forward by Wilson, *viz.* that we should ‘identify, by the
combined use of the historical and typological methods,
a concrete fact, “Gnosticism”, beginning methodolo-
gically with a certain group of systems in the Second
Century AD which everyone agrees to be designated
by this term. In distinction from this, *gnosis* is regarded
as “knowledge of the divine mysteries reserved for an
elite”.80 A distinction was also made between ‘pre-
Gnostic’ and ‘proto-Gnostic’, though more for the
purpose of clarifying the current use of the terms than
with the intention of laying down any rules for their
use. By ‘pre-Gnostic’ was meant certain themes and
ideas which existed independently before their
amalga-
mation into Gnosticism proper, and in this context
‘one can investigate the pre-existence of different
themes and motifs constituting such a “pre-” but not
yet involving Gnosticism.’ ‘Proto-Gnostic’, on the other
hand, generally indicates that the essence of Gnosticism
can already be found in other and earlier systems,
notably Iranian and Oriental. Thus, on this premise,
‘one can think to find the essence of Gnosticism already
in the centuries preceding the second century AD, as
well as outside the Christian Gnosticism of the Second
Century.’

In most books on the subject by English writers,
only the two basic expressions are usually employed:
‘Gnosticism’ and ‘Gnosis’. By ‘Gnosticism’ is meant
only the second-century systems as described by the
Church Fathers and in certain Gnostic texts. Such
systems are characterized by the combination of the
various elements of Gnostic belief which we have
enumerated above. The main distinguishing mark of
such ‘Gnosticism’ is its radical cosmological dualism,
since most of the other beliefs in the realms of theology,
soteriology, etc. spring naturally from this. By ‘Gnosis’
is meant the individual elements of Gnostic belief,
as they can be traced in the first century and earlier in
the Hellenistic world. It was these individual elements
that gained a foothold in the church of the first century,
and the development of them alongside Christian
theology led to the combination of all elements under a
cosmological dualism to produce the great second
century Gnostic systems.

The real crux of the problem of Gnosticism and the
New Testament lies in the language used by both New
Testament writers and Gnostics. Where we find similar
terms and concepts being used by both, is the language
itself ‘Gnostic’, or did it have a ‘Gnostic’ meaning
only in the context of a developed Gnostic theory?
The only way in which any definite pronouncement
can be made in this difficult area is by a painstaking
comparison of the evidence of each school of thought.
To do so would involve not merely the observation of
the occurrence of linguistic terminology, but also an
analysis of the significance attached to it in every pos-
sible context.81 Only on the basis of such an examination
will we finally reach anything like a definitive answer
to the question — and the complexity of such an
operation suggests that, unless new and conclusive
evidence comes to light from the Nag Hammadi texts,
or some other unexplored source, we can hope for no
easy solution in the immediate future.

pp. 15-93, for a valuable introductory study of the linguistic
problems involved.

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**The Messianic Secret in Mark**

**J D G Dunn**

Although the topic of the messianic secret is a very
familiar one in study of the Gospels it is not easy to
find a simple guide to the subject in English. Dr Dunn
wrote an excellent critical essay on the subject in the
Tyndale Bulletin 21, 1970, pp. 92-117, and we are grate-
ful to him for allowing an abbreviated form of this essay
to appear in the Bulletin. It has been largely shorn of
its footnotes, and readers who wish to follow up the
subject more thoroughly are referred to the original
article.

Wilhelm Wrede's *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evan-
gelien* (1901) marked a turning point of considerable
importance in the study of the Gospels inasmuch as
Wrede was really the first to recognize and appreciate
the theological nature of the Synoptics. His specific
thesis (that the messianic secret motif in Mark has a
theological rather than a historical origin) has 'mark'edly
influenced the researches of those who came after him,
to such an extent that it is often taken for granted, a
'given' in the investigation of new propositions and
theses. His own statement of the thesis has not escaped
problems involved.
legendary development in the tradition. When other
commands to silence are also taken into consideration—
to those healed miraculously (1: 43-45; 5: 43; 7: 36;
8: 26), the disciples after Peter’s confession (8: 30) and
after the transfiguration (9: 9) — as also the intention
of Jesus to remain hidden (7: 24; 9: 30f.) and the
command addressed by the crowd to Bartimaeus to be
silent (10: 47f.), it becomes evident that what is being
thus guarded is the messianic secret. He goes on to
cite other evidence, the most notable of which are
the private instructions which Jesus gives to the disciples
13: 3ff.) and the saying about parabolic teaching
(4: 10-13). On the basis of this evidence Wrede delivers
his judgment — namely that for Mark there is no
historical motif in question; rather the idea of the
messianic secret is a wholly theological conception.
The key is Mark 9: 9, when Peter, James and John
are commanded not to speak of what they had seen
until the Son of man should have risen from the dead.
Jesus’ Messiahship is and must be a secret. Only the
inner circle can be let into the secret. But with the
resurrection comes the revelation to all. In short, the
whole is a theological construction. Jesus did not in
fact claim to be Messiah during his ministry, and it
was not until after the resurrection that his messianic
status was affirmed by the Christian community. The
messianic secret is nothing other than the attempt made
by Mark to account for the absence of messianic claims
by Jesus himself.

