

“The Messianic Secret In The Gospel of Mark: Historical
Development and Value of Wrede’s Theory”

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INTRODUCTION

She can kill with a smile. She can wound with her eyes.
And she can win your faith with her casual lies.
She only reveals what she wants you to see.
She hides like a child, but she's always a woman to me.¹

These words compose the first lines of Billy Joel's song, "She's Always a Woman." They describe the mystery that surrounds and defines the very essence of the kind of woman Joel finds attractive *par excellence*. This kind of woman is attractive because she is characterized by enigma. If she were forthright and plainly honest, she would not be beautiful to Joel. In this mystery there is pulchritude.

In Mark's gospel Jesus seems to have this same mysterious character about his messiahship that Joel's woman exhibits. Jesus is the paradoxical Messiah. He will perform miracles as evidence of his messiahship, then he will command no one to speak of them. When demons see him, they proclaim his messiahship, and he commands them to be silenced. If Jesus is Messiah, why must he be so contradictory about the matter? Why does he bother with proving himself as Messiah, if he is only going to hide it?

Yet people were attracted to his ministry, like Joel to his woman. Perhaps it was the very mystery itself that won the people over. Maybe in order to be Messiah, he had to conceal himself in this same manner. It is possible that the very paradox revealed his true nature. It could be said, "He can win your faith with his casual lies/ He only reveals what he wants you to see/ He's always Messiah to me."

This paper intends to investigate this mystery of Jesus presented in Mark by sketching the history of this mystery, and offering an evaluation of its importance for exegesis in the gospel of Mark.

¹ Billy Joel, "She's Always a Woman," The Stranger, 1977, compact disc.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEORY

In 1901, William Wrede introduced a christological interpretation based on Mark's gospel which has been known as "The Messianic Secret," in Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien: Zugleich ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Markusevangeliums.² As the name suggests, Wrede's theory attempts to explain the recurring motif of Jesus denying his messiahship, especially as it is found in the second gospel. Below a rough sketch of Wrede's theory will be presented by highlighting significant movements from its inception to present day in order to provide the historical portion of this paper.³

Prior to Wrede

As all theologies do not emerge from a vacuum, but from a context with place and time, so too Wrede's christology was primed by the atmosphere of scholarship that permeated the academic spirit of his time. Perhaps the foremost influence which characterized christological scholarship in Europe was the quest to know the historical Jesus. Thus, James Blevins asseverates:

The theological stage upon which Wrede played a leading role had as its backdrop and scenery the myriad murals of the historical Jesus, as painted by the "liberal school" of the period. Any serious attempt to speak concerning Jesus to the intellectual circles of Europe during the nineteenth century had to assume the past studies of men such as David F. Strauss and Bruno Bauer.⁴

² William Wrede, Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien: Zugleich ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Markusevangeliums (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901); English edition, William Wrede, The Messianic Secret, trans. J. C. G. Grieg (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1971). All subsequent references are to the English edition.

³ For the structure of historical development from 1901-1950 I relied heavily upon James L. Blevins, The Messianic Secret in Markan Research 1901-1976. (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

In addition to the crusade to find the historical Jesus, academia was beginning to turn its eye upon Mark's gospel for another reason. Prior to the mid-1800's it was nearly universally assumed the second gospel was a digested version of Matthew's account. Markan studies were not pursued, since it seemed that the book did not offer much new information. However, the tides began to turn in the middle of the nineteenth century as scholars began exploring the possibility that Mark's gospel was written first. If Matthew was dependent on Mark for information, then the earliest strata of gospel tradition would properly be extrapolated from Mark, rather than the other gospels. Hence, there was rejuvenation in Markan research, christology, and literary criticism.

The priority of Mark and the research project to find the Jesus of history were the two most prominent ideologies that influenced Wrede. James Robinson describes the working hypothesis of the end of the nineteenth century: "The desired reconstruction of the historical Jesus in terms of character development, psychological comprehensibility, and 'historical probability' found in Mark documentary proof; and Mark found, through identification with this reconstruction, the proof of its historical character."⁵ The combination of innovative christological interest and Markan priority prepared the way for Wrede.

William Wrede

When William Wrede was a professor of New Testament at Breslau, he began speculating how he could make his contribution to the academic theater in Europe. Wrede's writing would reflect the principles he came to accept as a student under Albert

⁵ James M. Robinson, The Problem of History in Mark and other Marcan Studies, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 56.

Eichorn. Among Eichorn's influences upon Wrede, the most significant would be Eichorn's "History of Religions" method. This method advocated that Pauline theology was shaped by the surrounding pagan religions, which Wrede presented in his first work in 1897.⁶ During his first teaching job at Göttingen, he came under the influence of Julius Wellhausen who taught that Jesus' life was not messianic or eschatological, and that these faith traditions emerged from the early Christian community after the resurrection.

Wrede's thoughts came to fruition in the Messianic Secret, published in 1901. This work attempted to undermine all of the writings of his contemporaries, who tried to construct a historical Jesus given Markan priority. Wrede advocated his thesis using three lines of support. These lines of support fall under three categories: the gospel of Mark, the other gospels, and historical elucidation.

Messianic Secret in Mark⁷

First, Wrede sought to demonstrate that Mark's gospel portrays Jesus as someone who rejects messianic claims in an enigmatic method. In Mark's gospel, Wrede specifically points to Jesus' encounters with demons, the disciples inability to comprehend Jesus' ministry, and the cryptic style of Jesus' teaching as central support for his messianic secret theory. For Wrede, if the Markan Jesus really upheld the motif of messianic secret, then it is wrought with bizarre puzzles. The problem is not simply that Jesus is portrayed in two different ways, but that he is depicted in one paradoxical

⁶ William Wrede, Über Aufgabe und Methode der sogenannten neutestamentlichen Theologie, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1897).

⁷ Wrede, Messianic Secret, 11-149.

fashion. Why does Jesus command demons not to reveal his identity after they had already blurted it out? Why does Jesus ask for the healing of Jarius' daughter be kept a secret when everyone already knew she was dead (or in a coma)? If Jesus performs miracles in order to show that he is Messiah, then why does he ask people to stop proclaiming them? These questions do not add up to actual history for Wrede but to theological additions from the church into the gospel tradition.

Jesus' style of teaching further reveals a confusing enigma about his character. If Jesus avoided the title of Messiah because of its materialistic connotations, "Why does he not simply say that the political messiahship is a 'no go' and that he has as little to do with that as with their materialistic expectation?"⁸ That kind of forwardness to the messianic title would be more productive than the mysterious reaction Jesus has in Mark's gospel. Why present messiahship through the veil of secrecy (which brings added confusion), when he could have forthrightly explained what his messianic calling would and would not be like?

Furthermore, Wrede emphasized that Jesus is not declared as Messiah until after the resurrection. Most commentators who had dealt with reconstructing Jesus' life from Mark handled the messianic hushes as a minor theme that ran parallel to the larger theme of a developing awareness of Jesus' messiahship or fear that messianic claims would provoke a political uprising among the people. Wrede believed that these views were unsubstantiated by the gospel and that his view, where secrecy is the primary theme, offered a better explanation of the gospel datum.

⁸ Ibid., 42.

Therefore, distinguishing what in the gospels is actual historical witness from what is added faith tradition to the life of Jesus is not easy. While there must be some historical kernel to the gospel, Wrede contends it is virtually impossible to differentiate it from the added tradition of the early church.

Messianic Secret in the other Gospels⁹

The core of Wrede's argument rests upon Mark, since the working assumption was that Mark was composed first and used by the other gospels, but his second line of support appealed to proof from the gospels of Matthew, Luke and John. In Matthew, Wrede believed that the messianic secret is decentralized from the primary theme as it was in Mark, and resides as a tacit trait.¹⁰ There are certain aspects of Mark's source that Matthew could not rub out, thus leaving vestiges of Mark's influence. These remains from Mark are most distinctly evident in Jesus' parabolic teaching and in some of the healing stories where prohibitions are given. Ultimately, Matthew's gospel proves to be less supportive, although not irreconcilable with Mark's messianic secret. Wrede concludes:

In Mark the secrecy of the revelations is essential. The whole phenomenon of Jesus in its higher and true significance must remain hidden. Matthew no longer had this idea. Only residual traces of it remain.¹¹

⁹ Ibid., 151-207.

¹⁰ Ibid., 154: "...the idea of the Messianic secret no longer has the importance for Matthew that it has for Mark." Also 158: "Moreover it is not entirely without significance that while Matthew does not entirely omit the principle idea of Mark, that Jesus conceals himself through the parables from the people, he does let it slip into the background behind the question who shares the interpretation of the secrets contained in them, that is of the *kekrummena apo katboles*."

¹¹ Ibid., 163.

In contradistinction to Matthew's gospel, Wrede believed that Luke and John prove to be much more supportive for his theory than Matthew. Luke's gospel tells of demoniac encounters where Jesus commands silence and, although to a lesser extent than Mark, the blundering of the disciples to understand Jesus' messiahship.¹² Wrede understands Luke to have dropped a robust theme of secrecy and replaced it with a weaker one. Wrede explains that in Luke the people "do not appear in possession of the knowledge that he is Messiah but they await in hope that he will become this."¹³ Wrede concludes that Luke is much more in accord with Mark than Matthew is, yet it is not without traces of further theological development and the redaction of the author.

