian embraced the title *divi filius* (son of god) as the adopted great-nephew of Julius Caesar, and Mark’s incipit subverts the “good news” (εὐαγγέλιον) that

⁸⁴ Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark’s Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 99. Dunn, *Christology*, 47–48; cf. Kirk, “Idealized Human,” 7.

⁸⁵ Crossley, “Christ of Faith,” 27.

⁸⁶ Joel Marcus (*Way of the Lord*, 54) argues that the citation of Ps 2 may be an editorial addition to the earlier identification of Jesus with the Servant based on the Isaianic context set out in Mark 1:2 and the independence of John’s baptism account (cf. John 1:32–34). Conversely, Donald Juel (*Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988], 79–80) stresses that the reference to the psalm is primary given the evidence of Jewish messianic interpretations of Ps 2 (cf. 2 Sam 7) and the royal ideology that permeates Mark’s baptism scene. Further, the allusion to the Servant is debatable as there is little verbal correspondence between Mark 1:11 and Isa 42:1 LXX, though adopting the translation of the Isaianic passage in Matt 12:18 would make the intertextual links more apparent.

⁸⁷ Peppard, *Son of God*, 95–96. On the numerous biblical resonances, see Marcus, *Way of the Lord*, 49–54, 80–84.

⁸⁸ Peppard, *Son of God*, 109, 116–18.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 67–85, 95; cf. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, 232–33.

Augustus ushered in an era of peace in the Priene inscription.⁹⁰ The imperial cult had a presence in Palestine since Herod the Great built imperial temples in Sebaste, Caesarea Maritima, and Banias and, on the spectrum of negotiating it from accommodation (e.g. Mark 3:6; Josephus, *Ant.* 20.100) to resistance (e.g. Josephus, *War* 2.169–74, 184–203; Philo, *Legat.* 198, 208), one option was to defy Roman propaganda by re-inscribing it in the form of a native Jewish messianism via the process of colonial mimicry.⁹¹

Although many commentators resist these implications,⁹² the baptism account in Mark 1:9–11 intimates that Jesus inherits a new status when he is appointed as the royal Messiah.⁹³ M. Eugene Boring counters that Mark 1:11 must be read as a declaration of Jesus' prior identity or else the repetition of the divine pronouncement in Mark 9:7 signals that Jesus was adopted twice.⁹⁴ In Mark 1:10–11 (contra Matt 3:16–17; Luke 3:21–22), however, Jesus alone “saw” (εἶδεν) the heavens ripped open (cf. MT Isa 63:9) and heard the *bath qol* or heavenly voice, whereas his election was ratified before three witnesses in Mark 9:7. Peppard explains, “[T]his gathering would then resemble the *comitia curiata*, or “representative assembly,” necessary to confirm Roman adoptions.”⁹⁵

Some exegetes construe Mark 12:35–37 as repudiating an inadequate Davidic Christology (cf. *Barn.* 12:10–11).⁹⁶ Richard Horsley believes that the Markan Jesus signifies an archetypal liberating prophet in the mold of Moses or Elijah and spurns the script of the Davidic monarch from the Judaeen “great

⁹⁰ Craig A. Evans, “Mark’s Incipit and the Priene Calendar Inscription: From Jewish Gospel to Greco-Roman Gospel,” *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 1 (2000): 67–81; Tae Hun Kim, “The Anarthrous ΥΙΟΣ ΘΕΟΥ in Mark 15.39 and the Roman Imperial Cult” *Biblica* 79.2 (1998): 222–41; Winn, *Roman Imperialism*, 97–98, 101–102; Peppard, *Son of God*, 46–47; Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, 233.

⁹¹ Collins, *King*, 48–54, 115–16; Winn, *Purpose*, 40; Peppard, *Son of God*, 24–26, 92–93. I disagree with Hurtado (*Lord Jesus Christ*, 75–76, 91–93, 103) that the imperial cult only had an impact on the Christians at a secondary stage when they countered the imperial propaganda of the Flavians by emphasizing Jesus’ divine sonship.

⁹² For the denunciations of adoptionism in select Markan commentaries, see Peppard, *Son of God*, 96–97.