I

An analysis of Wrede’s thesis reveals three principal
strands: first the isolation of a distinct motif in Mark
which can be called the ‘messianic secret’; second the
argument that certain elements of that motif, noticeably
the exorcisms, are non-historical, leading to the con­
clusion that the whole motif is the construction of
Christian or Markan theology (the more recent rise
of form criticism has, of course, given more depth
and consistency to this argument); third, as the raison
d’être, the complementary argument that belief in
Jesus as Messiah was an Easter faith and that the
messianic secret results from an attempt to read back
Messiahship into the life of Jesus.

(1) If this is a fair representation of Wrede’s argu­
ment it seems to me to be open to several major
criticisms. The first of these is that Wrede has narrowed
the scope of the secrecy motif too much. I strongly
question whether the silences commanded by Jesus in
connection with the healing miracles can adequately
be brought under the category of messianic secret.
What is there about the healings that cannot be under­
stood before the cross and resurrection which is not
publicly demonstrated in, for example, the healing of
the paralytic before the scribes in chapter 2, or the
healing of the man with the withered arm in the
synagogue in chapter 3? What is there about the
healing miracles which particularly marks out Jesus
as Messiah? According to Mark not one of the miracles
performed publicly led the spectators to conclude that
Jesus was the Messiah (though see below, pp. 10ff.),
while several passages indicate that their reaction was
often completely different. The people of Nazareth
saw only the carpenter, the member of a well-known
local family, despite the public knowledge of his
miracles (6: 1-6). Herod and others thought he might
be John the Baptist resurrected, or Elijah or another
prophet (6: 14f.; 8: 28). The Pharisees judged him to be
possessed by Beelzebub (3: 22). Moreover, the only
recipient of Jesus’ healing who hails him in messianic
terms (10: 46f.) is not silenced by Jesus. So just what
secret was being safeguarded by those commands to
silence?

The attempt to bring all the healing miracle com­
mands to silence under the heading of ‘messianic
secret’ fails to carry conviction. Despite Wrede’s belief
that only one explanation must be applied to the so­
called secrecy passages, it is highly probable that in
different situations there were a variety of motives
operative — and particularly in Jesus’ dealings with the
sick: e.g. desire for privacy and concern for the well­
being of the individual being cured (cf. 1: 44; 5: 40;
7: 33; 8: 22, 26; 9: 25), as well as the wish to discourage
misleading ideas about himself from gaining fresh
currency, and perhaps the strong sense that his destiny
was completely in the hands of God. In this connection
it is worth noting that there are grounds for recognizing
1: 21-45 as a pre-Markan block of material in whose
construction one of the determining motifs was the way
in which excessive publicity resulted in increasing
restriction on Jesus’ movement and ministry (Capernaum,
country towns, desert areas — 1: 21, 38, 45).

I question also whether the saying about the use of
parables can be counted as part of the evidence for the
messianic secret. In Mark 4: 11 what Jesus says is that
parables conceal the mystery of the Kingdom from
hôi exô — and while I would agree that the mystery
of the Kingdom is closely related to the historical
status and ministry of Jesus, it is not to be wholly
identified with the Messiahship of the earthly Jesus.
Besides, both 4: 11 (to those who are outside everything
comes in parables) and 4: 34 (he would not speak to
them except in parables) indicate that it was his whole
ministry of word and deed which had this parabolic
effect — and his whole ministry cannot be contained
within the bounds of the messianic secret. In 7: 17,
for example, the parable whose explanation he gives
to the disciples in private is his teaching about inward
cleanliness. One should also note that if 4: 11 (the
illumination of the disciples) is interpreted in terms of
the messianic secret it at once comes into conflict with
passages like 9: 32 (the incomprehension of the
disciples).