The gospel of John appears to be the most harmonious of the three other gospels with Wrede's theory. Most lucidly in accord with Mark, John's gospel offers a clear demarcation between the faith of the disciples before and after the resurrection. Prior to the resurrection the disciples represent blindness to Jesus' life and mission, and afterwards they demonstrate total enlightenment.¹⁴ Furthermore, John's gospel revolves around the secrecy of Jesus that is veiled in his enigmatic speeches. Jesus' words are intentionally obscure. It is only after the coming of Jesus' Spirit following the resurrection event that they finally understand the hidden message in Jesus' words.

¹² Wrede contends that Mark's and Luke's picture of the disciples really has only one trait that overlaps with respect to the messianic secret that is "they contemplate the suffering of Jesus uncomprehendingly." *Ibid.*, 170. Nonetheless, this is no minor piece of corroboration for Wrede.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 178-79.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 205: "At all events the idea is common to both writers that the resurrection differentiates two periods for the disciples, that of blindness and that of full knowledge."

Wrede seized the odd congruence of the earliest gospel, which has a low christology, with the latest gospel, which has a strikingly high christology, in order to confirm his theory that the messianic secret stems from an earlier source than Mark, which he identifies as the early Christian community.¹⁵ Therefore, John's gospel provides not only supporting evidence for the messianic secret motif in the gospels, but it further contributes as independent attestation for locating the origin of the messianic secret.

Historical Elucidation¹⁶

Wrede's final support for his hypothesis is pursued in his final section entitled "historical elucidation." This section is termed so because Wrede wished at this point to clarify what he believed actually happened with the messianic secret and the historical Jesus.¹⁷ Given the research and argument he has presented up to this point, he attempted to tie up loose ends by identifying precisely what historical declarations can be made about Jesus and his claims to messiahship.

It is under this section that Wrede pronounces the most striking conclusions about Jesus' messiahship. Foremost was his claim that Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah.

He writes:

To my mind this is the origin of the idea which we have shown to be present in Mark. It is, so to speak, a transitional idea and *it can be characterised as the*

¹⁵ Ibid., 207: "The correspondence between Mark and John is of value, precisely because the characterisation of the disciples in John cannot be understood on a Markan basis, or anyway not only on a Markan basis. It proves we are dealing here with ideas that were operative in broad circles of the church."

¹⁶ Ibid., 211-52.

¹⁷ Ibid., 211.

after-effect of the view that the resurrection is the beginning of the messiahship at a time when the life of Jesus was already being filled materially with messianic content. Or else it processes from the impulse to make the earthly life of Jesus messianic, but one inhibited by the older view, which was still potent.¹⁸

Even more outrageous Wrede concludes:

If my deductions are correct, then they are significant for the assessment of Jesus' historical life itself. If our view could only arise when nothing is known of an open messianic claim on Jesus' part, then we would seem to have in it *a positive historical testimony for the idea that Jesus did not give himself out as messiah.*¹⁹

These kinds of claims would become the central point of conflict in the criticism that would imminently follow. Wrede accounted for the messianic content of the gospels by hypothesizing that by the time Mark's gospel was written, the Christian community had theologized the content of the story of Jesus, so that they came to believe Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus was only called "Messiah" through the eyes of Easter faith.²⁰ Hence Wrede draws some conclusions:

The one is an idea about Jesus and it rests on the fact that Jesus became messiah – so far as the belief of his followers was concerned – with the Resurrection, and the other is an idea about the disciples which rests upon the fact that they acquire a new understanding of Jesus as a *result* of the Resurrection. But the starting-point manifests itself in the end to be one and the same. Both ideas rest upon the fact that the Resurrection is the decisive event for the messiahship and that Jesus' earthly life was not to begin with regarded as messianic.²¹

Additionally, Wrede expressed that his studies lead one into skepticism over all the historical data in the gospels. The problem Wrede found with the gospel's historicity is not simply that they are based upon tradition, but that the tradition is so closely

¹⁸ Ibid., 229. [His italics.]

¹⁹ Ibid., 230. [His italics.]

²⁰ Ibid., 215: "Jesus becomes messiah only with the Resurrection."

²¹ Ibid., 236.

interwoven with later accretions that it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to tell history from legend. Therefore, Wrede's research not only threatened a historical messianic Jesus but also any hope of recovering a historical Jesus with any degree of certainty.

Summary

Wrede introduced a new and provocative challenge for research of the historical Jesus by examining the messianic secret in the gospel traditions. First, he argued that Mark, as the earliest gospel with the least amount of layers of tradition, demonstrated a paradoxical depiction of Jesus and his messiahship. Second, he examined the traditions in Matthew, Luke, and John. Matthew's tradition reflected a new emphasis, and offered no significant contribution to his theory. The third gospel demonstrated some further corroboration for the messianic secret similar to Mark. John's gospel offered the closest parallels, thus showing independent attestation to the messianic secret, which Wrede concluded originated from the Christian community prior to Mark's tradition. Finally, Wrede drew conclusions about the historical Jesus based upon the research he had presented. He concluded from the previous data that Jesus' claims to be the Messiah were never part of the historical Jesus, and were added by the early Christian church which worshipped him as the risen Lord. N. T. Wright succinctly expresses the progression of Wrede's theory this way:

- (i) Jesus did not think he was Messiah, or divine; (ii) the early church thought he was both; therefore, (iii) something appeared very wrong with the whole business; therefore (iv) somebody, after the early period but before Mark, had the bright idea that Jesus *had* thought these things after all, but had kept them secret; then (v) Mark used this theory as the basis for his narrative.²²

²² N. T. Wright, The New Testament and the People of God, Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 1 (Minneapolis, Fortress, 1992), 391. [His italics.]

Thus, Wrede cast a dark shadow over studies of the historical Jesus which raised questions not just to Jesus' messiahship but also to ascertaining any facts about the historical Jesus through the gospel traditions. For better or worse, Wrede made the impact into the academic world that he sought for.

The Response of Historicism (1901-1910)

Wrede's research was almost immediately heralded as a landmark work of research in Markan christology. As the Messianic Secret spread across Europe, criticism also followed. In fact, most of the continent and Britain immediately recognized the gravity of Wrede's study; hence their reaction to it was powerful. The initial reaction came from scholars who represented what may be called a motley array of "Historicism."

William Sanday

One of the loudest critics against Wrede came from William Sanday, the Oxford professor who championed a position which may be properly called "Radical Historicism." Sanday poignantly argued that Wrede's book was exceptionally in error. Sanday's polemic against Wrede can be found in his book, The Life of Christ in Current Research, published in 1907.²³ His faultfinding begins by characterizing Wrede's writing style like that of a "Prussian Officer."²⁴ Moving on to more substantial criticisms, Sanday described his personal astonishment with Wrede's radical thesis. For example, in one instance Sanday writes, "I cannot easily conceive of anything more utterly superficial

²³ William Sanday, The Life of Christ in Recent Research (New York: Oxford University Press, 1907).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 70. Prussian officers were renown for their flamboyant attire and cocky demeanor.

and impossible.”²⁵ After all, on the surface, if the church was confronted with the difficulty of reconciling absolutely no real facts of Jesus claim to messiahship with an Easter faith which demanded Jesus’ messiahship, why did the church just not make up the facts they needed instead of attempting to hide this embarrassment in a sinuous way? Such a cover-up conspiracy is astronomically infeasible in a first century world. Sanday illustrates:

A twentieth-century forger or criminal of the type dealt with by Sherlock Holmes might conceivably cover up his tracks in the way Wrede supposes; but that any first-century community or writer should so act is incredible. If the ancients deviated from strict veracity, they at least followed the maxim *pecca fortiter*. Where direct methods were open to them, we may be sure that they would prefer them; at least they would certainly not prefer methods so indirect and circuitous as Wrede imagines.²⁶

In addition to the farcical plausibility of Wrede’s proposal, Sanday specifically questioned Wrede’s use of the resurrection in his theory. If the early Christians’ Easter faith accounts for the marred historicity of the gospel, then what event birthed this post-resurrection faith? Surely such a faith only existed because these people witnessed a historical resurrection. Utilizing a metaphorical analogy, Sanday asks, “The elephant stands upon the tortoise; but what does the tortoise stand upon?”²⁷ The only plausible solution left, according to Sanday, was to suppose that Jesus revealed to his disciples his identity as Messiah prior to the resurrection.

Although Sanday does credit Wrede with stating a theological question in an innovative manner, the only value is that, “In the end almost every statement of a new

²⁵ Ibid., 74.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 75.

problem, or problems does good. The statement may be more or less a failure in itself, but it leads to a fresher and stronger apprehension of the facts.”²⁸ Even though Sanday seems to have believed that he leveled a cataclysmic blow to Wrede’s thesis, it appears that in some way either Sanday failed to fully appreciate the potency of Wrede’s theory or scholarship in the early twentieth century failed to fully appreciate Sanday’s criticisms. For even after Sanday’s response, Wrede’s theory continued to forge onward virtually unscathed.

Albert Schweitzer

Albert Schweitzer’s The Mystery of the Kingdom of God: The Secret of Jesus’ Messiahship and Passion was published on the same day as Wrede’s Messianic Secret.²⁹ Many of Wrede’s and Schweitzer’s conclusions overlapped with one another. Schweitzer fully specified these observations in his book, The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its progress from Reimarus to Wrede.³⁰ In contrast to Sanday’s “Radical Historicism,” Schweitzer’s view can be termed “Eschatological Historicism.”

Schweitzer himself explains the relationship between Wrede’s Messianic Secret and his own The Secret of Messiahship and the Passion when he writes:

²⁸ Ibid., 70.

