

The Divinity of Jesus and the Uniqueness of God:
Are they Compatible?
A Reflection on High Christology and Monotheism
in Mark's Gospel

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INTRODUCTION¹

The issue of whether monotheistic commitment and high Christology² are compatible has been approached from different angles with different assumptions.³ The proposals that are in favor of the compatibility of Jewish monotheism and divine Christology come from Richard Bauckham and Larry Hurtado. Richard Bauckham supports the compatibility of monotheism and high Christology through the notion of divine identity;⁴ monotheism is compatible with divine Christology because Jesus is included in the unique and exclusive identity of the God

¹ This paper is a revised version of the author's presentation at the 2014 Evangelical Society meeting under the title "Compatibility of High Christology and the Uniqueness of God in Mark's Gospel."

² In this article, the term "high"—when it modifies Christology—means something essentially synonymous to "fully divine" or "participating in the unique identity and authority of Israel's God."

³ For example, see P. Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God: The Origins and Development of New Testament Christology* (Cambridge: J. Clarke/Louisville: WJK, 1991); R. Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: "God Crucified" and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008); L. Hurtado, *One God One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); idem, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), especially chapter 1; J. McGrath, *The Only True God: Early Christian Monotheism in Its Jewish Context* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009); J. Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus? The New Testament Evidence* (London: SPCK, 2010).

⁴ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, chapter 1.

of Israel according to early Christian witnesses in the New Testament.⁵ Larry Hurtado, on the other hand, presents the compatibility of monotheism and high Christology in view of the flexibility that he suggests existed within first-century Judaism.⁶ According to Hurtado, first-century Jewish religiosity contained a notably high view of some angelic and human figures alongside the biblical deity. However, first-century Jews reserved their cultic veneration only for the God of Israel. These exalted angelic and human figures may be portrayed in (almost) God-like terms and images at times. Nonetheless, they are never a legitimate recipient of worship. According to Hurtado, the respect toward these exalted figures within first-century Judaism prepared a way for the high Christology of early Christians found in the New Testament, yet Christian devotion to Jesus contained reformulations of first-century Judaism in the sense that early followers of Jesus, who were Jews, worshipped Jesus alongside God.⁷

Both Bauckham's and Hurtado's proposals include stimulating suggestions and deserve closer attention and interaction; however, such go beyond the scope of this study.⁸ In the following, I intend to focus on the issue of the compatibility of monotheism and high Christology with special attention to Mark's Gospel, which has not received much focused attention in either Bauckham's or Hurtado's discussion of Christian origins. I will argue that in Mark's Gospel the portrayal of Jesus as a divine figure does not endanger monotheistic devotion;

⁵ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, chapter 1.

⁶ Hurtado, *One God One Lord*; idem, *Lord Jesus Christ*, chapter 1.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ For Bauckham's proposal, it would be helpful if he could substantiate his definition of "divine identity" by developing his relatively brief explanation of the term in *Jesus and the God of Israel*, chapter 1, and if he could also show more forcefully that the notion of "divine identity" was indeed understood by New Testament authors in a sufficiently clear manner, thus proving that discussing such a notion is not anachronistic. For Hurtado's proposal, it would be helpful if he could further clarify in what sense the noted "reformulations" are not a form of departure from Second Temple Jewish monotheistic commitment. See Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, chapter 1; Hurtado, *One God One Lord*; idem, *Lord Jesus Christ*, chapter 1.

rather, devotion to Jesus materializes and particularizes the commitment to the uniqueness of God. In order to support my thesis as such, I will (1) point to the concurrence of monotheistic and high-Christological references in Mark's Gospel, (2) elaborate on the relationship between monotheistic and high-Christological emphases in Mark's Gospel, and then (3) discuss briefly the significance of the functional subordination of the Son to the Father in understanding Mark's Christology and monotheism.

Concurrence of Monotheistic and High-Christological References in Mark's Gospel

High Christology in Mark's Gospel

Mark's Gospel includes a number of remarkable passages that present Jesus as a divine figure. Contrary to the common perception that Mark's Christology is essentially lower than that of Matthew, John or Paul, the Second Gospel contains a number of passages that depict Jesus on par with the God of Israel. In other words, a number of pericopes in Mark apply to Jesus divine attributes and prerogatives that are exclusively reserved for the biblical deity—even from the opening verses of the Gospel (Mark 1:2-3).