Turning to this latter theme, the obtuseness of the
disciples, which is often cited as an important element
in Mark’s theology of the messianic secret, even this
cannot be contained within its scope. I would be
prepared to admit the instance of the disciples’ astonish­
ment and hardness of heart at the stilling of the storm
as part of the messianic secret (6: 51-52). For I certainly
see messianic significance in the feeding of the 5,000,
although I am not so sure that Mark wished to bring out that significance, and Mark does specifically say that the disciples were dumbfounded 'because they had not seen what the miracle of the loaves meant' (Jerusalem Bible — ougarunēkanepeitoisartois). For the same reason I can see the justification for including the disciples' misunderstanding over the saying about the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod with the messianic secret, although the passage is a difficult one. For once again their obtuseness is underlined by a reference to the feeding of the 5,000, and the feeding of the 4,000, and the pericope ends with the words of Jesus oupōsunιeta; but it is impossible to bring 10:10 under the messianic secret — for what the disciples inquire of him in private (eis tēn oikian) is the meaning of his saying about divorce and marriage — hardly a distinctively messianic theme.

Bearing in mind this diversity in the situations which demonstrate the disciples' obtuseness, it is more plausible to recognize in the motif a historical reminiscence of the very natural and unexceptional slowness of unlettered men whose rigid and closed system of thought made it difficult for them to adjust to new teaching. It was not simply the difficulty of coping with new information, but the impossibility of trying to assimilate that new information into a system of thought and reference which had no place for such information. The situation which would cause a computer either to admit defeat or to explode, caused only confusion and incomprehension on the part of the disciples. Such a situation can be resolved only by a conversion of mind, something which by all accounts did not happen to the disciples till the gift of the Spirit after Jesus' resurrection. To go to the other extreme and attribute the motif to a Markan polemic against the disciples is certainly uncalled for.

I rather suspect that Wrede was misled by taking the exorcisms as his starting point. It was natural that a nineteenth/twentieth-century man should fasten on to these incidents which were to him among the most bizarre and incredible, and which for that very reason gave him immediate access to the theological viewpoint of the primitive church — that is, to the way the primitive church had viewed and worked over the historical facts. No psychological argument could explain how, for example, the Gerasene demoniac came to hail Jesus as Son of the Most High God, and recourse to a supernatural explanation was unacceptable. Therefore, Wrede concluded, we are in the presence of a legendary development in the tradition which leads us straight into the heart of the messianic secret. Leaving aside the issue of demon-possession and the possibility of 'supernatural' knowledge, which I personally hold to be a far more open question than Wrede allowed, it still seems to me that Wrede's approach was methodologically suspect. For the exorcism narratives would not stand out so prominently in Mark's time. The fact is that in their manner of presentation they accord by and large with the standard pattern of exorcism stories, even to the extent of the demon using the name of the exorcist and the exorcist commanding the demon to silence, and the knowledgeable reader of Mark's Gospel would see nothing out of the ordinary in Jesus' response to the demon's cry in Mark 1: 25 — φιμωθήτει kai exelthe ex autou. I recognize that there is weight to the counter-argument that Mark understood the injunction to silence in this first exorcism in terms of 1: 34 and 3: 11f., which could well be taken to indicate that demoniacs regularly hailed him as Son of God and that Jesus' usual response was a strong warning that they should not make him known. But if Mark was trying to 'get over' to his readers the message of the messianic secret the first exorcism would give no indication of it to his readers. In fact, the distinctive messianic secret motif only appears in these two summary statements, and there are no commands to silence in any of the other exorcisms where the narrative goes into any detail (5: 1–20; 7: 24–30; 9: 14–29). I question therefore whether Wrede was right to single out the exorcisms as the decisive clue to the meaning of the secrecy theme in Mark.