²⁹ Albert Schweitzer, Das Messianitäts-und Leidensgeheimis: Eine Skizze des Lebens Jesu (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1901); English edition, Albert Schweitzer, The Mystery of the Kingdom of God: The Secret of Jesus’ Messiahship and Passion, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Macmillan, 1950). All subsequent page references are to the English edition.

³⁰ Albert Schweitzer, Von Reimarus zu Wrede (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1906); English edition, Albert Schweitzer, The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: Macmillan, 1948). All subsequent references are to the English edition.

And yet they are written from quite different standpoints, one from the point of view of literary criticism, the other from that of historical recognition of eschatology. It seems to be the fate of the Marcan hypothesis that at the decisive periods its problems should always be attacked simultaneously and independently from the literary and historical sides, and the results declared in two different forms which corroborate each other.³¹

He goes on to further enumerate the impetus behind these works:

The meaning of that is that the literary and the eschatological view, which have hitherto been marching parallel, on either flank, to the advance of modern theology, have now united their forces, brought theology to a halt, surrounded it, and compelled it to give battle.³²

Wrede found a true collaborator in his critical studies of Mark in Schweitzer. One foundational premise they agreed upon was that one could not start with any presupposed belief about the historical Jesus and read him into the gospel narrative. Blevins encapsulates this when he summarizes:

He [Schweitzer] agreed with Wrede in dismissing the claims that a developmental scheme is evident in Jesus, his disciples, and the outward circumstances. Nor is there any indication of Jesus' making a distinction between a Messiahship of political or spiritual content. Schweitzer felt that these conceptions could not be read from individual whim into the Marcan text without proof. He contended that the scholar could not select what he considered to be the "historical kernel" and reject the rest as husk.³³

Furthermore, they agreed on the need for simplicity in Marcan research. "The simplicity consists in dispensing with the connecting links which it has been accustomed to discover between the sections of the narratives (*pericopes*)," avers Schweitzer, "in looking at each one separately, and recognising that it is difficult to pass from one to

³¹ Ibid., 330.

³² Ibid., 331.

³³ Blevins, 23.

another.”³⁴ In other words, Schweitzer wants to wield a hermeneutical hammer that breaks apart the Markan narrative from one connected narrative to many isolated *pericopes*. However, Schweitzer does not just shatter the continuity of the gospel and leave it in chaos. He underscores a connection in the gospel which unifies the story: the messianic secret. Schweitzer explains:

The complete want of connexion, with all its self-contradictions, is ultimately due to the fact that two representations of the life of Jesus, or, to speak more accurately, of His public ministry, are here crushed into one; a natural and a deliberately supernatural representation. A dogmatic element has intruded itself into the description of this Life – something which has no concern with the events which form the outward course of that Life. This dogmatic element is the Messianic secret of Jesus and all the secrets and concealments which go along with it.³⁵

Now Wrede and Schweitzer begin to show dissimilarities. The origin of the messianic secret differs for each of them. Schweitzer desires to uphold the basic historicity of the gospel, while Wrede is willing to sacrifice it. This is most evident when Schweitzer proposes this dichotomy: “Either the Marcan text as it stands is historical, and therefore be retained, or it is not, and then it should be given up.”³⁶ Schweitzer is critical of Wrede for postulating that the messianic secret was a motif invented by a community of believers that Mark at most gave form to. Hence Schweitzer’s criticism:

Wrede thinks of it as a collective act, representing the new conception as moulded by the tradition before it was fixed by the Evangelist. That is a very much more difficult to carry through. Tradition alters its materials in a different way from that in which we find them altered in Mark. Tradition transforms from without. Mark’s way of drawing secret threads of a different material through the texture

³⁴ Schweitzer, *Quest*, 333.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 337.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 336.

of the tradition, without otherwise altering it, is purely literary, and could only be the work of an individual person.³⁷

Schweitzer continues to level devastating animadversions against Wrede's literary theory behind the construction of the messianic secret. Schweitzer points out that Wrede admits to an earlier tradition regarding Jesus' triumphal entry and the High Priest's comprehension of Jesus' messiahship. In conceding this much, Wrede's literary hypothesis dissolves.³⁸ For a tradition that pre-dates Mark is certain to have some historicity behind it. The early church would have no reason to doubt the testimony of this earlier tradition. After all, why would the tradition propose an intentionally false view of Jesus? Additionally Schweitzer claims that the early church would have no interest in Jesus' claim to be the Messiah, unless he really claimed it.³⁹

The lengths Schweitzer goes to disprove Wrede on the origin of the messianic secret serve to clear the slate so he can present his view of eschatological historicism. Schweitzer believes that there are three kinds of secrets to be seen in Mark: the Messiah, the kingdom, and suffering. According to Schweitzer, Jesus understood his messianic call, but enigmatically veiled it under the title, "Son of man." Jesus kept his awareness a mystery, only gradually revealing it. This led to Peter's confession and ultimately to his own confession before the High Priest.

Schweitzer also contended that Jesus made no attempt to correct the common interpretation of the Messiah as a political revolutionary. Jesus used obscure language and parables to conceal the nature of the kingdom. Jesus understood his role as a

³⁷ Ibid., 340.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 343-44.

suffering Messiah, therefore, when he went to Jerusalem for the last time, he meant to bring about the coming of the kingdom by his own death. In fact, Jesus presses his hand in order to bring the kingdom due to frustrations. “Towards Passover, therefore, Jesus sets out to Jerusalem,” writes Schweitzer, “solely in order to die there.”⁴⁰ Therefore, what Schweitzer has done is reinterpret the life of Jesus with an eschatological framework, while retaining a historical foundation. He maintains there are dogmatic traces in Mark, but these are backed by authentic tradition. Therefore, it is appropriate to associate Schweitzer with the historical approaches of interpreting Mark.

Even though Schweitzer is critical of Wrede, it would be a quick oversight to neglect the common ground both scholars share. Schweitzer’s criticisms of Wrede are powerfully charged and aimed accurately at crucial aspects of Wrede’s work. However, many found Schweitzer’s depiction of Jesus as a frustrated eschatological Messiah to be guilty of reading between the lines of the gospels, which violates his very method. Nonetheless, his view played an important role in shaping Markan christology and the messianic secret.

Summary

The initial reaction from William Sanday and Albert Schweitzer to William Wrede’s messianic secret was characterized by attempts to reclaim historical grounds for describing the life of Jesus. While Sanday’s radical historicism which lambasted Wrede’s thesis made little influence outside of conservative circles, Schweitzer’s eschatological historicism which simultaneously embraced and critiqued Wrede’s views exercised more influence. These historical approaches to the messianic secret began

⁴⁰ Ibid., 391.

molding the theme of the messianic secret in Mark. Even though these reactions to Wrede did not stifle his influence in the years to come, they played a valuable role in the way in which others would subsequently view it.

A Mediating Interpretation (1911-1920)

The first decade that followed Wrede's Messianic Secret featured rejoinders from critics who advocated a historical position. The academic dialogue during this time did not prove to be fruitful, since neither side was willing to concede any points that could offer a common ground to work on. Also during this time Wrede was forced out of active participation in the discussion.

In the following decade scholars realized that both the liberal and conservative scholarship had begun to entrench positions which seemed to present little promise for beneficial dialogue. Such rigid dogmatism from both sides promptly severed sincere communication for profitable dialectic. Those who recognized this malady sought a way to reopen the lines of communication. These scholars attempted to forge a mediating position in Markan history and christology to revive the interchange of the conservative and liberal positions. Johannes Weiss and Adolf Jülicher are two scholars who represent this mediating group.

Johannes Weiss

Johannes Weiss developed a Markan theory that confessed the gospel had some historical and fictitious accounts, but he also contended that the two were capable of being discerned from one another. In keeping with the Markan criticisms of his day, he was willing to test the contents of the text. Weiss speculated that Mark relied on an

earlier source, *Ur-Markus*, which had four definite sources: (1) Petrine Narratives; (2) Teaching discourses; (3) Words and discourses of Jesus (with or without historical framework); (4) Folk myths and legends.⁴¹

Weiss also worked under the assumption that Mark was not written without theological intent. Rather, Mark was written to show that Jesus was the Son of God. Yet, this intention does not mar all hope for keeping the historical content of the gospel. How could he maintain the integrity of the Christ of faith with the Jesus of history? He overcame this difficulty by building certainty upon the fact that Jesus' earliest disciples connected the earthly Jesus with the heavenly Christ. In doing this, he established a middle position, by following many of the same criticisms leveled against the book of Mark while also maintaining it provided a basic historical sketch of the words and acts of Jesus.

With regard to the messianic secret, he appeased the liberal scholars by admitting that Mark's gospel is mainly a theological story that stemmed from Mark. He believed many of the demoniac confessions had a superficial setting. To mollify the conservative academicians, Weiss said that the messianic secret was not an entirely fabricated motif invented by Mark. For example, he regarded the demoniac confession in the Synagogue to be authentic (Mark 1:21-28). So, his middle ground accepted the claims of the left that declared the messianic secret was invented by Mark, but he also agreed with those on the right confessing that because it was a Markan invention does not necessarily lead to Wrede's skepticism. Ultimately, Weiss believed that the messianic secret had authentic roots in a Jesus who did not want his messiahship made known.

⁴¹ Blevins, 48-49.