Following the heading in 1:1 ("The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God"⁹), Mark provides a composite citation of Mal 3:1 and Isa 40:3 and in so doing applies the divine κύριος language of Isa 40:3 (LXX) to his Messiah (Mark 1:3). This κύριος language was used clearly for the God of Israel in the original context of Isaiah but is now appropriated to Jesus by the Evangelist. This appropriation implies Jesus's divinity and, more descriptively, the Evangelist's inclusion of Jesus in the view of the unique and exclusive God of Israel.¹⁰ Such a

⁹ Scripture quotations in English are taken from the New American Standard Bible (1977) and those in Greek are taken from Nestle-Aland 27th Edition (1993) for the New Testament and from Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta* (1935) for the LXX.

¹⁰ It is noteworthy that Isa 40:3 (quoted in Mark 1:3) belongs to a section of Isaiah known to be emphatically monotheistic (Isa 40-55). In quoting one of the

notable beginning (1:2-3) is significant because it sets a tone for how the rest of the narrative as well as Mark's Christology and theology proper in it should be appreciated.

The Evangelist's appropriation of the divine κύριος language for Jesus is not coincidental as such appropriating reoccurs in the middle of the Galilean section of the Second Gospel. Namely, Mark 5:19-20 provides another occasion where the divine κύριος language is applied to Jesus:

He [Jesus] said to him [the person just delivered from massive demon possession], "Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord [ὁ κύριος] has done for you, and *how* He had mercy on you." And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus [ὁ Ἰησοῦς] had done for him; and everyone marveled.

In 5:19, Jesus commands the former demoniac to share what the Lord (ὁ κύριος), which refers to the God of Israel, has done, but in verse 20 this person instead proclaims what Jesus (ὁ Ἰησοῦς) has done—and there is no hint that Jesus as the main character of the narrative or Mark as the narrator was in any way uneasy with the former demoniac's "disobedient" act of proclamation. The remarkable interchange between the divine Lord (ὁ κύριος) and Jesus (ὁ Ἰησοῦς) in these two verses implies that the identity of God and the identity of Jesus meaningfully overlap with each other in Mark's Gospel.¹¹

beginning verses of that emphatically monotheistic section of Isaiah, the Evangelist overlaps Jesus with Israel's God by appropriating the divine κύριος language of Isa 40:3 to his Messiah. This observation, however, does not imply a form of modalism as Mark distinguishes Jesus from God (or the Son from the Father) even from the outset of his narrative by portraying the Father as one speaking to the Son: "As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way'" (Mark 1:2).

¹¹ Additionally, see Mark 12:36: εἶπεν κύριος τῷ κυρίῳ μου· κάθου ἐκ δεξιῶν μου, ἕως ἂν θῶ τοὺς ἐχθρούς σου ὑποκάτω τῶν ποδῶν σου (quoting Psalm 110:1). It is noteworthy that both God and the Messiah (that is, Jesus in Mark's Gospel) share the κύριος language. Of course, use of the κύριος language does not guarantee a person's divine status. Nonetheless, if it is noted how the divine κύριος language of Isaiah 40:3 (LXX) was appropriated for Jesus at the very

Mark's high Christology is seen not only in his Christological use of the divine κύριος language (1:3; 5:19-20) but also in a number of other ways. In Mark 2:1-12, Jesus is depicted as one possessing power to forgive sins, which is a divine prerogative according to the Old Testament (e.g., Pss 32:1-5, 51:1-3, 85:2, 103:3, 130:4; 2 Sam 12:13; Isa 44:22; Dan 9:9; Zech 3:4) and Second Temple Judaism (e.g., 1QS 2:8f.; 11:14). Even Mark explicitly supports the understanding that forgiving someone's sins is a divine business at the beginning of the Jerusalem section of the narrative: "... whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father, too, who is in heaven, may forgive you your transgressions" (11:25).

In Mark 4:35-41 and 6:45-52, Jesus appears to have authority to subdue rebellious waters of the sea, which is another divine prerogative according to the Old Testament (e.g., Pss 89:9; 65:7; cf. Ps 104:5-9; Job 26:10-12; 38:8-11). In the latter passage (Mark 6:45-52), in particular, Jesus is portrayed to walk on the sea and present himself to the fear-filled disciples in an epiphanic manner.¹²

Mark's divine Christology is found in later parts of the narrative as well. In 13:27, for instance, Jesus announces that he "will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds...."¹³ It is noteworthy that Jesus does not refer to his followers as God's elect but as His own elect. In so doing, Jesus meaningfully overlaps his identity and sovereign authority with God's.¹⁴

beginning of the Gospel (Mark 1:3), the sharing of the κύριος language between God and the Messiah (Jesus) in 12:36 seems to reinforce Jesus's divine status.