(2) If the first criticism puts a question mark against Wrede's isolation of a specifically messianic secret, my second puts a question mark against his calling the motif 'messianic secret'. For it appears to me that Wrede did not give sufficient weight to what might be called a counter-balancing publicity-revelation theme which seems frequently to run directly counter to the secrecy motif. After the first exorcism Mark says 'his reputation spread everywhere (pantachou) through all (holēn) the surrounding Galilean countryside' (1: 28). After the healing of the leper we are told that the leper started talking about it freely and telling the story everywhere, so that Jesus could no longer go openly into any town but had to stay outside in places where nobody lived. Even so, people from all around came to him (1: 45). On another occasion Mark says 'once again such a crowd collected that they could not even have a meal' (3: 20). And far from commanding him to be silent Jesus orders the Gerasene demoniac, now cured, to 'go home to your people and tell them all that the Lord in his mercy has done for you' (5: 19f.). In Nazareth they certainly knew all about his miracles, (6: 2–3), and so remarkable and public were they that all sorts of rumours were current about him (6: 14ff.; 8: 28). The feeding of the 5,000 was the result of an attempted escape to seclusion on the part of Jesus and his disciples, because 'there were so many coming and going that the apostles had no time to eat' (6: 31). And in the region of Tyre and Sidon he entered a house (eis oikian) and did not want anyone to know it; but it was impossible for him to be concealed (7: 24). To cite but one other instance, it is certainly remarkable, if we believe that the messianic secret motif decisively shaped the material, that Bartimaeus should be allowed to be depicted as twice loudly hailing Jesus as Son of David — and Jesus neither rebukes him nor tells him to be silent (10: 46ff.)! In view of the messianic significance of the title Son of David (12: 35–37a) it is surely quite inadequate to dismiss this pericope as having nothing to do with the theory of the messianic secret, as Wrede and those who follow him do.
So far as the messianic secret is concerned the publicity theme is most noticeable in the contexts where one would expect withdrawal and silence. In the healing of the paralytic Mark alone says that the proof of the miracle — his rising and walking off — happened ‘in full view of them all’ (2: 12 NEB). And in the case of the man with the withered arm, far from performing the miracle privately Jesus commands him _egeire eis to meson_ and there, having first drawn all eyes upon him, effects the healing (3: 3ff.). It is true that there is a secrecy, or better, privacy motif in some of the healings (5: 37ff.; 7: 31–37; 8: 22–26). But the woman with the haemorrhage is healed in the crowd and it is Jesus himself who draws attention to a cure which no-one else had noticed. And Bartimaeus is healed in full view of the crowd. Nor surely was Mark naïve enough to impose a messianic secret motif on a story like the raising of Jairus’ daughter. How could the raising of a dead girl to life be kept silent when the mourning had already begun? And why is it on several occasions after Jesus gives a strict command to silence that Mark immediately goes on to tell how the news was broadcast far and wide (1: 25–28, 43–45; 7: 36ff.)? If the messianic secret motif was added to explain why Jesus was not recognized as Messiah, and part of that motif is the command to demons and men not to tell of their cures, I am at a loss to understand what Mark was trying to achieve by adding or at least retaining the publicity sequel. For the whole point of these passages is that the secret commanded was not kept. The commands to silence failed, and so the so-called attempt to keep his Messiahship secret also ‘ailed’. If the messianic secret was a Markan theory, then these publicity passages are the _reductio ad absurdum_ of that theory. This publicity motif shows that at most we can speak of a messianic _misunderstanding_, but hardly of a messianic _secret_.

There is also a very prominent theme of revelation which should not be ignored. I will not enlarge upon it but simply call attention to its various facets — the authoritative claims made by the Markan Jesus for himself: to forgive sins, no less (2: 10); to have a mission to call _kalesai_ sinners (2: 17); to be sovereign _kurios_ over the sabbath (2: 28); to be the one who binds the strong man (Satan) and ransacks his house (3: 27); that loyalty to _him_ will be the yardstick of judgment in the parousia (8: 38). Again there is the teaching Jesus gives to his disciples in private about the true nature of his Messiahship (8: 31–33; 9: 31–32; 10: 32–34, 45; 14: 22–25). Schweizer justifiably notes the concern with which Jesus brings God’s mystery to men, especially the disciples (4: 34; 7: 17–23; 8: 15–21, 27–33; 9: 30–32; 10: 32–34; cf. 5: 37; 9: 2; 13: 3ff.). Finally, one might call attention to such passages as the Parable of the Wicked Tenants, where the Markan Jesus specifically claims a special relation of sonship and where Mark tells us that the priests and lawyers recognized that the parable was aimed at them (12: 12); or again to the Bartimaeus episode where Jesus is twice hailed as Son of David (10: 47ff.) and to 15: 39 where the centurion confesses that the dead Jesus was truly a or the Son of God. A theory of the messianic secret which does not take account of these other themes which are just as prominent will inevitably give a distorted picture both of the Markan Jesus and of the Markan theology.

(3) My third criticism of Wrede’s thesis is that it does not give sufficient weight to the element of historicity which is firmly attached to the motif of the messianic secret. As I have already indicated, Wrede believed that Jesus did not claim to be Messiah during his life and that all messianic elements were superimposed upon the tradition. But in my opinion there are several incidents whose historicity it is almost impossible to dismiss and whose central significance has definite messianic overtones — a significance which must have been known to and intended by Jesus.

I think first of the feeding of the 5,000. As John O’Neill observes, ‘we may suppose that some extraordinary event will lie behind such a miraculous narrative... it remains true that if Jesus did preside at a communal meal in the desert places of Galilee and Judaea, this would have had peculiar significance to his contemporaries. They would perhaps remember that Moses by praying to God was able to feed the people with manna and quail in the desert; they would perhaps be reminded of the promise that the desert would again be fruitful; and they would think of the shepherd King as they were given food in the barren places (cf. Pss. of Sol. xvii. 45). The Qumran desert community placed great emphasis on communal meals, and looked forward to the time when the Messiah of Aaron would preside and the Messiah of Israel, whom God had begotten among them, would come (IQSa ii. 11–22).’