Furthermore, Weiss rejected Wrede's radical conclusion that Jesus himself never claimed to be the Messiah. Weiss points out that it would have been too cumbersome for Jesus' disciples to invent that Jesus had claimed to be Messiah, if he had not claimed it himself. Weiss makes his case:

How was it possible for the disciples to expect their fellow-countrymen to accept what must seem to them the quite inadmissible declaration, that the Crucified was the Messiah, the King of Israel, and how could they persuade themselves to acknowledge their own adhesion to so paradoxical and bold a proposition?... What made them burden their cause with a thesis so difficult and almost impossible to maintain? They must have had strong grounds.⁴²

Even though he recognized many of the critical tests of his age, Weiss' ultimate conclusion concerning Jesus' messiahship was that "the earliest Christ-belief reaches back ultimately to the life of Jesus."⁴³

Adolf Jülicher

Adolf Jülicher represented another attempt at a mediating position. Jülicher did not believe many of the liberal school's criticisms of Mark to be a genuine hindrance to the content of Mark's gospel. He affirmed that the gospel was the product of a post-resurrection community, which must be accounted for in historical evaluation. He declares:

If we call the picture of Jesus which this man [Mark] has drawn – half-historical,... we admit, thereby, that we cannot permit his uncontested tradition to become the authentic basis for our investigation.⁴⁴

⁴² Johannes Weiss, Christ: The Beginning of Dogma, trans. V. D. Davis (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1911), 22-23.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁴ Adolf Jülicher, Neue Linien in der Kritik der evangelischen Überlieferung (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1906), quoted in Blevins 55.

But Jülicher's liberal views were balanced by his conservative inclinations. With regard to the messianic secret, Jülicher accepted most of Wrede's framework, except he traced it back to an actual historical tradition of Jesus. Even if Mark's gospel had the markings of a faith community, it still had some historical authenticity since it was written while many eyewitnesses were still around. So, Wrede's theory was useful in explaining the demoniac encounters, the disciples' daftness, and the obscure teachings of Jesus, but he still could affirm that the historical Jesus must have desired in his earthly ministry to keep his messiahship secret to some extent.

Summary

Even though those who attempted to bring moderation to Wrede's messianic secret ultimately failed to unite the liberal and conservative factions of academia, these moderates carried on the messianic secret to a new interpretation. At the heart of this moderate position is the bridging of the messianic secret to the historical Jesus. For Wrede, Jesus never claimed to be Messiah, hence all of his commands of silence were not historical. This new theory undercut this negative aspect of Wrede's theory, while upholding many other tenets of his theory. After Wrede's theory initially underwent negative criticism in its first decade, this new position hoped to bring many people to be able to positively join in some of what Wrede proposed, so long as they did not accept that the historical Jesus never claimed to be Messiah.

The Messianic Secret and Form Criticism (1921-1930)

The moderate appeal to unite liberal and conservative positions proved to be unsuccessful. As a result, the 1920's revealed a new take on dogmatism from both the

liberal and conservatives schools, especially regarding the historicity of the gospels and the messianic secret.

Of most significance was the reappropriation of Wrede's messianic secret by the liberal theologians. They were unable to embrace the moderates' approach which accepted only a fragment of Wrede's theory. Instead, those in the left began seeking a comprehensive theory of the gospels by analyzing the individual stories of Jesus. Like Wrede, many scholars began to analyze each individual narrative unit in an attempt to delineate what could be attributed to the historical Jesus and what was invented by the community of those who believed a Christ of faith. This attempt to fractionate the gospel stories and determine their origins is known as form criticism.⁴⁵

Even though form criticism heralded many heroes, such as Martin Dibelius and Karl Schmidt, for the purposes of this research, the focus shall be upon Rudolf Bultmann's interpretation of Wrede's thesis. Also, it would be inaccurate to suppose that conservative scholarship sat idly by as the gospels' historicity was questioned. In order to represent this reaction, A. E. J. Rawlinson's position will also be considered.

Rudolf Bultmann

Perhaps what demonstrated the failure of the moderates from the preceding decade most clearly was Bultmann's total acceptance of Wrede's messianic secret. Bultmann unequivocally affirmed Wrede's conclusions and their implications for New Testament studies. He candidly writes, "Indeed it must remain questionable whether

⁴⁵ Richard Soulen, Handbook of Biblical Criticism, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), s. v. "Form Criticism": "...the analysis of the typical forms by which human existence is expressed linguistically."

Jesus held himself for the Messiah at all and did not rather first become Messiah in the faith of the community.”⁴⁶

Following the lead of Dibelius, Bultmann believed Mark’s role in writing the gospel was mainly as an editor who provided the connecting links between each narrative unit. It is for this reason that Jesus’ messianic claims cannot be traced to his own lips.⁴⁷ On the one hand, Bultmann recognized that Mark includes both the incredible display of Jesus’ divine attributes found in passages where he walks on water, calms storms, heals diseases, and exorcises demons. On the other hand, he acknowledges a veil of secrecy he discloses when he commands demons, and those he has healed, to be silent and his intentionally abstruse teaching in parables. It does not take much deduction to see how this dovetails with Wrede’s original thesis.

Bultmann, using the tools of form criticism, articulated Wrede’s position with a different emphasis. While both Wrede and Bultmann concluded that the divergent lives of Jesus presented in Mark is the result of a faith that begins with the resurrection, Bultmann underscores the apology inherent to the messianic secret. He declares:

We can leave for the present undecided the question whether the theory of the Messianic secret is to be explained as apologetic – i.e. as an answer to the question why Jesus was not universally recognized as Messiah – or as a veiling of

⁴⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, Die Erforschung der synoptischen Evangelien (Aus der Welt der Religion; N. F., Vol. 1, Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1925). English edition, Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Kundin Form Criticism: Two Essays on New Testament Research, trans. Frederick C. Grant (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), 71. All subsequent references are to the English edition.

⁴⁷ Bultmann, Theologie des Neuen Testaments, vol. 1 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1948). English edition, Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, vol. 1, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Scribners, 1951), 32: “The attempt to understand the Messiah-secret not as a theory of the evangelist but as historical fact, falls to pieces against the fact that its literary location is in the editorial sentences of the evangelist, not in the body of the traditional units.” All subsequent references are to the English edition.

the fact that faith in Jesus' Messiahship begins from belief in his resurrection. I hold the second view to be right, and Wrede thought the same....

From this point of view even the theory of the "messianic secret" is no longer a merely literary phenomenon, but the actually necessary expression of faith in a Messiah for whom an incognito was characteristic.⁴⁸

Hence, Bultmann supposes that Mark's narrative blends the sayings of the historical Jesus who rejected messianic claims and the Christ of faith who is exposed in the revelatory confessions of the gospel. In other words, Bultmann accepts that Mark used the messianic secret as a device to synthesize the church tradition and historical information he knew about Jesus.⁴⁹ For Bultmann, the historical Jesus was not messianic but rather eschatological and ethical in his ministry.

A. E. J. Rawlinson

During this period, the conservatives attempted to make as winsome a case as possible for their side. In order to accomplish this, a much more open-minded approach needed to be exhibited. It was through the work of these engaging scholars that future conservatives would find a reawakening. Rawlinson exemplified such a conservative scholar.

James Blevins identifies four points which Rawlinson accepted of Wrede's messianic secret:⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1921). English edition, Rudolf Bultmann, The History of the Synoptic Tradition, trans. John Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 347-48. All subsequent references are to the English edition.

⁴⁹ Bultmann, Theology, 22: "The contradiction between the point of view [of the *kerygma*] and the traditional material finds expression in the theory of the Messianic secret, which gives the Gospel of Mark its particular character..."

⁵⁰ Blevins, 101-2.

1. The repetitious identification of Jesus' messiahship by demoniacs betrays the hand of a redactor.
2. The resurrection is the turning point in the lives of the disciples in which they gain spiritual insight.
3. The teaching of Jesus was introduced in the early church with the understanding that its origin was in his private instruction of his disciples.
4. Mark viewed Jesus' miraculous works as signs of his messiahship, while the Galileans did not.

Rawlinson comes to closest agreement with Wrede on the fourth point regarding miracles. He confirms this himself when he admits:

It is possible, therefore, that it was actually upon some such grounds as Wrede suggests that Mk. conceived the Lord as having normally enjoined that the miracles should be kept secret: though he is at the same time sufficiently in touch with the facts of history to be well aware that it was largely by the rumor of Jesus' miraculous deeds that the multitudes were attracted.⁵¹

However, from these points of agreement with Wrede, it would be hasty to infer that Rawlinson held the same skepticism as Wrede concerning the historical Jesus. In order to make sense of the messianic secret Rawlinson believed that Jesus tried to conceal his miracles in order to avoid being known as a miracle worker to the crowds, however, he ultimately was unable to do so. Furthermore, Rawlinson concluded that Jesus rejected the popular role of Messiah and attempted to teach his disciples beforehand his true role as a suffering Messiah.⁵²

⁵¹ A. E. J. Rawlinson, St. Mark, 7th ed, Westminster Commentaries (London: Methuen & Co., 1949), 261. [First published 1925.]

⁵² *Ibid.*, 262: "Since our Lord's own conception of Messiahship was radically other than that which would be likely to be suggested by the term 'Messiah' in the popular mind, it is historically probable that His claim to be the Messiah was put forward, at least in public, only indirectly and with a certain amount of reserve. To this extent also the Marcan suggestion of a 'Messianic secret', which the people were generally not to learn, though as a stereo-typed theory it might easily be taken too rigidly, is not wholly without a basis of justification in the facts."