⁹³ See Brown, *Christology*, 144; Dunn, *Christology*, 47; Marcus, *Way of the Lord*, 74–75; Adela Collins, “Mark and His Readers: The Son of God Among Jews,” *HTR* 92 (1999): 394–95; Collins, *King and Messiah*, 127–28; Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, 238.

⁹⁴ Boring, *Mark*, 46.

⁹⁵ Peppard, *Son of God*, 130.

⁹⁶ See Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, 35; Marcus, *Way of the Lord*, 139–42; Telford, *Theology*, 50–51; Horsley, *Whole Story*, 20, 285.

tradition.”⁹⁷ Unless Mark 12:35–37 contradicts 10:47, it seems that Mark strains to alleviate the scriptural tension between the Messiah as David’s descendant (2 Sam 7:12–14) and David’s Lord (Ps 110:1) by confirming the truth of both descriptions.⁹⁸ James Crossley downplays the title “son of David” that Bartimaeus bestowed upon Jesus in Mark 10:47 as a respectful address—like calling someone a “son of Abraham”—and underscores that the crowd chants for “the *kingdom* of our father David” (11:10).⁹⁹ Again, the framing of Peter’s climatic confession of Jesus as the Χριστός or “anointed one” (8:28–30) between the healings of two blind men may be the key. The first healing occurs in two stages (8:22–25), and the sight of the second blind man is restored after he hails Jesus as “son of David” and before joining Jesus on “the way” to Jerusalem (10:46–52).¹⁰⁰ The acclamations of Jesus as the “Christ” and the “son of David” are equivalent and partially insightful, but Jesus’ identity is not completely grasped unless his suffering is affirmed and internalized (8:30–38; 10:52). There is an extra sense of dramatic irony that Bartimaeus sees what other characters metaphorically fail to see.¹⁰¹

Mark 12:35–37 intimates that Jesus’ position will surpass David’s former majesty and the Davidic terrestrial kingdom was re-envisioned as a celestial one, at least until Jesus returns to earth in his eschatological triumph (cf. 8:38; 13:24–37; 14:62).¹⁰² Jesus’ prediction that he would sit at the right hand of power provokes the high priest to tear his garments and utter cries of “blasphemy” (14:63–64). Darrell Bock states, “The self-made claim to sit at the right hand and ride the clouds would be read as a blasphemous utterance, a false claim that *equates* Jesus in a *unique* way with God and that reflects an arrogant disrespect toward the one true God.”¹⁰³ Bock references Philo’s rebukes of those who arrogate divine honors for themselves (*Dreams* 2.130–31; *Decal.* 13, 14.61–64).¹⁰⁴ Bock rightly qualifies

⁹⁷ Horsley, *Whole Story*, 92–93, 247–53.

⁹⁸ Kingsbury, *Christology*, 109; Juel, *Messianic Exegesis*, 143–44; Watts, *New Exodus*, 287–88.

⁹⁹ Crossley, “Christ of Faith,” 126.

¹⁰⁰ Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (JSNTSS 4; Sheffield: JSOT, 1981), 3; cf. Watts, *New Exodus in Mark*, 288.

¹⁰¹ Juel, *Messianic Exegesis*, 142.

¹⁰² Kingsbury, *Christology*, 112–14; Watts, *New Exodus*, 289–90.

¹⁰³ Darrell Bock, “Blasphemy and the Jewish Examination of Jesus,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 17 (2007): 78 (emphasis mine). On page 77, Bock cites the biblical images of Yahweh as the rider on the clouds (Exod 14:20; Num 10:34; Ps 104:3; Isa 19:1). Nevertheless, clouds could be part of the divine transport for Moses (*Ant.* 4.325–26) and the Danielic “son of man” (Dan 7:13).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

the uniqueness of this claim when he adds that the privileged few such as Moses in the *Exagōgē* or Enoch in the *Similitudes* received the same treatment, but the priestly leadership may have thought it to be the height of hubris for a humble Galilean carpenter (τέκτων) to expect a comparable fate.¹⁰⁵