Even more to the point is the evidence of John 6: 15 that the crowd intended to ‘come and seize Jesus to proclaim him king’. C. H. Dodd argues, convincingly I think, for the historicity of John 6: 14f. Most noticeable is the otherwise very odd use of _enangkasen_ in Mark 6: 45 — Jesus had to force the disciples to put out into a difficult sea. The two independent traditions interlock and together provide a very coherent picture. The crowd see the messianic significance of Jesus’ action and are so carried away on a wave of mass enthusiasm that they attempt to make him king by acclamation. The disciples themselves are caught up in the excitement, and Jesus in order to forestall the move has first to force the disciples to embark by themselves on an unwinviting lake. Only then is he able to turn to the crowd and with the voice of authority to dismiss them (_apoluein_). He then goes off immediately by himself into the hills to pray — and it is perhaps significant that Mark only mentions Jesus praying three times, and that on each of the other occasions the implication is that he resorted to prayer because of temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early temptation — temptation at the time of his early
success to remain where he was so popular (1: 35, 38); temptation in Gethsemane (14: 35f.). So in 6: 46 there is the implication that Jesus was tempted to give way to the crowd’s demands — to be the Messiah of popular conception and popular appeal, and that he fled to the silence and loneliness of the hills that quiet communion with his Father might strengthen his conviction concerning the nature of his mission and Messiahship. Whether Mark was aware of the messianic significance of the story he recorded it is hard to say; but I would strongly maintain that that significance is inherent to the historical incident he records.

I think secondly of Peter’s confession in Mark 8: 27ff. — a passage which caused Wrede not a little difficulty. Points in favour of the substantial authenticity of the pericope are: the specification and location of the place of confession (none of the traditional resurrection appearances to the Twelve took place so far north), the unique appearance of the title Christos addressed to Jesus by a disciple, the evidence that Jesus was Pneumatiker, and the total improbability of the primitive church calling Peter ‘Satan’. Nor should we ignore the otherwise surprising insertion kai idon tous mathetas autou in verse 33a, which has the ring of an authentic reminiscence, and the Jewish character of verse 33. Grundmann also calls attention to the thrice repeated epittimin and to the érxato didaskein which is not the normal Markan semitism but indicates a particular point of time at which for the first time the repeated teaching referred to by the didaskein received a concrete content. 3

As for the passage as a whole, and without being able to go into detail, I may say that I am not convinced by the arguments which attribute the connection between 8: 27–30 and 8: 31ff. solely to Markan theology. It is unquestionable in my opinion that Jesus saw (or at least came to see) his mission in terms of suffering, and entirely probable that he should begin to explain this to his most intimate followers at some stage in his ministry. Nor do I feel it necessary to attribute verse 30 — the command to silence — to the hand of an interpolator. For it is not the Christ of Easter whom Peter confesses, or else why is he rebuked? And if it is the Christ of Jewish hope and popular expectation whom Peter hails — as the rebuke requires — a pre-Easter origin cannot so readily be denied to the confession. Here again then is an account whose historical substance is of irreducible messianic significance.

The third incident in which I believe historicity and messianic significance go together is the entry into Jerusalem. On the score of historicity Vincent Taylor points to ‘the local expressions at the beginning, the vivid character of the account, ... the description of what happened, the restrained nature of the acclamation, and the strange manner in which the account breaks off without any suggestion of a “triumphal entry” (as in Mt.).’ 4 One might also note that the actions and shouts of those with Jesus create an impression of authenticity, because though they conform in a general way to Zechariah 9: 9 they include details which are neither necessary nor even particularly appropriate — a fact which makes it unlikely that the narrative is a construction of the primitive church. Specially worthy of comment is the appearance of hósanna, which is firmly embedded in the Synoptic tradition, and also in John’s account, but which appears nowhere else in the New Testament — a strong indication of authenticity. I therefore find Taylor’s conclusion wholly justified: ‘These characteristics suggest the eyewitness rather than the artist.’ 5

As for messianic significance, we may note in the words of D. E. Nineham, ‘It is difficult to see why Jesus sent for the colt and entered the city on it unless he intended to make clear the fact of his Messiahship. Pilgrims normally entered Jerusalem on foot, so, as the story stands, the fact that Jesus deliberately procured and rode an ass makes it impossible to think of him as simply a passive figure in a demonstration which was none of his doing.’ 6

The messianic associations of the Mount of Olives should also not go unobserved. The fact is that there is no effort on the part of Jesus to keep his Messiahship secret — certainly not in Mark’s narrative, for Mark’s narrative, and, if I would add, the historical event, can only be construed as a clear assertion of a kind of Messiahship.