Summary

This phase of the historical progression of the messianic secret was dominated by the liberal form critics like Rudolf Bultmann. Equipped with new method and terminology, the messianic secret was nearly entirely reinstated as Wrede originally had argued. In response, the conservatives like Rawlinson began constructing a case for conservative scholarship that could appeal to a broader audience other than just to conservatives. This would ultimately influence the next stage in the interpretation of the messianic research, which would be dominated by conservative thought.

Conservative Modification of the Messianic Secret (1931-1950)

While the previous period of evolution in the theory of the messianic secret was dominated by the liberal position by proponents like Rudolf Bultmann, this next phase of the theory was dominated by conservative scholarship. Leading this change was German scholar Julius Schniewind. However, just as conservative thinkers did not passively watch their position fall under fire by the liberal position in the previous era, so liberal scholars too did not just “sit pretty” during this stage. Focus will be placed upon F. C. Grant as the representative of the liberal reaction for this period.

Julius Schniewind

Schniewind’s criticism of Wrede’s messianic secret was supported by his studies in first century Jewish culture. Even though Schniewind believed Wrede to be completely wrongheaded in attributing the messianic secret to a completely fictional account, he concurred that the gospel was typified by the theme of messianic secret. From his studies of the Jewish background of the New Testament, Schniewind claimed

that Jesus fulfilled, not reinterpreted, the role of Messiah. Hence he claims “The Messianic expectation of the Old Testament, as it still existed in Judaism of the time, was both adopted and fulfilled by Jesus.”⁵³

Jesus accepted and fulfilled the Jewish expectations of Messiah, in Schniewind’s view, because the Jews believed the Messiah would be a heavenly king with the Spirit of God that would be the future world’s sovereign leader who would also resurrect the dead. The key to Schniewind’s view is to understand that it was considered a mystery how these characteristics could be unified in one person. So, the messianic secret is not intended to be understood as a veiling of Jesus’ kind of messiahship, but rather it is intended to be understood as the very content of Jesus’ messiahship. Blevins describes Schniewind’s interpretation:

All the mighty power of the future kingdom is manifest in the simple words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth – this is the secret.... In Schniewind’s view, Jesus chooses the motif of the suffering Servant of Isaiah, because it is the best vehicle for expressing his veiled power.... In this role, Jesus is not perceived as the Messiah even though the power of God is inherent in him – thus, the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled.⁵⁴

Schniewind believed that the gospels represent the kerygma as recorded by the apostles. Hence, his view is reminiscent of the historical responses by tracing the messianic secret to the very lips of Jesus. Schniewind is willing to accept the motif of secrecy as historical in Mark, contrary to Wrede. Instead of following the lead of others that Jesus was misunderstood or tried to explain his messiahship was different from

⁵³ Schniewind, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, Das Neue Testament Deutsch, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933), 175. Quoted in Blevins, 119.

⁵⁴ Blevins, 120.

popular expectations, Schniewind claimed Jesus mysteriously presented himself as Messiah in order to properly fulfill the role of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah.

F. C. Grant

F. C. Grant exhibited the influence of form critics like Bultmann in his approach to the messianic secret. By using form criticism, Grant believed the careful scholar could decipher what was the original event and what had been produced by the early church. Perhaps the most important distinction he made in form criticism was its purpose. For Grant, the kerygma was handed down, not for maintaining the historical integrity of Jesus, but rather in order to meet the needs of the early Christian community.

As might be expected, Grant upheld the messianic secret with very few alterations from Wrede's original presentation. Grant plainly declares, "...enough has been said to indicate that in principle the thesis [Wrede's] must be accepted."⁵⁵ Grant did deviate some from Wrede's original view. For example, Grant placed more emphasis on Mark's role in creating the messianic secret, rather than the Christian community, as Wrede supposed. Furthermore, Grant believed that the messianic secret as a theme in Mark's gospel should not hold a central position necessary for interpreting the gospel, but rather occupies a subordinate position in the gospel as a whole.⁵⁶ In other words, for Grant, the messianic secret was just another minor theme that worked in coordination with others like Jesus' teaching in parables.

⁵⁵ F. C. Grant, The Earliest Gospel The Cole Lectures (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1943), 161.

⁵⁶ Ibid.: "It is subsidiary to his whole interpretation of the life of Jesus as already Messiah on earth, and long before his resurrection."

Grant theorized that Mark's paramount concern was to explain that Jesus became Messiah at his baptism. Otherwise, the question lingers, "If Jesus was already Messiah during his earthly career, why was he not recognized as Messiah?"⁵⁷ Mark deals with this issue by writing that the demons and those enlightened by faith could perceive him, while the Jews were blind to this revelation as a result of their sins.⁵⁸

Overall Grant interpreted the ministry of Jesus as a social gospel, rather than an eschatological one. Even though Grant believed Mark to have been written earlier, he gives Luke primacy with regard to historical data about the life of Jesus. Grant maintains that the kingdom Jesus proclaimed offered a "this-worldly" kind of hope. Hence he asseverates, "Jesus expected the kingdom of God to be realized upon the soil of Palestine, and in his own time."⁵⁹ Grant does not wish to undermine that the kingdom was religious in nature, but he does wish to minimize views that emphasize that the kingdom was eschatological or apocalyptic.⁶⁰

Ultimately, this led Grant to conclude that the historical Jesus never claimed to be Messiah. As one professing a social gospel, Jesus would not have any interest in political titles like Messiah. Furthermore, all eschatological professions like the title "Son of Man" are not original to the lips of Jesus. Grant claimed Jesus' crucifixion was driven

⁵⁷ Ibid., 162.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 254-55, 260-61.

⁵⁹ F. C. Grant, The Gospel of the Kingdom The Haskell Lectures (New York: Macmillan, 1940), 14.

⁶⁰ Ibid.: "But this does not mean his hope was non-religious, the elaboration of an economic program or dream of some kind of mundane utopia. It was supremely religious; but it was not other-worldly, nor was it 'apocalyptic'."

and caused by the religious leaders' jealousy, and that this did not require Jesus to claim he was the Messiah.

Summary

Julius Schniewind represented one of the innovative conservative scholars who attempted to rescue the historical Jesus' claim to messiahship. Schniewind attempted to do so by affirming the historicity of Jesus' claims to be Messiah with the amalgamation of first century messianic expectations in Palestine. Ultimately, Schniewind's thesis challenged the core of Wrede's theory by postulating that the messianic secret is traceable to the historical Jesus.

Following the lead of Rudolf Bultmann, F. C. Grant used the tools of form criticism to redefine the ministry of Jesus from eschatological and messianic emphasis to underscore Jesus' proclamation of a social gospel. Even though Grant de-emphasized many of Wrede's key points, in the end he affirmed the controversial conclusion Wrede had drawn: that the historical Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah.

The Messianic Secret and New Critical Approaches (1951-1980)

The next era in Markan research yielded new textual critical approaches. Willi Marxsen is credited with coining the term and methodology of redaction criticism. Vincent Taylor is noted for taking the technique of form criticism developed by liberal scholars like Rudolf Bultmann and Martin Dibelius and drawing conservative conclusions. Even though his critical method is not new in the strictest meaning of the word, it is being used in a new way – to bolster confidence in the historicity of the gospel

instead of skepticism. These new approaches added to the historical progression of the messianic secret.

Willi Marxsen

Willi Marxsen utilized the method of *redaktionsgeschichtliche*, which emphasized the role of the evangelist in bringing connecting unity to the form of the gospel. Indeed, Mark's creative work is seen in the backdrop in which he arranges the *pericope* units. In order to properly understand the context that the redactor is operating under, Marxsen follows Joachim Jeremias' lead proposed in his paramount work on miracles where a two-fold *Sitz im Leben* is delineated: the historic life of Jesus and the church.⁶¹ However, Marxsen argues for a tripartite *Sitz im Leben* by adding the *Sitz im Leben* of the evangelist. Marxsen explains:

We grasp Mark's share of the work and thus his actual achievement (as well as that of the other evangelists) not in the material primarily but in the "framework."... This framework should not be dismantled from a merely historical standpoint, as is almost always the case with form history, but should be examined for its "situation-in-life" from the standpoint of redaction history....

If Joachim Jeremias differentiates the "first situation-in-life" located in the unique situation of Jesus' activity, from the "second situation-in-life" mediated by the situation of the primitive church (which form history seeks to ascertain), we are dealing here with the "third situation-in-life."⁶²

So, what is the *Sitz im Leben* of the Markan gospel? From Marxsen's point of view, this would not necessarily consist of just one local community of Christians but

⁶¹ Joachim Jeremias, Die Gleichnisse Jesu (Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1947). English edition: Joachim Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, trans. S. H. Hooke (New York: Scribners, 1954), 20.

⁶² Willi Marxsen, Der Evangelist Markus: Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Evangeliums Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956). English edition: Willi Marxsen, Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969), 23. All subsequent references are to the English edition.

could possibly encompass a motley group of Christian communities that have formed the evangelist's perspective. Whatever it may be, the *Sitz im Leben* of the redactor crucially affects the creation of the gospel, and therefore ought to be taken into account to properly interpret the text.

With regard to the messianic secret, it is no surprise to discover that Marxsen attributes it to the imaginative work of the evangelist. In fact, Marxsen believed that the subsequent modifications that the messianic secret had undergone since Wrede first proclaimed it have turned for the worse. With regard to the historical evolution of the thesis, Marxsen writes:

Nevertheless, it is generally conceded that the theory of the messianic secret belongs to Mark's point of view. It should have occurred to the scholars to search for further motifs originating in his point of view. Instead, the evangelists were examined almost exclusively from literary standpoints. Measured against Wrede's understanding, this is a regression, for he had already emphasized that Mark is "in a certain sense a creative personality."⁶³

Marxsen obviously deviates from Wrede's original theory by speculating the messianic secret originated in the redactor of the gospel, rather than the early Christian community. However, he is in more agreement than disagreement with Wrede in claiming that the messianic secret is a theological motif, rather than an historical account of Jesus' life.