¹² It is possible for the two-word expression ἐγώ εἰμι (6:50) to carry a Christological double entendre—especially if the expression is considered against the background of Isaiah (LXX), that is, the biblical book explicitly mentioned at the very beginning of the Gospel (Mark 1:2). In Isaiah 40-55 (LXX), ἐγώ εἰμι is a set reference to Israel's God (41:4; 43:10-11, 13; 46:4; 48:12; 51:12) and Mark's Gospel opens by naming "Isaiah" (Mark 1:2) and quoting a verse from this particular section of Isaiah (i.e., Isa 40:3 quoted in Mark 1:3).

¹³ In Mark 13:27, the Greek for "His elect" is τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς [αὐτοῦ]. The textual issue, however, should not affect one's translation because, if the personal pronoun αὐτοῦ is not original, then the definite article functions as a personal pronoun in this construction.

¹⁴ See also Mark 3:13, where Jesus is seen to make a sovereign choice in appointing the Twelve, thus signaling the restoration of Israel: "And He went up

Jesus' trial in 14:61-64 shows another passage that reflects Mark's high Christology in later parts of the narrative. At his trial, Jesus responds to the high priest's question ("Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed *One*?" [v. 61]) by applying to himself a composite reference to Ps 110:1 and Dan 7:13 and thus portraying himself as a cosmic sovereign who participates in the divine sovereignty of the God of Israel: "... you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62).¹⁵ To the high priest, such an answer is undoubtedly blasphemous, as reflected in his charge against Jesus before the Council: "What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy..." (vv. 63-64). Other members of the Council confirm the high priest's charge, thus condemning Jesus "to be deserving of death" (v. 64). There is no hint from Mark's narration that the high priest and other members of the Council misunderstood the nature of Jesus' claim in 14:62. Their misunderstanding concerns not the nature of Jesus's bold response in v. 62 but its authenticity.¹⁶

There are certainly other Markan passages that reflect the high Christology of the Evangelist.¹⁷ Above I have listed several of them in a selective manner, prioritizing the passages where divine Christology is

to the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted (οὓς ἤθελεν αὐτός), and they came to Him." Significantly, the scene of Mark 3:13 portrays Jesus not as part of the twelve but as the one sovereignly summoning the twelve. In that sense, 3:13 seems to link implicitly the status of Jesus with that of the God of Israel in the Old Testament.

¹⁵ Here in 14:62, again, the phrase ἐγώ εἰμι possibly contains a Christological double entendre. See my discussion on Mark 6:45-52 and the use of ἐγώ εἰμι in that passage above.

¹⁶ This statement is also applicable to the scribes' response to Jesus with a charge of blasphemy in Mark 2:7. The scribes rightly understood the extremely bold nature of Jesus's claim in verse 5 but rejected the authenticity of the claim that a Galilean rabbi possesses divine authority to forgive sins (v. 7; cf. v. 10). Interestingly enough, 2:7 is the first passage in Mark where the motif of "blasphemy" appears whereas 14:64 is the last passage in the narrative containing that motif.

¹⁷ See, e.g., (1) Mark 1:8 (description of Jesus as one baptizing with the Holy Spirit, i.e., Spirit of God); (2) 1:21-28; 2:28; 5:1-20 (Jesus's unique authority in his exorcism); (3) 6:7 (portrayal of Jesus as one giving his disciples authority for exorcism); and (4) 14:22-25 (depiction of Jesus as one reformulating Israel's foundational meal, i.e., the Passover meal).

relatively self-evident. This brief list, though selective, appears to suffice for establishing the fact that high Christology is a distinctive feature of Mark's Gospel.

