

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

The "wonder-loving Mark" feels the pressure of the oft-raised objection, and meets it by his own adaptation (probably resting on the Second Source¹) of the Isaian doctrine of the deaf and blind servant. In particular he weaves together, as we have seen, in a typical editorial insertion (Mark 4, 11-12), a combination of Paul's classic theme of the "hiding of the mystery" with the principal proof-text from Isa. 6, 9-10, and in addition explains the incredible blindness and dumbness of unbelieving Jews, in which even those who later believe are involved, by constant reiteration of the declaration that "their hearts were hardened." This may perhaps not be due to any direct literary influence from Romans, but the locality above all others in which we should most naturally look for such an adaptation of the theory of *πῶρωσις* in antijudaic apologetic would certainly be that to which that epistle was addressed.

G. MARKAN CHRISTOLOGY

One more point of contact between Mark and Romans, a feature closely connected with its doctrine of *πῶρωσις*, or the "hiding of the mystery of the kingdom," deserves consideration before we pass to other features which connect this Gospel with practices and institutions otherwise known to have prevailed in very early times among Christians at Rome. We must consider the peculiar Christology of Mark, which on the heretical side led Cerinthus and his adoptionist followers to make it their standard, and on the orthodox led independently in the regions represented respectively by Luke and Matthew to the prefixing of "infancy chapters" which by different methods seek an accommodation between the Hellenistic idea of virgin birth and the primitive Jewish of direct Davidic descent.

Among other features which, under the conception already voiced of conditions at Rome, will seem quite natural to the Epistle to the Romans, will be the Apostle's reference in two passages (Rom. 1, 4; 9, 5) to the fact that "as concerning the flesh" Jesus himself had been a Jew. In the former passage

¹ Cf. Matt. 11, 2-19; 12, 17-21 with Luke 7, 18-35.

(Rom. 1, 4) Paul even endorses the belief represented in the (conflicting) genealogies of Matthew and Luke, that "according to the flesh" Jesus really was "born of the seed of David"; though he goes on to point out that his "appointment in power" as the Son of God was only "by the resurrection from the dead." In this opposition between "a Christ according to the flesh" (2 Cor. 5, 16¹; cf. Mark 8, 33 τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων) and a Christ "appointed" by the resurrection "according to the Spirit of holiness" (Rom. 1, 4) we have Paul's epiphany doctrine, which in doctrinal viewpoint corresponds with the transfiguration story of the Synoptists. These have, of course, no real incarnation doctrine such as Paul's of the pre-existent Wisdom (λόγος) of God, their nearest approach being the Baptism story, whose doctrinal content is the equivalent in terms of mystic vision of Paul's theological statement in Col. 1, 13, 19. Neither of these symbolic elements of Mark is really assimilated by the evangelist. Baptism and Transfiguration alike stand apart from the context as foreign material unexplained.

On the other hand, Paul's doctrine of the appointment (ὀρίζεω) is based on Psalm 110, 1. This appears from his frequent use of the phrase "at the right hand of God"; indeed, in two Pauline passages (1 Cor. 15, 25-28; Eph. 1, 20-22) this proof-text is combined with Psalm 8, 5-7. Furthermore, a Deutero-Pauline epistle probably addressed to Rome and slightly earlier than Mark (Hebrews) develops an elaborate Christology on the basis of these same two proof-texts. This Epistle, after first (2, 5-9) elaborating Psalm 8, 5-7, makes special development of the later context of Psalm 110, 1 to teach that Christ is the predicted priest-king "after the order of Melchizedek," since his dynasty, like Melchizedek's, is without a genealogy (ἀγενεαλόγητος), "without father or mother, having neither beginning nor end of days." This is generally admitted to represent an Alexandrian type of development of

¹ The reference in this passage is not (as sometimes supposed) to contact of Paul with Jesus during the ministry, a contact denied by Paul's opponents and never claimed by him. The reference (as shown by the phrase κατὰ σάρκα here and in Rom. 1, 4) is to the expected Jewish Messiah κατὰ τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

the Pauline Christology. At all events it employs the same proof-texts and makes the same contrast between "a Christ after the flesh" and a Christ brought into the presence of the angels as the Son of God (Heb. 1, 6). This clearly involves a complete declaration of independence of the Palestinian or Jewish-Christian Christology, in which the title "Son of David" long continued to be taken in the most literal sense.