Vincent Taylor

Vincent Taylor followed the method of form criticism as established by Rudolf Bultmann and Martin Dibelius. However, Taylor stood out from those German scholars because he did not believe that form criticism necessarily led to historical skepticism.

⁶³ Ibid., 22.

Taylor recognized several types of forms: pronouncement stories, miracle stories, sayings and parables, and stories about Jesus.⁶⁴ The pronouncement stories are among the most authentic for Taylor because they express a unique aspect of Jesus' character rather than the innovation of the early church. Taylor also believed that the miracle stories should be accepted as authentic. After all, if Jesus is divine, then one should have no problem acknowledging Jesus could perform supernatural acts. Taylor also notes that the vivid details in the miracle stories sets their origin on more reliable grounds.⁶⁵ The sayings and parables are also regarded as generally reflecting the bona fide words of Jesus. By comparing the gospels, the teachings of Jesus can confidently be identified. Finally, Taylor also held that the stories of Jesus represent an accurate depiction of the historical Jesus. These stories can be traced to personal accounts either by Peter or other informants in some cases.⁶⁶

While Bultmann and Dibelius regard many of these forms to be the products of myths and legends, Taylor understood their views to reflect an assumption brought into the text, rather than from it. In order to find harmony among some of the differing accounts, Taylor suggested that the stories might have been given with pragmatic intentions rather than narrative interests. Furthermore, instead of claiming the stories have been expanded, he proposes that the stories have actually been shortened in their

⁶⁴ Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London, Macmillan, 1952), 78-89. For sake of brevity I have omitted discussion of the forms he identifies as "Markan Constructions" (82-85) and "Summary Statements" (85-86).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 80: "Vivid details, many of which are peculiar to Mark, set these narratives in the earlier list, and suggest that for these incidents Mark had information at his command more direct than the common oral tradition of the Church."

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

content. Therefore, Taylor follows the hermeneutical method of Bultmann and Dibelius, while rejecting the skeptical conclusions they reached.

In The Life and Ministry of Jesus, Taylor proposes to reconstruct a life of Jesus with the tools of form criticism, while affirming the historical authenticity of the gospels.⁶⁷ Taylor sets out using Mark as the main source and supplements it with the information from the other gospels.⁶⁸ “Mark’s Gospel is a collection of self-contained narratives, many of which are grouped topically and others chronologically;” writes Taylor, “but it is not a heap of unstrung pearls.”⁶⁹ For Taylor, Mark is not a comprehensive biography as modern readers understand one, however it is still a reliable source of historical information on Jesus since Mark was written shortly after his death.⁷⁰

With regard to the messianic secret, Taylor, like many of the conservatives, accepted Wrede’s shell, while rejecting his core. Taylor unloads a series of criticisms against Wrede’s view that Jesus never historically claimed to be Messiah.⁷¹ One weakness is that Wrede put too much weight that the disciples’ belief in the resurrection would necessarily infer his messiahship.⁷² Furthermore, if he was not crucified for claiming to be the Messiah, why would the church invent such a cumbersome assertion?

⁶⁷ Vincent Taylor, The Life and Ministry of Jesus (Nashville: Abingdon, 1955).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

⁶⁹ Taylor, St. Mark, 147.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 130-149. See also Life and Ministry of Jesus 26-27.

⁷¹ Taylor, St. Mark, 122-24.

⁷² Vincent Taylor, Jesus and His Sacrifice: A Study of His Passion-Sayings in the Gospels (London: Macmillan, 1937), 19: “...belief in resurrection does not of necessity suggest Messiahship.” *cf.* Taylor St. Mark, 122.

If the messianic secret is a literary device, then it is not carried out consistently and logically. Had someone fabricated the motif, it would resemble more signs of overt design and fluidity than the fragmented form it takes in Mark's gospel.

Therefore, Taylor suggests that the messianic secret is not the redactional work of the evangelist or a creation of the early church, but a creation that originated in the actual historical person of Jesus. Thus he asseverates:

In His own estimation Jesus is Messiah in His works of healing, His exorcisms, His victory over Satanic powers, His suffering, dying, rising, and coming with the clouds of heaven.⁷³

Taylor rejected the messianic secret as Wrede presented it, however, he cannot deny the importance of this theme in Mark's gospel.⁷⁴ Of the highest importance for Taylor is affirming that the messianic secret is original to the historic life of Jesus. He offers one explanation for the imposition of silence when he explains:

Jesus imposed silence because of the nature of Messiahship as He conceived it to be. To Him it was not primarily a matter of status but of action.... The Messiah already, He would not be the Messiah until His destiny was fulfilled. We may agree that it is necessary to read the Story in terms of doctrine; but the doctrine is that of Jesus Himself.⁷⁵

Thus, Taylor maintained that the messianic secret did not originate with Mark or the early Christian community but on the actual lips of Jesus. Such a view is warranted by the reliability of Mark and a faithful interpretation of the gospel.

⁷³ Taylor, *St. Mark*, 123.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 123: "The explanation must be that, while the idea of the Messianic Secret is untenable as Wrede presented it, none the less it is of great historical and theological importance."

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Summary

From the new textual critical methods come two antithetical conclusions. Willi Marxsen's redaction criticism renewed skepticism of Jesus' messianic proclamations by relocating the source of the motif on the creative work of the evangelist who produced the gospel. Contrary to Marxsen, Vincent Taylor took the very methodology previously employed by liberal scholars to question the historicity of the gospels and demonstrated that it confirms the trustworthiness of the gospels. This dichotomy of contrasting opinions in this phase will continue to split even wider as it is passed on to the contemporary stage.

Contemporary Approaches to the Messianic Secret (1981-2002)

Given the fact that one hundred years have passed since Wrede first articulated his position, it is surprising that the contemporary academic milieu is so diverse in its approach to the messianic secret. There is the view of N. T. Wright who consistently rejects the theory as Wrede articulated it. Burton Mack represents the polar opposite of Wright by calling for a reinstatement of Wrede's thesis. Also many hold a middle view accepting some of Wrede's research, although modifying it a considerable amount as well, which can be represented by the position of Morna Hooker. After reviewing these contemporary interpretations of Wrede's messianic secret, the survey of the historical evolution of the theory will be completed, and an attempt will be made to assess the value and interpretation of the messianic secret in Mark's gospel.

N. T. Wright

N. T. Wright finds Wrede's explanation for the messianic secret extremely implausible. Notice how he describes Wrede's theory:

First there was Jesus, who in no way thought of himself as Messiah. Then there was the early church, who hailed him as such (why?) despite his innocence of the idea. Then there was the ingenious and anonymous hero, who faced with this anomaly, invented the explanation that Jesus *had* after all spoken of himself as Messiah, but had always kept the matter strictly secret. Then there was Mark, who took this scheme and deliberately embodied it in a continuous narrative. Even he did not do such a good job, since there are still oddities, such as those times in the gospel when it seems as though the secret is being let out too soon. And all this is supposed to have happened within forty years.⁷⁶

As the aforementioned paragraph elucidates, the first difficulty Wright has with Wrede's thesis is that it supposes a high speed of theological evolution. Furthermore, Wright finds it difficult to believe such a complex concoction is more probable than supposing Jesus claimed to be Messiah. Hence he argues:

This is not to say that quick and dramatic theological development is impossible. It quite often happens, and the first century is a good example. But development of this oddity and complexity, for which complex and bizarre motivations have to be invented, stage by stage, out of thin air – this is asking us to believe quite a lot. A hypothesis which explains the data without recourse to this kind of thing is always going to prove more successful, and rightly so. Wrede paid dearly for the simplicity of his basic (and simple) idea – that Jesus did not think himself as Messiah – at the cost of ultra-complexity everywhere else, and even then there was a lot of data which still refused to fit. It is no good cleaning out under the bed if the result is a pile of junk under the wardrobe.⁷⁷

Wright mercilessly lambastes Wrede's theory, leaving it seemingly impotent. Since Wright rejects Wrede's method and conclusion regarding the messianic secret, how does Wright himself understand the enigmatic character of Jesus in Mark? Can he offer a hypothesis that fares better than Wrede?

⁷⁶ Wright, New Testament, 104.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Wright believes that the universal attestation of the gospels that Jesus' closest followers understood him to be Messiah should be accepted. This becomes clear, especially in light of his journey to Jerusalem. Wright summarizes the core of the synoptic tradition at this point:

The central scene is short and simple. Jesus asks his followers about the general public opinion of him and his work; they all tell him that he is thought of as a prophet. But who do *they* think he is? The Messiah. Jesus sternly commands them not to repeat this to anyone.⁷⁸

So Wright establishes his point that Jesus' earliest followers understood him to be the Messiah. Inevitably, the next question to confront is: Why does Jesus command them to be silent about their discovery? Wright stresses the political connotations that surround the title of Messiah are paramount in understanding the answer to this question. He explains:

...once Jesus was thought of as a potential or would-be Messiah, the movement would swiftly attract attention of the wrong sort. Herod had already heard about Jesus, and reckoned he was a prophet of sorts. If he had known more, he might not have been content with merely "hoping to see him". We have already seen that Jesus spoke about Herod, and about John and himself in relation to Herod, in ways which implied an awareness that he was making a claim which Herod would find threatening.⁷⁹

Furthermore, Wright also maintains that Jesus redefined the concept of Messiah, even though he still accepted the title. "If he had not, his action in the Temple, and the riddles which surround it, would remain inexplicable."⁸⁰ Wright makes a powerful case

⁷⁸ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 2 (Minneapolis, Fortress, 1996), 529. [His italics.]