The fourth incident I want to fasten on to is the trial and condemnation of Jesus. That Jesus was found guilty of claiming to be King of the Jews is the testimony of all four Gospels (Mk. 15: 26; Mt. 27: 37; Lk. 23: 38; Jn. 19: 19). The frequent repetition of the title in Mark 15 — verses 2, 9, 12, 26, 32 — is particularly noticeable. Since it was not a title employed by the early church there can be little doubt, Bultmann notwithstanding, that we are on sure historical ground here: Jesus was crucified as a messianic pretender, because of the political connotations of the title King of the Jews. But this implies that there was some basis to the charge and the condemnation — that there were substantial grounds for applying it to Jesus — that, indeed, the title was in some sense accepted by him. The historicity of the trial scene in 15: 2ff. inevitably reflects favourably on the authenticity of the earlier hearing described in 14: 55ff., since it can be fairly argued that the question of Pilate (15: 2) is simply the Graeco–Roman version of the question of the high priest (14: 61) — the blasphemy charge suitably nuanced for a Roman court.

Turning to that earlier hearing, the presumption is strong that Jesus did actually speak the words about building the Temple, in some form at least. Although Lohmeyer is probably correct in classifying cheiropoiétion and acheiropoiétion as a Markan or community explanatory addition, 7 nevertheless the fact cannot be

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5 Taylor, Gospel, p. 452.
ignored that six New Testament passages testify to the saying (Mk. 14: 58; 15: 29; Mt. 26: 61; 27: 40; Jn. 2: 19; Acts 6: 14); and if the saying sometimes seems obscure that speaks rather in favour of than against its authenticity. Incidentally, the saying also attests to the power which was ascribed to Jesus — katalusō. It is not without relevance to the question we are studying that such power could be ascribed to Jesus by way of accusation — and it certainly testifies to some claim, by word or action, to messianic activity and power. As attributed to Jesus by the witnesses it can only be intended and understood messianically. The probability is high that it provided the basis of the prosecution's attack on Jesus, and Otto Betz in particular has shown how naturally an examination at that point leads on to the direct question of the high priest: 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed?' — for the building of the Temple belonged to the messianic age (1 Enoch 90: 29; 4 Ezr. 9: 38-10: 27; cf. Ezk. 40-48; Jubilees 1: 17, 27f.) and the saying involves a claim to fulfill the prophecy of Nathan (2 Sa. 7: 12-14) and so to be Messiah, Son of David, and Son of God.

If we can find no adequate reason to dispute the authenticity of the course of questioning, what are we to make of Jesus' reply to the high priest's question? It is here that Wrede's thesis breaks down completely. For however affirmative or evasive were his opening words — and we shall return to this point shortly — there is no doubt that the high priest understood the reply as a messianic claim: the high priest's tearing of his clothes was hardly prompted by the silence of Jesus. In the words of Montefiore, 'We must surely believe that the Messiahship claim was at least ventilated, and that it was resolved that Jesus was to be denounced to Pilate on that ground.'

II

Wrede's thesis that the messianic secret motif had a theological rather than a historical origin was based on his conclusion that certain elements of that motif were clearly unhistorical. We are now in a position to stand Wrede's line of reasoning on its head, for our conclusion thus far is that certain elements of that motif are clearly historical; that is, that the messianic character of the tradition is not the reflection of post-resurrection Christian theology — it belongs to the incidents themselves. On the basis of that conclusion we can now present the thesis that contrary to Wrede the so-called 'messianic secret' motif had a historical rather than theological origin. To argue this thesis in depth is beyond the scope of this paper, but the four incidents already examined almost constitute proof enough.

First the feeding of the 5,000. The important points which emerge here are first: that there was abroad, in Galilee at least, a popular conception of the Messiah as a political kingly figure — the sort of King of the Jews that Pilate felt justified in crucifying; that Jesus was a Messiah of this type was the conclusion reached by those whom Jesus miraculously fed in the desert. The second important point is the evidence of how Jesus reacted against this attempt to force a false messianic role on him. He saw all too clearly how politically inflammable the Galilean crowd was. The lesson learned, or confirmed, by this effect of his display of authority would go a long way towards explaining his reticence in other situations.

With regard to Peter's confession, the interesting thing is again Jesus' reaction. Peter hails him as Messiah; and how does Jesus respond? There is certainly no question of his denying the title — but there is also no indication of his accepting it beyond the impersonal peri autou of 8: 30. 8: 30 is a word neither of rebuke nor of congratulation. It is a command to silence followed immediately by explicit and very pointed teaching about the nature of his Messiaship. The implication is strong that Peter was little further forward than the Galilean crowd in his understanding of Jesus' Messiahship. The command to silence is given not so much because Jesus' Messiahship is secret, but because it is misunderstood.