Scholars must be careful to not import too much into the term “blasphemy.” Such accusations could be hurled around in a dispute over the office of the high priesthood, such as when Hyrcanus II wanted the Pharisees to implement the death penalty against Eleazar for his blasphemous invectives against him (Josephus, *Ant.* 13.293–95).¹⁰⁶ At his hearing, Jesus dared to turn the tables on the appointed leaders and judges of the people and proclaimed that he was going to judge them (cf. Exod 22:28).¹⁰⁷ In their perception, his audacity merited the verdict of blasphemy. Undoubtedly Jesus’ cosmic status transcended the limited extent of the Davidic empire, but the expectation to sit beside Yahweh on the throne would not include Jesus within the “divine identity” any more that it would include Enoch, Moses, Solomon, or Metatron (cf. 1 Chron 29:20; 1 En. 61:8; 62:2, 5; 69:27, 29; Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* 9.29.5–6; *b. Hag.* 15a).

The Markan Jesus and the Divine Name?

The last key signifier of the “divine identity” is that the deity is known to the covenant people by the Tetragrammaton.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, a principal intermediary agent could bear the sacred name (Exod 23:20–21; *Apoc. Ab.* 10:3–4, 8).¹⁰⁹ Mark 1:2–3 and 5:19 may be the strongest proof-texts to support the bestowal of the divine name upon Jesus. Mark 1:2–3 conflates LXX Exod 23:20, Mal 3:1, and Isa 40:3. After a meticulous examination of Mark’s composite citation, Rikki Watts finds that Malachi’s prophecy that a messenger would prepare for the arrival of the Yahweh in judgment upon the temple exerted the greater influence on Mark 1:2.¹¹⁰ Mark 1:3 quotes LXX Isa 40:3 nearly verbatim, except ἀὐτοῦ (his) is substituted for τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν (of our God). Joel Marcus regards the shift from the second person address to Jesus (“your way”) in Mark 1:2 to the third person narration (“the way of the Lord”) in 1:3 to be awkward, and believes that Mark pictures one path shared between Jesus and God. In this

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁰⁶ Crossley, “Christ of Faith,” 138; Bock, “Blasphemy,” 83.

¹⁰⁷ Bock, “Blasphemy,” 83.

¹⁰⁸ *Bauckham, God of Israel*, 7–8.

¹⁰⁹ Fossum, *Name*, 318–21; Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 76–78; McGrath, *True God*, 12–13.

¹¹⁰ Watts, *New Exodus*, 53–90.

way, Mark preserves the unity and the distinction between the two.¹¹¹ Daniel Johansson has a simpler explanation: verse two directly addresses Jesus (“your way”) and verse three has the messenger speak about Jesus (“his paths”). Mark 1:9 discloses that Jesus was the “Lord” whose way was prepared.¹¹² Timothy J. Geddert forthrightly states that Mark represents the central character as “Yhwh, bodily present on earth in the person of Jesus.”¹¹³

Whatever the scriptural passages meant in their original literary contexts, Mark altered the first person possessive pronoun in “my face” (προσώπου μου) in Mal 3:1 to a second person one in “your face” (προσώπου σου) in Mark 1:2 so that there is a distinction between the divine speaker and Jesus. This might support Owen’s identification of Jesus as the theophoric Angel of Yahweh,¹¹⁴ but the absence of any notion of Jesus’ pre-existence or heavenly descent should give one pause about an alleged angelomorphic Christology in Mark’s text. There is, in fact, a parallel to referring to a human as the referent of a text originally about Yahweh when the Dead Sea Scroll sectarians herald the year of Melchizedek’s favor (cf. 11QMelch II.9; cf. Isa 61:1).¹¹⁵ Mark 1:3 ties Jesus’ mission closely with the divine purposes, just as Yahweh’s return to Zion in Deutero-Isaiah was linked to what was happening on the ground, namely that Cyrus II was the instrument for permitting the exiles to return to their homeland (cf. Isa 44:24–45:19).

Turning to Mark 5:19–20, Jesus instructs the Gerasene demoniac to report the mercy of the “Lord” (κύριος) to his household and kin, but he spreads throughout the Decapolis what “Jesus” did for him. This could suggest a basic unity in the actions of the κύριος and Jesus,¹¹⁶ or that Jesus performs miracles via the power of his divine benefactor.¹¹⁷ Another way to read it is that Jesus re-directed attention away from himself by crediting Israel’s God with the miracle,

¹¹¹ Marcus, *Way of the Lord*, 38–40.