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 529-30. For his discussion on Jesus and Herod see *ibid.*, 495-97.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 530.

against Wrede, and supplies a robust theory affirming the messianic nature of Jesus' ministry. Wright's own words best capture the ramifications of his proposition:

It was a claim to a Messiahship which redefined itself around Jesus' own kingdom-agenda, picking up several strands available within popular messianic expectation but weaving them into a striking new pattern, corresponding to none of the options canvassed by others at the time. Jesus' style of Messiahship was sufficiently similar to those in the public mind to get him executed, and for his first followers to see his resurrection as a reaffirmation of him as Messiah, not as something quite different. But it was sufficiently dissimilar to mean that everyone, from his closest followers through to the chief priests, misinterpreted at least to some extent what he was really getting at; and that the movement which did come to birth after his resurrection, though calling itself messianic, cherished agendas and adopted lifestyles quite unlike those of other movements with the same label. If Jesus was a Messiah, he was a Messiah with great difference. But Messiah was what he claimed to be.⁸¹

Burton Mack

On the opposite spectrum of Wright is Jesus Seminar advocate Burton Mack. Mack suggests an interpretation of Mark's gospel that is in close agreement with Wrede's original thesis. One of the central tenets that is present throughout all his writings is that the Christian myth is a development which added Jesus' claims to messiahship. In fact, he argues that much of Jesus' life as recorded in the gospels has been ascribed to him by the Christian community.

One way Mack proposes to account for the messianic claims found in Mark's gospel is that they follow the pattern of the Greek myths written before the New Testament. In his book, A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins, he explains:

To structure a story about Jesus by means of these narrative designs was, therefore, to create a new story out of familiar plots. The new story was truly new, for none like it had been told about Jesus before. But the plots were not new, nor were they selected without consideration for the nature of the received Jesus materials and the Christ myth. For each narrative design there was a

⁸¹ Ibid., 539.

definite point of departure given with traditions. The framework stories were appropriate to the Hellenistic Son of God mythology. The messianic scenario took its rationale from the popular meaning of the Christ title.... The narrative designs were selected, therefore, in order to merge Jesus traditions with Christ cult traditions at the point of an account of Jesus' death.⁸²

Mack's striking conclusion clearly corresponds with Wrede's theory. First, there is the charge that the historicity of Jesus' personal claim to being the Messiah has been marred by the early church. However, Mack is more like Marxsen than Wrede insofar as he attributes the addition to the tradition to be the creative work of Mark the editor, rather than the early Christian community. This is most obvious when he declares, "Some creative author must have credit for the final composition of each, however, for the signs of literary skill and design are obvious in all of them."⁸³

In order to pull off such a radical thesis, Mack must assume that Mark was not just a creative editor but a literary genius. Surprisingly, Mack is willing to commit to such a view. He argues that Mark intentionally blended the Greek myths with the stories he knew of Jesus in order to create a life of Jesus.⁸⁴ In fact, he goes so far as to acclaim, "Given the bizarre congeries of materials available to him, and the complexity of narrative designs decided upon to integrate them, Mark's story of Jesus is amazingly unified and coherent."⁸⁵

⁸² Burton Mack, A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 289-90.

⁸³ Burton L. Mack, Who Wrote the New Testament?: The Making of the Christian Myth (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995), 153. See also, Burton L. Mack, The Christian Myth: Origins, Logic, and Legacy (New York: Continuum, 2001), 103.

⁸⁴ Mack, Myth of Innocence, 288-90 and Who Wrote the New Testament?, 152-61.

⁸⁵ Mack, Myth of Innocence, 290.

Mack embraces a modified form of the messianic secret to corroborate his thesis of mythmaking in the New Testament. In doing so, he accepts the difficult burden of making the Markan author into a creative literary prodigy. However, if his framework for identifying the sources of Mark's gospel are cogent, then the historicity of Mark cannot be accepted with any certainty – the same conclusion entailed with Wrede's extreme hypothesis.

Morna Hooker

Morna Hooker represents a middle position in the contemporary portrait of scholarship on the messianic secret. She finds the responses that attempt to keep the messianic secret as historical lacking. Notice her difficulties:

The view which takes the secret to be historical fails to explain why Jesus should have chosen to confuse his disciples by using an enigmatic title, leaving them bewildered about his own understanding of his messiahship. It also assumes that there are in fact “unclean spirits” who possess supernatural knowledge, and leaves unsolved problems of how the bystanders could ignore the confessions of Jesus' identity made by the men and women who were possessed by these spirits, and why Jesus should give such unrealistic commands – e.g. the command to keep silent about the fact that he has raised a child from the dead (5:43)!⁸⁶

Although her criticisms initially seem to represent the very essence of Wrede's thought, she also is critical of non-historical approaches to the messianic secret. She describes her criticisms of Wrede and his subsequent followers saying:

Wrede's solution is equally problematic: since Jesus was put to death as a messianic pretender, it seems that during his ministry questions about his messiahship were already being asked, even if no clear answer was yet being given. To describe the whole ministry of Jesus as “unmessianic” is to ignore totally the plain evidence of the gospels in favour of a complex theory as to how that evidence came to be arranged.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Morna Hooker, The Gospel According to Saint Mark Black's New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 67.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

At this point, Hooker seems to have painted herself into a corner, rejecting both the historical explanation and the fabrication theory of the messianic secret. However, she believes there is room to walk on a thin line that accepts certain degrees of both views. First, she follows Wrede's original demarcation of the disciples' understanding before and after the resurrection.⁸⁸ The disciples gain full understanding only in light of an Easter faith. Furthermore, Hooker admits that the motif could be the handiwork of a redactor. Indeed, the theme of secrecy is actually used by the evangelist to enlighten the gospel.

If we ask how Mark makes use of the secret, then it is important to notice that *it functions in precisely the opposite way to what one expects*: it serves as a means of revelation to the hearers/readers of the gospel.⁸⁹

Hooker attributes the theme of secrecy largely to the redactional work of the evangelist.⁹⁰ However, she is hesitant to explore the origin of the secret with regard to whether or not the historical Jesus employed it. She cautiously explicates her ambivalence:

It remains an open question whether Mark has created the messianic secret *ex nihilo*, or made use of a theme which he found in the tradition. Our answer to the questions depends on the degree of creativity which we attribute to Mark himself. On the assumption that he is in fact making use of earlier traditions, we may ask whether any of this has its origins in Jesus' own ministry. If we believe that

⁸⁸ Ibid.: "But Wrede was surely right in pointing to Easter as the crucial turning-point. It is not until the resurrection that men and women are able to understand who Jesus is and what he signifies. It is not that the church imposes a messianic interpretation on to a non-messianic life and death: rather, in the light of Easter faith the disciples see events from a new perspective."

⁸⁹ Ibid. [Her italics.]

⁹⁰ Ibid., 68: "It seems clear that the commands to secrecy are largely (though not necessarily entirely) artificial, and that they are a narrative device which has been used by Mark to draw his readers' attention to the real significance of the story."

Jesus' actions were characterized by an authority characterized by an authority which may fairly be termed "messianic", then it is possible that the so-called secret reflects not simply the tension between Jesus as he was perceived in his lifetime and as he was confessed after the resurrection, but the reluctance of Jesus to make claims about himself: for his message was centered on God and on his kingdom, not on himself, and if he believed himself to be in any sense Messiah, the last thing he would do was claim the title for himself. Artificial though the secret may be, there is a sense in which it corresponds to the truth about the way in which Jesus came to be acknowledged as Messiah only through suffering and death.⁹¹

Hooker correctly points out that one's presuppositions about Jesus and the Markan evangelist will impact whether one finds the messianic secret to be tenable as a historical motif or not. Unfortunately, she does not discuss whether any degree of certainty can be concluded about the messianic nature of Jesus' ministry or the creative aptitudes of Mark. As a literary device, what is important in Hooker's view is that the theme of secrecy works counter-intuitively. "The truth about Jesus is at once hidden from view," writes Hooker, "and yet spelt out on every page of the gospel."⁹²

Summary

After one hundred years of scrutiny, Wrede's initial statement of the messianic secret still has no overwhelming judgment from scholarship. Representing conservative scholarship, N. T. Wright rejects Wrede's hypothesis wholesale. Opposite of Wright is the interpretation of Burton Mack who largely accepts the groundwork and conclusion

⁹¹ Ibid., 69. *cf.* Her approach in Morna Hooker, "Disputed Questions in Biblical Studies: Jesus and Christology," in The Expository Times 112 (June 2001): 298-302. Specifically on 299 she states: "It is difficult to make sense of Jesus' words and actions without supposing that he thought himself in *some* sense as 'messiah', i.e. 'anointed'." [Her italics.] However, she shows signs of ambivalence when she writes on 300: "The fact that the term 'Christ' soon came to be used as the equivalent of a proper name obscures the fact that its earliest use for Jesus would have been an affirmation that he was 'God's Messiah' or 'anointed one'."

⁹² Hooker, St. Mark, 69.