In the entry into Jerusalem three points call for attention. The first is that Mark carefully avoids making the messianic character of the event fully explicit. The Zechariah prophecy is not referred to; the ovation seems to come from the disciples rather than the crowd, and the cries of welcome fall short of complete messianic recognition and homage. The second is the manner of Jesus' entry: he comes as a humble king who speaks peace, not as the political King of the Jews. The third is the fact that the authorities did not immediately pull Jesus in and that no reference seems to have been made to the entry at the trial — which suggests that no political significance was seen or could easily be read into the entry. In short, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was an enacted parable about the nature of his Messiahship. Those whose ears were attuned to catch political overtones heard nothing. Those who looked and listened for the coming of the Kingdom saw something of eschatological and messianic significance, but fell short of full understanding.

In the trial of Jesus once again interest centres on Jesus' response to the questions put to him by the high priest and by Pilate. I am much impressed by the arguments in favour of the longer reading in 14: 62. What scribe faced by the triumphant and unequivocal egō eimi would dilute it to the colourless and equivocal su eipas hoti egō eimi? And the longer reading certainly accounts for the texts of Matthew and Luke. In that case Jesus' reply to the high priest is very similar to his reply to Pilate. To both questions — 'Are you the Christ?' and 'Are you the King of the Jews?' — Jesus answers in effect, 'You could put it that way'. He accepts the titles, but at the same time makes it clear that he does not attach the same significance to them as do his questioners (cf. Jn. 18: 33-37). These exchanges

are important in that they exemplify the dilemma which must constantly have confronted Jesus — could he accept or use simpliciter titles which meant one thing to himself and something very different to his hearers?

The conclusions I draw from studying these passages are that Jesus believed himself to be Messiah, but that his conception of the messianic role was an unexpected and unpopular one. Because the title Messiah had such different connotations to Jesus and to those who heard him he never used it of himself or unequivocally welcomed its application to him by others; and when his actions or words seemed to encourage the to him false conception of Messiahship he tried to prevent it by commands to silence. Nevertheless he did not deny his right to the title, but attempted to re-educate his hearers in the significance of it for him. And the claims he made to Messiahship and messianic authority were of a parabolic sort whose significance was there, plain for all to see whose eyes were not blinded and whose ears were not clogged by misconceptions (8: 17–21).

These conclusions follow directly from the four passages we examined. But I believe that they hold true for the whole of the Markan tradition, and to round off the argument I will merely illustrate the force of this contention by drawing attention to three other motifs which shed light over the whole Gospel. First of all, the motif of authoritative teaching and action. I refer in particular to the section 2: 1–3: 6. We have four very definite claims made by Jesus to very considerable status and authority — authority to forgive sins (2: 10), authority to command and call (kalesai) people (2: 14, 17), status as bridegroom (2: 19 — in the context of Old Testament thought a very pointed and meaningful metaphor) and status and authority as Lord over the sabbath (2: 27; 3: 4–6). In none of these incidents could it be said that Jesus was explicitly claiming to be Messiah, but in each case there were messianic overtones — overtones which the individual seeking the truth would be able to recognize.

Secondly, there is the parabolic nature of Jesus’ teaching to which attention is drawn in chapter 4. I would draw attention again to the ta panta in 4: 11: ‘to you has been given the mystery of the Kingdom, but to those outside all things are in parables’, or, as Jeremias translates, ‘all things are obscure’. Bearing in mind 4: 33f., I take the parallelism of this verse to signify that all Jesus’ teaching was in the nature of a parable; that is, to those who had ears to hear (4: 9) the parable unfolded its meaning; but to those whose ears were dulled to the note of divine authority the parable gave no light.10 I have no doubt that this double-edged quality of Jesus’ teaching was his own choice. Rather than a straightforward statement of certain truths which would register on most of his hearers’ understanding but make no impact on their emotions or their will, Jesus deliberately chose to speak in parables so that the truth thus conveyed might have maximum impact, even if only on a few.

Thirdly, I would point to the phrase ‘Son of man’, the self-designation preferred by Jesus, as I believe it to be. Again we enter a much-ploughed field, and I will not attempt to plough a fresh furrow. Suffice it to say that the work of Geza Vermes on the one hand, and of Morna Hooker on the other, serve to underline how fully that phrase exemplifies the parabolic nature of Jesus’ Messianic claims. Vermes cites several examples of Aramaic usage which seem to support the view that bar nash(a) could have been used by Jesus as a circum-location for ‘I’, and that the phrase could have been understood by his hearers in that sense.11 Nor can the link between the Markan Son of man and the Danielic Son of man so well forged by Miss Hooker be easily broken.12 In the words of Matthew Black: ‘No term was more fitted both to conceal, yet at the same time to reveal to those who had ears to hear, the Son of Man’s real identity.’13

Finally, attention should also be drawn to the parallel noted by Richard Longenecker between the Synoptic Jesus on the one hand and the Qumran Teacher of Righteousness and Simeon ben Kosebah on the other. Common features in each case include (1) external acclamation, (2) reticence on the part of the individual to speak of himself in terms used of him by others, and (3) consciousness on that individual’s part of the ultimate validity of the titles employed. The basis of this common pattern Longenecker finds not in any ‘messianic secret’ theology, but in the Jewish view that ‘no man can be defined as a messiah before he has accomplished the task of the anointed’. If this is so it certainly enhances the historicity of the Synoptic picture.