Monotheism in Mark's Gospel

Mark's Gospel includes not only remarkable high-Christological passages but also notable monotheistic references especially in three passages (12:28-34 [vv. 29, 32]; 2:1-12 [v. 7]; 10:17-31 [v. 18]). The fact that Mark employs explicit monotheistic references repeatedly in his relatively short account¹⁸ indicates that the Evangelist is substantially interested in the uniqueness of God. In fact, Mark is the only New Testament author who quotes directly the monotheistic call of the Shema in Deut 6:4: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord" (Mark 12:29).¹⁹

There are other New Testament passages that contain explicit monotheistic rhetoric such as John 17:3, Rom 3:30, 1 Cor 8:4-6, Gal 3:20, Eph 4:6, 1 Tim 1:17, 2:5 and Jas 2:19. However, none of those passages includes the direct quotation of the monotheistic call of Deut 6:4. Matthew and Luke each include a parallel passage to the Love Commandment pericope of Mark 12:28-34, but in referencing Deut 6 both Matthew and Luke quote only Deut 6:5.²⁰ On the other hand, it has to be noted that Mark does not only quote Deut 6:4 in Mark 12:29 but also includes its paraphrase in v. 32 when the Evangelist reports a scribe's friendly response to Jesus: "Right, Teacher, You have truly stated that He is One; and there is no one else besides Him."

Monotheistic language is found in two other places in Mark's Gospel, namely, 2:7 and 10:18. In Mark 2:7, scribes react to Jesus's claim that the paralytic's sins are forgiven: "He is blaspheming! Who can

¹⁸ Mark is by far the shortest Gospel among the canonical Gospels and, particularly, among the Synoptic accounts.

¹⁹ Although the meaning of Deut 6:4 may deserve a further discussion, how Mark the Evangelist understands this Deuteronomistic verse seems clear enough, in particular, based upon its paraphrase in Mark 12:32: "... He is One; and there is no one else besides Him." Namely, the exclusive uniqueness of the God of Israel is the essential part in Mark's understanding of Deut 6:4. The exclusive uniqueness of the God of Israel is, of course, the basis of the undivided allegiance to the biblical deity (Deut 6:5 quoted in Mark 12:30).

²⁰ See Matthew 22:34-40//Luke 10:25-28.

forgive sins but God alone (εἰ μὴ εἷς ὁ θεός [which literally means, ‘except one, i.e., God’])?”²¹ In 10:18, in his dialogue with an interlocutor who has addressed Jesus as “good teacher,” Jesus responds with a seemingly hard saying: “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone (εἰ μὴ εἷς ὁ θεός).”²² The quotation of the Shema in the Love Commandment passage, in particular, and its paraphrase within the same pericope— together with two other passages that employ monotheistic language— show that monotheistic commitment was an important concern to Mark the Evangelist.

I have so far surveyed high-Christological and monotheistic passages in Mark’s Gospel. The fact that both high-Christological and monotheistic references are employed repeatedly within the Gospel of Mark implies that, to the Evangelist, monotheistic and high-Christological emphases are compatible with each other. A contemporary reader of Mark’s Gospel may wonder how the two emphases could be compatible. Nevertheless, Mark does not seem to have any problem with their collocation in his account.

Organic Linkage between Monotheism and High Christology in Mark’s Gospel

I have shown above that monotheistic and high-Christological concerns are compatible in Mark’s Gospel. In the following section, I

²¹ Mark seems to employ both εἷς and ὁ θεός in 2:7, each of which could individually refer to Israel’s God, in order to conform to the language of the Shema (Deut 6:4 LXX). Mark combines εἷς (not μόνος as in Luke 5:21, which is syntactically more natural) with ὁ θεός, corresponding to the phraseology of Deut 6:4 LXX (Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, AB 27 [New York: Doubleday, 2000], 222). The fact that the Evangelist is not strictly bound by the wording of Deut 6.4 LXX in expressing monotheistic concern is seen from the following two factors. Firstly, the friendly scribe paraphrases and does not directly quote the monotheistic call of the Shema (Deut 6:4 quoted in Mark 12:29) in his response to Jesus (12:32). Secondly, the scribe’s paraphrase itself (12:32) contains an interchange between two different monotheistic expressions (i.e., εἷς ἔστιν and οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλος πλὴν αὐτοῦ/).

²² See my further discussion on Mark 2:1-12 below, which addresses other details in the passage and especially how the scribes who are antagonistic characters in the passage serve Mark’s narrative and especially Christological purposes.

intend to argue that monotheistic and high-Christological emphases are not only compatible with each other but also connected organically to each other in Mark's narrative. I will pay particular attention to the three explicitly monotheistic passages in Mark (i.e., 2:1-12 [esp. v. 7]; 10:17-31 [esp. v. 18]; 12:28-34 [esp. vv. 29, 32]) and elaborate on the linkage between monotheistic and high-Christological concerns in each of those passages.