¹¹² Daniel Johansson, “Kyrios in the Gospel of Mark,” *JSNT* 33.1 (2010): 104–105; cf. Watts, *New Exodus*, 87, 90; Geddert, “Connect the Dots,” 334.

¹¹³ Geddert, “Connect the Dots,” 338.

¹¹⁴ Paul Owen, “Jesus as God’s Chief Agent in Mark’s Christology,” in *Mark, Manuscripts, and Monotheism: Essays in Honor of Larry W. Hurtado*, ed. Chris Keith and Dieter T. Roth (LNTS 58; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 42–43. Owen recognizes that the angel plays the role of the messenger guarding Israel’s way in Exod 23:20, but argues that Mark combined this with Malachi’s oracle about the coming of the “lord” and the “angel of the covenant” to the temple.

¹¹⁵ Kirk, “Idealized Human,” 19.

¹¹⁶ Johansson, “Kyrios,” 106.

¹¹⁷ Marcus, *Way of the Lord*, 40.

but the demoniac spoils Jesus' desire to maintain secrecy by naming Jesus as the source of the healing. A parallel example is when Jesus orders a leper to undergo the requirements of Torah for cleansing, but he disobeys the directive and publicizes Jesus' healing powers instead so that Jesus could no longer enter a town openly (1:40–45). Owen detects an allusion to Ps 82 in the wider Markan pericope about "legion" as it references the "Most High," and Jesus passes Yahweh's sentence on the unjust spirits as they are cast into the depths (Mark 5:7, 13).¹¹⁸ This allusion does not seem secure: "Most High" is a standard title by which non-Jews address the Jewish deity (cf. Gen 14:18–22; Deut 32:8; Isa 14:14; Dan 3:26; 4:34; Acts 16:17; Heb 7:1; Josephus, *Ant.* 16.163; Philo, *Legat.* 157, 317). There may be a more transparent allusion in the charging of the pigs into the sea to the drowning of Pharaoh's army in the exodus.¹¹⁹

We need to get a clearer picture of Mark's usage of κύριος. Jack Dean Kingsbury denies that it is a christological title in Mark's Gospel and judges that the term, when applied to Jesus, means no more than "sir," "owner," or "master."¹²⁰ On the contrary, Johansson spots several supposedly ambiguous instances of κύριος that are unclear as to whether Jesus or Yahweh is the referent (1:3; 5:19; 11:3; 12:9; 13:20, 35).¹²¹ Second, the term is often accompanied by divine functions, such as when Jesus exercises lordly prerogatives on the Sabbath (2:28). Johansson relates this to Jesus' presumption to forgive sins in Mark 2:10.¹²² Third, the polite address κύριε may have one level of meaning to a character in the narrative world (7:25), but a deeper level of meaning for the implied reader based on the prior usages of the term (cf. 1:3; 5:19).¹²³ Fourth, Johansson renders "the one coming in the name of the Lord" (ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου) to mean that Jesus bears the Lord's name and comes to execute the divine sentence on the temple (11:9–11; cf. Mal 3:1).¹²⁴ Thus, Jesus and Yahweh possess the same name.

Johansson over-interprets these verses. Mark 2:28 usurps a divine prerogative if it is severed from 2:27. Since the Sabbath was given for the benefit of humankind, this particular human speaker exercises lordship over the

¹¹⁸ Owen, "Chief Agent," 52.

¹¹⁹ Watts, *New Exodus*, 159–60; Horsley, *Whole Story*, 147.

¹²⁰ Kingsbury, *Christology*, 110–11.