Wrede explicated. Somewhere between the complete rejection and acceptance of Wrede's messianic secret is the mediating approach Morna Hooker employs that accepts and rejects aspects of both readings of the messianic secret.

This concludes the sketch of the historical development of Wrede's theory. This has exposed the evolution of the theory as well as the broad spectrum of responses to the messianic secret. However, the questions remain: What value is there to Wrede's proposal? To what extent can this help in reading Mark? These questions will be addressed in the next section of this paper.

VALUE OF WREDE'S THEORY

What are we supposed to do with the messianic secret? One hundred years of scholarship has revealed diversity in interpretations but very little progress in either the conservative or liberal camps. As a hermeneutical tool, some have found the messianic secret helpful to understanding Jesus' baptism⁹³ and the "sandwich stories" in Mark's gospel.⁹⁴ Even though some have found the motif helpful to their readings of certain texts and complementary themes, the question remains whether or not Wrede's theory can be legitimately invoked to support these interpretations. Below, I intend to demonstrate that Wrede's theory is untenable. Then, I propose what I believe to be the appropriate methodology for reading the theme of secrecy in Mark.

Rejection of Wrede's Proposal

The messianic secret as Wrede presented it is virtually baseless compared to other interpretations. Most of the criticisms against Wrede have been most poignantly expressed by his first and last critics, William Sanday and N. T. Wright.⁹⁵ These are the most severe difficulties I have with Wrede's proposal:

⁹³ Joel Marcus, "Jesus' Baptismal Vision," New Testament Studies 41 (Oct. 1995): 512-19.

⁹⁴ Tom Shepherd, "The Narrative Function of Markan Intercalation," New Testament Studies 41 (Oct. 1995): 522-40. Especially, his conclusion on 540: "One central themes recurs in each of these ironic situations – Christology. Each one of the intercalations links with this central theme of Mark and forces the reader to contemplate what it means to say, 'You are the Christ.' To be the Christ involves secrecy and revelation, life and death, cleansing and cursing, poverty and riches, suffering and resurrection."

⁹⁵ In addition to the historical criticisms previously cited, see Christopher Tuckett, ed., The Messianic Secret, Issues of Religion and Theology, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); Heikki Räisänen, The 'Messianic Secret' in Mark's Gospel, trans. Christopher Tuckett (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990); David E. Garland, Mark The NIV

- (1) Such creativity by the early Christian community (or a Markan redactor) is inconceivable given the short period of time following Jesus' death in which the gospel was written.
- (2) The theme itself is not consistently employed throughout the gospel.
- (3) There is no reason to suppose that a resurrection experience of Jesus would necessarily entail a belief that he had to be the Messiah (unless he claimed otherwise).
- (4) The earliest Christians would not have added unsubstantiated, cumbersome statements to the lips of their Lord.
- (5) The fulcrum of Wrede's theory rests upon the resurrection, which must be interpreted as an historic event if it is to maintain such radical explanatory power.
- (6) Jesus was crucified for claiming to be the Messiah. Moral teachers are not crucified for their kind words.
- (7) Ockham's razor demands that since there are rival interpretations which presuppose less and explain more than Wrede's theory, then they should be accepted over it.

My opinion follows N. T. Wright's sentiment that, "This line of thought, begun by Wrede nearly a century ago, has long outlived its sell-by date."⁹⁶ While Wrede's position has initial shock-value that is commendable and requires some response, I believe this challenge has been successfully met over the past century, leaving Wrede's theory a dubious mess. Still, some scholars perpetuate his theory on the same grounds he did nearly a hundred years ago which now has been undermined by scholarship. Whatever valid inquiry Wrede had in 1901, those same grounds are no longer live options for the honest researcher today.

Inevitably this conclusion presents itself with at least two consequences. First, this means that any attempt to explain gospel passages on the basis of the core of Wrede's theory should be rejected. However, this does not mean everything that Wrede argued is

Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 76-77; James R. Edwards, The Gospel According to Mark, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 63-65; R. Alan Cole, Mark, rev. ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 89-91.

⁹⁶ Wright, Victory of God, 529, n. 181.

automatically false; it simply means that one cannot appeal to Wrede's research as a foundational reason for accepting an obtuse reading of some gospel passage. Second, this places the burden of proof upon the one rejecting Wrede's explanation to provide a better one for the admittedly odd presentation of Jesus in Mark's gospel. This is what I intend to demonstrate in my next section.

Understanding Secrecy in Mark's Gospel

If Wrede's theory is altogether false, then how can we explain these bewildering passages in Mark which remain irksome at face value? I propose that there is not one solitary hermeneutical formula that needs to be invoked whenever we encounter the alleged messianic secret. Rather, I suggest that there are several corroborative reasons which can account for the motif of secrecy in Mark's gospel that do not compromise the historicity or message of the gospel.

First of all secrecy could have been implemented because Jesus did not wish to be renown for being a miracle worker.⁹⁷ Secondly, faith based upon miraculous exhibitions is not faith in the person and message of Jesus but rather on the miracles he performs.⁹⁸ Everyone who witnessed Jesus' miracles did not come to have faith in him. Instead, they usually revealed the content of faith that people already had in Jesus. David Garland correctly notes that miracles actually disclose "those who want only miracles can see nothing."⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Garland, 76-77.

⁹⁸ This seems to be the case with Simon the magician (Acts 8:9-24).

⁹⁹ Garland, 77.

Third, Jesus wished to keep his messiahship and miraculous works secret so that he could share the gospel, instead of fall prey to the inescapable connotations of being a miracle worker.¹⁰⁰ If word got out too soon about his messiahship, he might have been crucified earlier. Furthermore, throughout his ministry he had to deal with problems of large crowds stymieing his ministry.¹⁰¹ It is not inconceivable that in some cases, Jesus' command of silence was done to avoid the problems of working around crowds.

A fourth reason Jesus may have exercised the messianic secret is to avoid the popular connotations associated with the Messiah. Jesus came as a suffering Messiah, not a conquering one. In order to disarm the common connections most people made with the Messiah, he did not always openly accept the title. This would keep the masses from inaugurating him as the leader of their revolution, and it would also delay the expediency of Rome's punishment for those who accept such rabble-rouser titles. Additionally, this would allow him time to teach his disciples the true nature of his messiahship, even though they would not come to fully understand it until after the resurrection.

In addition to the aforementioned interpretive reasons, there are two text critical principles that also can justify the theme of secrecy in Mark without relinquishing the historical value of the gospel. First, Heikki Räisänen has demonstrated that some of the motifs of secrecy in Mark are totally unconnected with Jesus' messianic nature.¹⁰² Most of Wrede's advocates think that Jesus' enigmatic teaching in parables is part of the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 77.

¹⁰¹ Mark 1:45, 2:2, 3:9, 7:24.

¹⁰² Räisänen, 76-143, 242-43.

alleged messianic secret, however, Räsänen has shown that the parables are unrelated to Jesus' claim to be the Messiah. Additionally, he argues that many of the other alleged passages that buttress Wrede's exposition of the messianic secret are also irrelevant to Jesus' status as Messiah. The second critical issue recognizes the strength of redaction criticism. Mark chose to include certain stories and placed them in a certain order for specific reasons. It must be conceded as possible that Mark selectively chose (true) stories that depicted Jesus in this manner for the purpose of presenting his gospel with a messianic secret motif that culminated in Peter's confession first, then in Jesus' own before the high priest.¹⁰³ This does not threaten the historicity of the gospel of Mark; it merely shows that Mark knew how to arrange a story to emphasize one aspect of Jesus' life for the sake of presentation.

Summary

In conclusion, it seems that there are better ways to interpret the passages of secrecy in Mark's gospel than what Wrede proposed. Furthermore, scholarship has raised insurmountable problems that destroy Wrede's hypothesis and leave it insufficient. In fact, I propose that even if my explanations for the secrecy motif are dubious, then it is still more likely that some other explanation is to be preferred over Wrede's outrageous theory. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that Wrede's thesis is indefensible given the objections against it and the plausibility of accepting a better hermeneutical framework to account for the so-called messianic secret passages.

¹⁰³ Mark 8:27-30, 14:61-62, respectively.

CONCLUSION

The two-fold purpose of this paper was to present a historical sketch of the development of Wrede's thesis and to offer an evaluation of the messianic secret. While the historical development had to remain sketchy and uncomfortably scant in some areas, it was sufficient to illustrate the evolution of the theory as well as the broad range of interpretations and reappropriations it encountered over the years. Moreover, the historical analysis revealed the implications for Wrede's theory for textual criticism and interpretation for the differing periods of scholarship. One of the most startling results of the historical research is the discovery that research has nearly gone full circle in interpreting the messianic secret insofar as Wrede is represented by Burton Mack and William Sanday is exemplified in N. T. Wright. Furthermore, the history of the theory exposed relevant changes the theory made through paradigms of methodological interpretation as well as the noteworthy objections that never seemed to dissolve in the sands of time.

The second portion attempted to critique Wrede's position and demonstrate the stronger plausibility of another hermeneutical framework instead of Wrede's messianic secret. First, I pointed out my objections to Wrede's theory as a whole. Second, I offered an accumulation of different reasons that explain Mark's use of the messianic secret that compromise neither the historicity nor the exegetical integrity of the text.

In conclusion, it is my judgment that Wrede's troublesome interpretation of Mark's gospel should be rejected as spurious. Contrary to the ramifications of Wrede's position, the gospels can be affirmed as confirming that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah without compromising historical accuracy.

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