Generally speaking, the linkage between monotheistic and high-Christological emphases can be seen from the fact that the Evangelist places three explicit monotheistic references (including the only New Testament quotation of the monotheistic call of the Shema in Mark 12:29) in his Christologically-conditioned narrative—Mark's Gospel is titled as "the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus *Christ*, the Son of God" (1:1) and begins Christologically by appropriating the divine κύριος language of Isaiah 40:3 (LXX) to Christ (1:3). Furthermore, the fact that monotheistic and high-Christological emphases both are found not just once but repeatedly in the narrative suggests that their concurrence is not incidental but is a result of the Evangelist's deliberate arrangement.²³ More specifically, however, the following discussion on each of the three explicitly monotheistic passages will show the organic connection between high-Christological and monotheistic concerns in Mark's Gospel.

Mark 2:1-12

In Mark 2:1-12, one finds the first monotheistic reference in Mark's Gospel. This reference is significant for the current discussion because it is the *very first* monotheistic reference and thus provides a frame in which the following Markan passages with the same/similar

²³ Mark is a capable and reliable author who is intentional about what he narrates. Mark's competency is seen from his elaborate use of sandwich constructions (e.g., 3:20-35; 5:21-43; 6:7-30; 11:12-21) and dramatic irony (e.g., 2:7; 15:17-19). The three-fold pattern of (1) Jesus's prediction, (2) disciples' failure and (3) Jesus's corrective teaching on discipleship in the "Journey" section (8:22-10:52), again, reflects Mark's skillfulness as a storyteller. The Evangelist's pervasive use of the passion motif throughout the Second Gospel (see, e.g., 2:7, 19; 3:6; the three-fold passion prediction in chapters 8-10; [and] the passion narrative in chapter 15) has the same significance concerning Mark's competency as an author/narrator.

monotheistic rhetoric should be understood. In Mark 2:5, Jesus announces that the paralytic's sins are forgiven: "My son, your sins are forgiven." Such an announcement provokes the scribes, and as a result they react: "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone (εἰ μὴ εἶς ὁ θεός)?" (2:7).

What must be noted concerning the scribes' reaction in v. 7 is that monotheistic language in the scribal reaction is directly linked to a high-Christological emphasis of the Evangelist. While it is true that the scribes are complaining about Jesus with their monotheistic rhetoric in 2:7 ("Who can forgive sins but God alone?"), in Mark's narration, that complaint ironically represents the Evangelist's own Christological agenda that Jesus is a divine figure, and he indeed has the divine authority to forgive sins (cf. v. 10). The scribes are correct that no one is able to forgive sins except the unique God of Israel, but they are utterly mistaken about Jesus's identity in relation to the view of that unique God. According to Mark, Jesus is not a blasphemer, as the scribes think (v. 7), but a unique figure who does only what God can do! A later verse in the same passage, i.e., Mark 2:10, supports this interpretation, where Jesus does not retreat in front of the scribes' reaction but reinforces his earlier assertion in verse 5 by claiming: "The Son of Man [i.e., Jesus himself]²⁴ has authority to forgive sins on earth." Jesus shares the unique authority of Israel's God to absolve sins!²⁵

In Mark 2:1-12, monotheistic language is not used to separate Jesus's identity from God's identity or Jesus's authority from God's authority, but to overlap them and link them inseparably with each other. In other words, the Evangelist's monotheistic concern is organically and inseparably connected to his high-Christological concern in this pericope.

²⁴ While its historical background is still hotly debated, "the Son of Man (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου)," a phrase appearing only in the Gospels and Acts in the New Testament, is always a reference to Jesus without a single exception and mostly Jesus's self-reference. For the use of this phrase in Mark's Gospel, see 2:10, 28; 8:31, 38; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33-34, 45; 13:26-27; 14:21[2x], 41, 62.

²⁵ Pss 32:1-5, 51:1-3, 85:2, 103:3, 130:4; 2 Sam 12:13; Isa 44:22; Dan 9:9; Zech 3:4; also, 1QS 2:8f.; 11:14.

Mark 10:17-31

Mark 10:17-31 contains a similar dynamic of integrating monotheistic and high-Christological concerns. To his interlocutor, who bows before him and addresses him as “good teacher” (v. 17), Jesus replies in a seemingly unfriendly way: “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone (εἰ μὴ εἷς ὁ θεός)” (Mark 10:18).