¹²¹ Johansson, "Κυριος," 103–11.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 112.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 114–15.

institution.¹²⁵ The Matthean parallel to Mark 2:1–12 correspondingly displays that God can confer authority to forgive sins to humans (cf. Matt 9:8). The Syrophenician woman addresses Jesus as “sir” as a token of respect (7:25), and Jesus is the “master” of the disciples commissioned to acquire a colt (11:3). I do not see the ambiguity in God being the *κύριος* in Mark 12:9 and 13:20: it is the son of the owner or lord who was murdered out of resentment that he would inherit the vineyard, and Jesus has no authority over the length of the tribulation since the Father sets the dates for the eschatological calendar (cf. 13:32).¹²⁶ Jesus is the *κύριος* or “owner” of the house who left servants to care for his property and may return at any moment in Mark 13:35. Despite the biblical traditions of the “day of Yahweh,” intermediary figures such as Melchizedek (11Q13) or Enoch (*I En.* 62:2–3; 69:27–28) could enact the eschatological vengeance. It is farfetched that the crowd meant anything beyond blessing the divinely certified agent of their deliverance (11:9), and Johansson’s citation of the Philippians hymn is irrelevant as Jesus inherits the highest name as a consequence of his post-mortem exaltation (cf. Phil 2:9–10).¹²⁷ Owen may be guilty of over-reading Jesus’ use of *ἐγώ εἰμι* (6:50; 13:6; 14:62), which could be rendered “it is I,” and references to Jesus’ “name” (6:14) may just be an idiomatic way of narrating how Jesus gained a popular reputation as a healer.¹²⁸

Words take on meanings in semantic units. The meaning of *κύριος* ranges from a substitute for the Tetragrammaton to any social superior based on context. There need to be some interpretive controls before we tack on extra layers of meaning beyond what would have been apparent to the characters in the narrative world based on our reconstructions of the knowledge of the implied audience. Despite Johansson’s insistence that Mark re-defines the Shema in the immediately preceding passage by placing two *κύριοι* (Lords) on the throne (12:28–34),¹²⁹ the evident import of Mark 12:36 is that the first Lord (=Yahweh) is distinct from the second one, as the former conferred an elevated

¹²⁵ Casey, *Gentile God*, 49.

¹²⁶ Johansson (“*Kyrios*,” 108–109) appeals to the awkwardness of Mark’s change in subject from *ὁ θεός* in 13:19 to *κύριος* in 13:20 and to the fact that the “elect” belong to Jesus in 13:27. However, Mark’s literary style is generally unrefined and the elect belong to God too if they have embraced Jesus’ message of God’s reign.

¹²⁷ Contra Johansson, “*Kyrios*,” 115.

¹²⁸ Contra Owen, “Chief Agent,” 46–48.

¹²⁹ Johansson, “*Kyrios*” 117–19. The parallel that Johansson draws with 1 Cor 8:6 could be undermined if Paul did not split the Shema, but placed an additional confession of Jesus as Lord alongside the traditional affirmation of the oneness of God (cf. McGrath, *True God*, 39–43; Dunn, *Worship*, 109).

status upon the latter. The Markan Jesus had a delegated authority. Mark is equally adamant that Jesus did not exercise every divine prerogative and submitted to his heavenly Father's will (cf. 10:18, 40; 13:30; 14:35–36; 15:34).

Conclusion: Marking a Difference

Mark's theological conceptualization of Jesus is more fittingly described as a "divine agency" rather than a "divine identity" Christology. Bauckham's rubric for a "divine identity Christology" is arguably more applicable to the Pauline or Johannine corpuses, but Mark's Gospel should not be squeezed into the same mold. Scholars should resist the tendency to gloss over differences and be rigorously historical in contextualizing the claims forwarded about Jesus and the functions they served in the symbolic universes and social formations of the varied early Jesus groups. It is more historically plausible that these groups exhausted whatever categories were available in their cultural milieu to articulate the significance of Jesus. It is the inclusion of a rich plurality of voices in the New Testament canon that enabled Christians to develop a full understanding of the humanity and divinity of Jesus. Partly due to the rise of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, some Christians were compelled to firmly locate Jesus on the eternal side of being rather than on the creation side of becoming.¹³⁰ The question of whether Mark's Gospel should be regarded as an anomaly in the current "early high Christology" paradigm or is a sign that our reconstructions should leave room for a greater amount of diversity in first-century christological conceptions would take us beyond the scope of this inquiry.

¹³⁰ Hayman, "Monotheism," 3; McGrath, *True God*, 92; Peppard, *Son of God*, 11.