In short, I believe that to speak of a messianic secret is misleading and unjustified. So far as Jesus’ Messiahship was concerned there was no secret as such, only a cautious disavowal of false views — those of the Galilean wonder-worker and of the warrior or political King of the Jews — and an equally cautious assertion and explication of his own understanding of Messiahship — that of service and suffering in this world and of exaltation only after death. As to the reason for this, all the Evangelists agree: Jesus was indeed Messiah during his earthly life, but his Messiahship was incomplete and inevitably misunderstood during that phase. Only with the cross, resurrection and exaltation would he enter into the fullness of his messianic office, and

10 The saying has to be read together with those of verses 21–22, as the repetition of the challenge to hear aright makes clear (4: 9, 23). Jesus came to give light, and his teaching shed light enough; nevertheless that light was hidden for many, and would remain so for the time being, till either the resurrection or the parousia.


only then could its true nature be properly understood by men. The so-called secrecy motif in Mark is nothing other than Mark's method of bringing home to his readers the programmical nature of Jesus' Messiahship.

Wrede's thesis has been subjected to many criticisms in the course of its life, and the recent attempts to defend and define its raison d'être must be pronounced inadequate. Since the 'messianic secret' motif is part and parcel of the tradition itself we are at the end of the day more or less shut up to the choice between the mere 'that'-ness of complete Bultmannian scepticism and a Jesus who was a secret or rather a misunderstood Messiah.

I do not want to overstate my case. I would not deny, for example, that Mark may have interpreted simple commands to silence demons in terms of the 'messianic secret' motif (1: 34; 3: 11f.) or that it is Mark's own opinion about the disciples which is being expressed in passages like 6: 51-52; 14: 40b. But the question is whether this interpretation and opinion expresses an understanding of the material which is essentially foreign to it, or whether it is merely developing a theme which is already native to the material. When one takes into account the complexity of the secrecy motif (which reflects the complexity of life) the counterbalancing publicity-revelation theme, the inherent messianic character of the pericope we examined, and the very strong probability which emerged from that examination that there were two understandings of Messiahship at issue, I cannot but conclude that the so-called 'messianic secret' originated in the life-situation of Jesus and is in essence at least wholly historical.

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**Comment: 'To the Praise of his Glorious Grace'**

Donald S Allister

The 'Comment' on the subject of predestination by Paul Marston in the last issue of the Bulletin has aroused some reaction from proponents of a different point of view among our readers. At our invitation Donald Allister, a TSF member at present studying at Cambridge, has produced a brief statement of an alternative position.

The Bulletin as such has no particular axe to grind in relation to this matter. Its standpoint is that of the doctrinal basis of the TSF and it therefore accepts 'the sovereignty of God in creation, revelation, redemption and final judgment' as a fundamental truth attested by Scripture. But there is scope for difference of opinion in the elucidation of this statement, and our contributors are free to expound it in accordance with its scriptural basis. Only through such continuing discussion can a Reformed group of Christians, which recognizes that it is semper reformanda, conform itself more closely to the pattern of revealed truth.

F.D.E. Schleiermacher wrote of two ways in which heresy can arise: 'either human nature will be so defined that a redemption in the strict sense cannot be accomplished, or the Redeemer will be defined in such a way that He cannot accomplish redemption'.1 As far as the Christian understanding of the atonement is concerned he was right. Before any discussion of the gospel can begin it is necessary to understand what the Bible teaches about God and about man, but it must be remembered that the Bible is God's Word: no attempt to systematize its teaching or to re-arrange the order of its contents can do justice to it — for no presentation of revealed propositions about God and man can be as balanced or as well ordered as the Bible. The only way to learn to think and understand biblically is to read the whole word of God, from Genesis to Revelation; to read it again and again in a spirit of prayerful submission and obedience. The only way to interpret individual parts of the Bible is in the light of the whole. 'Seek for that sense which is most agreeable to the general strain of the Scripture. The infallible word of God must, doubtless, be consistent with itself. If it does not appear so to us, the obscurity and seeming inconsistency must be charged to the remaining darkness and ignorance of our minds.'2 I shall now turn to some of the essential biblical principles in the light of which the teaching of individual passages should be seen.3

God is sovereign. He is the cause and creator of all things. 'I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done,