A superficial reading/hearing of Jesus’s response in Mark 10:18 may offer an impression that Jesus was denying his ultimate goodness in contrast to God’s perfect goodness, thus qualifying his identity as something less than divine. Nevertheless, a more careful observation on the wording of the verse reveals something profound. In Mark 10:18, the Greek phrase for “but God alone” is εἰ μὴ εἷς ὁ θεός (literally, “except one, i.e., God”). This Greek construction is used only in two places throughout Mark’s Gospel. One is, of course, here in Mark 10:18 and the other is in Mark 2:7: “Who can forgive sins but God alone (εἰ μὴ εἷς ὁ θεός)?” One can say that Mark’s audience was not facing the so-called difficult saying of 10:18 in a vacuum. Rather, they were encountering Jesus’s saying with a presupposition constructed by 2:1-12 and, in particular, by how the phrase εἰ μὴ εἷς ὁ θεός was used in 2:7.

As discussed above, Mark 2:1-12 presents Jesus as one possessing divine authority to forgive sins, and the monotheistic language in 2:7, accordingly, has a high-Christological intent in Mark’s narration. Now, in handling the phrase “but God alone” (εἰ μὴ εἷς ὁ θεός) in Mark 10:18, facing this phrase for the second time, it would be sensible to remember how that phrase was used in its first and only other occurrence in Mark 2:7 and read 10:18 in light of 2:7. Jesus’s words in Mark 10:18 (“No one is good but God alone.”) then do not seem to imply any qualifications on Jesus’s goodness or his divinity. Rather, those words appear to provide a veiled claim on his deity, offering an invitation for his interlocutor to search and find out the true identity and significance of Jesus, whom he has addressed only as “good teacher” (v. 17)!

The presented high-Christological reading of 10:18 in connection to 2:7 is supported by the fact that (1) Jesus remarkably juxtaposes his command with the Decalogue in the same pericope (vv. 19, 21) and that (2) Jesus presents himself as one guaranteeing eternal life for his followers (vv. 29-30; cf. v. 21), especially after addressing God as the sole source of salvation (v. 27; cf. Rev 7:10)—again in the same

pericope. Moreover, it seems difficult to assume that the Evangelist views Jesus as “holy” (ἅγιος [1:24]) but not “good” (ἀγαθός [10:18]), if one wishes to take 10:18 as Jesus’s qualification of his goodness.

The so-called hard saying in Mark 10:18, which employs a monotheistic rhetoric, expresses implicitly something profoundly high-Christological. Through such narration, the Evangelist invites his readers/hearers to reflect on and affirm Jesus’s unique identity as a divine figure.

Mark 12:28-34

The last Markan passage with monotheistic rhetoric is the Love Commandment pericope in 12:28-34. Unlike the first two monotheistic passages, this pericope does not seem to contain a Christological force within itself. It could be noted that because the first two monotheistic references in Mark have Christological bearing, one should apply such bearing to the last monotheistic reference. I do not think it necessarily wrong to transfer the Christological concern found in the previous two monotheistic passages (2:1-12 [v. 7]; 10:17-31 [v. 18]) to Mark 12:28-34 since all of these passages hold together as parts of the same narrative.

Nevertheless, there is one thing that more forcefully demands our attention, namely, the juxtaposition of the Love Commandment passage (Mark 12:28-34) and the David’s Son pericope (12:35-37). When these two juxtaposed passages are appreciated in light of each other, then (1) the quotation of Deut 6:4 (the monotheistic call of the Shema) and its paraphrase contained in the Love Commandment passage (Mark 12:29 and v. 32) and (2) the quotation of Ps 110:1 in the David’s Son pericope (Mark 12:36)²⁶ are naturally linked with each other, thus integrating their respective monotheistic and high-Christological concerns.

The Old Testament scriptures quoted in each of these juxtaposed passages (i.e., Deut 6:4-5 and Ps 110:1) were critically important in the earliest decades of the Christian movement as seen from the New Testament.²⁷ In light of their respective importance, it would be

²⁶ See Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 21-23, which discusses high-Christological significance of the application of Ps 110:1 to Jesus in New Testament.

²⁷ See the immediately following paragraphs.

reasonable to think that Mark was aware of and deliberate about the juxtaposition of these two key Old Testament passages.