When we turn to the Gospel of Mark, we find (as in Paul) a bare trace or two (10, 48-49; 11, 10) of the early (perhaps authentic) belief in Jesus' Davidic descent. But so little value attaches to it that the reader remains wholly in the dark as to whether Jesus is, or is not, actually descended from David. Genealogy there is none. On the contrary, the only way in which the matter is brought up at all is in an awkwardly appended ¹ supplement (12, 35-37) to the three party questions raised and debated in the temple. After the colophon "And no man after that durst ask him any question," Jesus is represented as himself raising the question of his own claims to Messiahship, and settling it (by implication) on the basis of Psalm 110, 1.² He is to be manifested as Son of God by exaltation to the right hand of power! If he is descended from David, this fact has no value or bearing on the case. That a doctrine of this kind should be maintained in that seat of western and Gentile Christianity which had received the Epistle to the Romans (and quite recently in all probability Hebrews as well) need not surprise us. That it should be current and acceptable in the Aramaic-speaking circles of the Eastern church would pass comprehension.

The Christology of Mark is really composite. That of the evangelist himself is a massive supernaturalism somewhat crudely adjusted to two bases of older Jewish vision story — the baptism and transfiguration. The work is superscribed "Beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God." It ends its account of the ministry with the scene of the Roman centurion standing before the cross, awe-struck at the portents

¹ This is made only the more conspicuous by Matthew's corrective transposition.

² Some texts, however, omit "the Son of God."

attending the tragedy, and exclaiming, "Truly this man was a son of God." This type of "strong" Christology (if we may use this term) characterizes the Gospel throughout, and passes on from it to its satellites, though not without attempted adjustment to the more consistently Jewish Christology of the Second Source. In Mark the figure of the superhuman hero, the demi-god, more Gentile than Jewish, is superimposed throughout the Gospel upon that of the *παῖς* or *υἱὸς θεοῦ* of the baptism (which the temptation story of Q interprets in the sense of Jewish wisdom), and the Son of Man Christology of the transfiguration. The former Christology is the basis of Mark 1, 9-11. It verges as closely upon adoptionism as the latter, presupposed in 9, 2-10, verges on docetism. The Gentile capstone superimposed upon these two Jewish pillars is, as already stated, the massive supernaturalism of the evangelist's own belief. The true Markan Christ is the superhuman wonder-worker, who silences the claims of the Law by an act of supernatural power (2, 6-10; 28), and imposes obedience on wind and sea (4, 41) as well as on demonic powers (5, 6-7). This "strong" Christology, as we have termed it, is of course very far from the "high Christology" of Paul. But it certainly does not differ in the direction of greater sympathy or appreciation for Jewish thought. The evangelist embodies the two vision scenes of the baptism and transfiguration; but he does not show toward them the appreciation or understanding we should expect from one of Jewish birth or training. His readers must interpret them for themselves. The evangelist no more explains these scenes than he explains the title Son of Man, which he boldly adopts, or the doctrine of the suffering Servant, which he presupposes in 10, 45 and 14, 24.