It is a scholarly consensus that Second Temple Jews emphasized exclusive commitment to the God of Israel.²⁸ Such an emphasis was expressed frequently by the formulae of (1) the Shema of Deuteronomy 6 and (2) the first two commandments of the Decalogue in Deut 5//Exod 20.²⁹ In light of multiple explicitly monotheistic emphases found in different New Testament books written by various authors, the concern for the uniqueness of God was also important in the first-century Christian circles, in general, and among New Testament authors, in particular.³⁰ To Mark the Evangelist, monotheistic concern was clearly significant as seen from the fact that he quotes directly the monotheistic call of the Shema in Deut 6:4 (Mark 12:29), paraphrases it (v. 32) and includes two other explicit monotheistic references in the Second Gospel (2:7; 10:18). As already noted, Mark is the only New Testament author who quotes directly the monotheistic call of the Shema in Deut 6:4 (Mark 12:29). On the other hand, Ps 110:1 (109:1 LXX) is the most quoted Old Testament verse in the entire New Testament corpus. Various New Testament authors, including Mark, reference this verse in order to reinforce Jesus's heavenly enthronement and his participation in the divine sovereignty of Israel's unique deity.³¹

In light of the importance of these two Old Testament scriptures that are quoted in the Love Commandment passage and the David's Son periscope among early Christian circles, it seems highly unlikely that the juxtaposition of these two Old Testament passages was incidental—

²⁸ See Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, chapter 1; Hurtado, *One God One Lord*; idem, *Lord Jesus Christ*, chapter 1; J. McGrath, *The Only True God* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), chapter 2.

²⁹ For brief examples, see (1) the Nash Papyrus (2nd cent. BCE?), which combines the Shema (Deut 6:4-5) and the Ten Commandments—likely for liturgical/catechetical purposes, and (2) the Qumran *tefillin* and *mezuzot* that include passages from Exod and Deut and reflect the literal rendering of the practice prescribed in Deut 6:8-9.

³⁰ See John 17:3; Rom 3:30; 1 Cor 8:4-6; Gal 3:20; Eph 4:6; 1 Tim 1:17, 2:5; Jas 2:19; Mark 2:7; 10:18; 12:29, v. 32.

³¹ See Matt 22:44; 26:64; Mark 12:36; 14:62; Luke 20:42-43; 22:69; Acts 2:33-35; 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; 12:1; 1 Pet 3:22.

unnoticed by Mark the Evangelist.³² It would be far more viable to think that Mark deliberately placed these two passages together and, in so doing, connected Deut 6:4 with Ps 110:1, thus integrating monotheistic and high-Christological concerns once again in his narrative—as the Evangelist did earlier in 2:1-12 and 10:17-31.

The examination of all three monotheistic passages above reveals that Mark's monotheistic concern is inseparable from his high-Christological emphasis. All three monotheistic passages in Mark have high-Christological bearing in one way or another. In other words, whenever Mark employs explicit monotheistic language, he couples it with an interest in Jesus's divine identity and authority. Monotheistic and high-Christological interests are not only concurrent in the Second Gospel but also inseparable from each other. The integration of monotheism and high Christology implies that the Evangelist interprets the traditional Jewish monotheistic commitment with a high-Christological lens and that the exclusive identity of Israel's God is expressed with the unique person and ministry of Jesus in mind.

Nonetheless, what about the Markan passages that portray Jesus (the Son) as submitting himself to the Father? How should one relate such passages to the Evangelist's high Christology that is inseparable from his monotheistic concern? Would the Son's submission to the Father imply something less than divine Christology in Mark's Gospel? The last section of this paper will be devoted to addressing that very issue.

Significance of the functional subordination of the Son to the Father for the discussion of monotheism and Christology in Mark's Gospel

Prior to actual discussion in this last section, I need to clarify my terminology. When I mention "subordination" of the Son to the Father, it does not signify ontological subordination. What I mean by the term "subordination" is rather functional in nature, referring to the Son's

³² This point can be reinforced further by noting that 12:28-34 and 12:35-37 are not simply juxtaposed but also belong to the same unit of conflict stories that report the controversies between Jesus and the Jewish authorities of his days as located in the temple (11:27-12:44).

submission to the Father in roles. I have shown above that throughout Mark's Gospel, Jesus is portrayed as a divine figure included within the unique and exclusive identity of the God of Israel. In light of such a portrayal, ontological subordination cannot be a real option in accounting for the Markan passages that depict Jesus's (the Son's) submission to the Father. However, one should still not ignore the fact that there are a number of Markan passages that picture the Son as submitting himself to the Father, revering him without any reservations.

Mark's Gospel depicts Jesus as the *Son of God*. The central theme of the Gospel and the core part of Jesus's teaching is the *Kingdom of God* (1:15; 4:1-34; 14:25; 15:43). The Gospel Jesus proclaims is described as "the *Gospel of God*" (1:14). Jesus's divine authority to forgive sins results in the *glory of God* (2:12). Jesus pictures the ultimate glory he will have at the point of consummation as "the *glory of his Father*" (8:38). Constantly in Mark's Gospel, Jesus surrenders himself to God's authority (10:40; 13:32), God's will (14:36) and the Scriptures (14:49). Jesus is seen to be *theo-centric* enough to address his Father repeatedly as "my God" during his crucifixion (15:34; cf. Ps 22:2 [21:2 LXX]). There are certainly other Markan passages that concern Jesus's *theo-centric* devotion and his utter submission to the Father.

However, would the Son's submission to the Father require something less than divine Christology in Mark's Gospel? My answer is, "No, not necessarily." Functional subordination is, in fact, an important and even necessary factor in the integration of high Christology and monotheism mainly because the Divine Son's submission to the Divine Father implies unity between the two persons. The Son's functional subordination to the Father indicates that the Kingdom of God (i.e., the Reign of God) is not divided but singularly unified.³³ Mark the Evangelist does not present two gods nor does he portray Jesus as a second-deity;³⁴ rather, Mark portrays Jesus as one included within the view of Israel's unique God. In fact, in Mark's Gospel Jesus's authority is overlapped with God's authority (e.g., 2:1-12), and Jesus's cosmic rule with God's own

³³ Cf. 1 Cor 15:28; Zech 14:9.

³⁴ Jesus is never referred to as θεός in Mark although he is portrayed as one whose identity overlaps the unique identity of Israel's God from the very outset of the Gospel (1:2-3) and across the Gospel (see my discussion on Mark's high Christology above).

reign (e.g., Mark 12:36; 14:62). If so, in Mark, devotion to Jesus or high Christology does not distract nor compromise the commitment to the uniqueness of God but rather particularizes and realizes it in the ultimate sense, and, significantly, such Christological particularization of God's uniqueness is expressed, at least in part, through the language of functional subordination.

Conclusion

In this study, I have shown that high Christology and monotheistic commitment are compatible with and, more importantly, inseparable from each other in Mark's Gospel. I have supported my thesis with three particular points as follows. Firstly, monotheistic and high-Christological emphases are concurrent in Mark's Gospel, and both emphases, respectively, appear repeatedly across Mark's Gospel. In view of such repeated concurrence, monotheistic and high-Christological concerns are compatible to the Second Evangelist. Secondly, all three monotheistic passages in Mark's Gospel are linked with Christological concerns in one way or another, and such linkage implies that Mark's monotheistic and high-Christological emphases are organically linked to each other and inseparable from each other. Thirdly, functional subordination of the Son to the Father is not a reflection of something less than divine Christology but rather an indication of the true unity of God's reign and the Christological particularization of God's uniqueness.³⁵

To Mark the Evangelist, high Christology does not threaten commitment to the God of Israel, and monotheism does not eliminate the divinity of Christ—even if unbelieving Jews contemporary to Mark did not necessarily agree with the Evangelist's Christological devotion to the God of Israel.³⁶ Nevertheless, according to the Evangelist, the

³⁵ Of course, these three points do not exist in isolation from one another but rather in close linkage with one another. Nevertheless, looking at each of them individually, as I have done in this study, is helpful for appreciating more fully a complicated issue such as the compatibility of monotheism and high Christology.

³⁶ Cf. Mark 2:1-3:6; 11:27-12:44; 14:61-64; John 5:18; 10:29-33; also, Alan Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism*, SJLA 25 (Leiden: Brill, 1977), *passim*.

exclusive identity of God includes Jesus the Messiah, and true commitment to Israel's deity is neither threatened nor compromised but is realized through devotion to Jesus. This Jesus is part of the unique identity of Israel's God who restored his people from Babylon and has done even greater things in and through His Son (cf. Mark 5:19-20).³⁷ Thus, Mark's Gospel must begin—and this reflection must end—as follows:

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way; The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight'" (Mark 1:2-3).

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³⁷ I am here hinting at the New Exodus motif in Mark's Gospel. For the use of that motif in Mark's Gospel, see, e.g., R. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark*, BSL (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000).