When we look from this composite, ill-digested Christology of Mark to the improvements attempted by the later Synoptists, it is easy to see the true nature of their prefixed infancy chapters. Independently Matthew and Luke endeavor to accommodate the "strong" "Son of God" doctrine of Mark to the older Jewish conception of the "Son of David." The almost out and out adoptionism of the opening scene of Mark 1, 9-11, in which, as Wellhausen puts it, "Jesus goes down into the water a

simple mechanic of Nazareth; he comes up out of it the chosen Son of God," could not permanently be tolerated. The flux of which each of the later Synoptists independently avails himself, in order to fuse into a workable amalgam this Markan adoptionism and the Jewish theocratic conception of the Son of David reflected in the genealogies is the story of Virgin Birth. True, it cannot really be harmonized with the genealogies; but it is not in the least un-Jewish. On the contrary, the epithet *θεόγονος* applied to Isaac by Hellenistic Jews, and Paul's references to Isaac's birth through the operation of a divine word of promise (Rom. 4, 17-22; 9, 9), show parthenogenesis in its proper interpretation to be entirely congenial to Judaism. At all events this doctrine serves to bridge the chasm between the *ἀγενεαλόγητος* Christology of Mark, almost defiantly independent of what the scribes say as to the Davidic descent of "the Christ" (Mark 12, 37-39), and the primitive Palestinian doctrine of human parentage. For we have already observed that Paul acknowledges the Davidic descent of Jesus as matter of fact (Rom. 1, 4; 9, 5; Gal. 4, 4), even while he bases his own doctrine on the exaltation to "the right hand of God" (1, 4; 8, 34).¹

Some of the steps by which we have endeavored to trace the complicated development of primitive Christology through action and reaction between Jewish and Hellenistic conceptions of various kinds may fail to win the reader's assent. Of one thing, however, we are persuaded. No competent student who surveys on the one side the "strong" Christology of Mark, and on the other the compromises and adjustments of the later Synoptists can say that the better title to emanate from Palestinian soil lies with the earlier. On the contrary, Mark reflects the same contrast as Romans and Hebrews between the Christ "of the seed of David according to the flesh" and the Christ who is "manifested" as the Son of God by exaltation to the "right hand," in Deutero-Pauline, Alexan-

¹ For the "manifestation" (*ἐπιφάνεια*) to the multitude at the baptism, the fourth evangelist very naturally substitutes a "manifestation of his glory" (John 2, 11) to the disciples at Cana by a miracle corresponding to that characterizing the manifestation ("epiphany") of Dionysus on Jan. 5-6. See "After Six Days," Bacon, *Harvard Theological Review*, VIII (Jan., 1915), pp. 94-121.

drian Christology, "a high priest forever, without father, without mother, without a genealogy." So far from showing appreciation of, or consideration for, the native Jewish type of Christology, it eliminates entirely the genealogies, and leaves the reader uncertain whether the acclamation of the blind beggar at Jericho and the crowd at Jerusalem have, or have not, any basis in fact. Its only reference to the subject is the supplementary question appended to the series of debates between Jesus and his Jewish opponents in the temple, the scornful:

How say the scribes that the Christ is the son of David? David himself said in the Holy Spirit:

The Lord said unto my Lord,
Sit thou on my right hand
Till I make thine enemies thy footstool.

H. ROMAN RITUAL AS AFFECTING MARK

The most specifically Roman trait in Mark is found in the sphere of early ritual and observance, matters which in the East especially are clung to with intense devotion. The principal feature of this kind belongs, like Mark's ultra-Pauline apologetic and Christology, to a stratum of the Gospel which is clearly secondary. It is all the more conspicuous because in this case undeniably in conflict with the basic story.

We have, unfortunately, for the trait in question no designation simpler than "Anti-quartodecimanism." The recognition of its specifically Roman (or at all events western) character depends on familiarity with the early history of the observance of the Church's one great annual festival, the Easter feast of Redemption, which combined characteristics of the Jewish feast of national redemption (Passover) with the much more widely-observed Oriental feast of resurrection celebrated in commemoration of the triumph over death of various redeemer-gods, such as Attis, Adonis, and Osiris. The celebration took place among the churches of Cappadocia, and in Tertullian's time at Rome itself, annually, on the 25th of March, the vernal equinox of the Julian calendar. It can be traced, of course, much further back than the celebration of the birth of Jesus on December 25th (Julian winter solstice, the dies invicti