

BENIAMIN PASCUT

Redescribing Jesus' Divinity  
Through a Social Science  
Theory

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

438

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**Mohr Siebeck**

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Benjamin Pascut

# Redescribing Jesus' Divinity Through a Social Science Theory

An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Forgiveness  
and Divine Identity in Ancient Judaism  
and Mark 2:1–12

Mohr Siebeck

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For Malina and Mark



## Preface

The earliest known drawing of Jesus dated around 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE and discovered in a teaching room of the Palatine Hill in Rome leaves us questioning. How are we to understand the inscription “Alexamenos worships (his) god” alongside the figure of a man with arms posed in a gesture of worship toward the sketch of the crucified Jesus? Most puzzling, why does Jesus have the head of a donkey? The answer is somewhere between ridicule and reputation, between mocking the supposed divinity of a crucified man and scribbling a bad legacy. It can’t be that a true god is so foolish as to let himself be crucified at the hands of his enemies. So ridicule the idea of a god hanging lifeless on a tree. Give him a donkey face to match his foolishness. Place the caricature in a teaching room for everyone’s mockery.

This ancient drawing dressed in parody somehow epitomizes the way many streams of New Testament scholarship of the last century have reconstructed the character of Jesus in the gospel of Mark. The face of Jesus sketched in modern scholarly literature looks more and more like that of a donkey. We’ve been told that we simply can’t look at the face of Jesus and see the face of the God of the *Shema*. That’s foolishness – or at least a tremendous stretch from Jewish monotheism and how the gospel depicts the man Jesus. Isn’t he the one calling in his last hour, “my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34) If he’s God, who is he calling for, himself? Can one be God and God-forsaken at the same time?

But what if the matrix of Jesus’ identity in Mark includes participation in the divine identity of God? What if the scholarly donkey representations are fabrications on the canvas of the Enlightenment? To this day, teaching rooms of the academy continue to reject Alexamenos’ creed with a confession that bears resemblance to Peter’s denial, “I do not know this man of whom you speak” (14:71). Perhaps, the only hope of exposing the donkey face is the crowing of a rooster.

The present research conducted during my doctoral studies at University of Cambridge aspires to bring a contribution to the discussion concerning the divine identity of Jesus in the gospel of Mark. Not all readers are expected to hear the rooster crowing while analyzing the pages of this work, but all are given the gospel imperative, “Whoever has ears to hear had better listen!” (4:9).



If you have a garden and a library, you'll lack nothing (Cicero, *Fam.* 9.4). That seems to have been the motto for the success of Roman orator Marcus Tullius Cicero. Undoubtedly, the many gardens and libraries of University of Cambridge provided the perfect setting for the birth and growth of my research, especially the Fellows Garden at Clare College and the unpopulated corners of the Semitic section of the University Library. But what truly added words and life to my work was the support and guidance of the Faculty of Divinity. I am profoundly grateful to Dr. Simon Gathercole for being a supervisor who encouraged and supported my creative research initiatives. His expertise in a wide range of areas helped me improve and refine my arguments from our first meeting in Boston at the Society of Biblical Literature in 2008 to the completion of my research in 2014. The quality of his supervision and scholarship remains a constant inspiration.

Dr. Peter Head, who kindly supervised me for one academic year, read several portions of this manuscript in its early stages and offered valuable feedback. In addition to the support of Prof. Richard Bauckham, whose conversations about Christology over Italian food brought flavor to my work, I owe special thanks to my doctoral committee, Dr. Peter Williams and Dr. Catrin Williams, for their insightful advice and to the editorial committee of the WUNT series and Dr. Ross Wagner for offering valuable feedback for improvement that has been incorporated into this final draft.

To Rob and Sim Gregory, I am indebted for the generous fellowship at the Joseph & Alice McKeen Study Center that enabled me to prepare this dissertation for print. In good Augustinian fashion, their mentorship has been priceless to my personal and professional development and a true inspiration on how to equip servant leaders.

It is with gratitude that I acknowledge the enduring love and support of my parents, Gheorghe and Delia Pascut. It was my father who first drew my attention to the wonders of Jesus' identity, instilled in me the passion of studying the Bible critically and mentored me toward my vocation. Throughout the years, my mother's dreams turned into prayers and prayers turned into degrees. Special thanks are also due to my parents-in law, Traian and Liliana Mot, for their financial support extended throughout my undergraduate and graduate studies and to my sisters and their families for their thoughtful gifts.

Behind this monograph stands the sacrifice of my wife Malina. Anyone who knows her knows that she's an example of love and selflessness that gives others impetus toward perseverance and growth. Our son Mark, who was 4 when we moved to Cambridge, got quickly attached to the hundreds of books in my office bearing his own name. And soon, my research turned into an adventure playground, where he would randomly stack the commentaries on Mark's gospel and I would attempt to record their bibliographical information. This may account for possible errors within this manuscript for which the blame falls entirely on my shoulders.

Unless indicated otherwise, Old Testament quotations are from BHS or NASB, New Testament quotations are from NA<sup>27</sup> or ESV, English quotations of the Septuagint including the Apocrypha are from NETS, quotations from the Pseudepigrapha are from James Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983, 1985) the Greek Septuagint is based upon the edition edited by Alfred Rahlfs, while citations from the Dead Sea Scrolls are from *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Study Edition*, ed. and trans. Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar (2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1997–1998). As for my use of Philo, Josephus and Greco-Roman texts, translations are from the Loeb edition. All other translations of ancient texts quoted have been referenced in the footnotes. Abbreviations of biblical or other ancient sources follow *The SBL Handbook of Style*, ed. P. H. Alexander (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999).

Joseph & Alice McKeen Study Center, April, 2017

Beniamin Pascut



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## Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ABS	American Bible Society
ACEBT	Amsterdamse cahiers voor exegese en bijbelse theologie
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
<i>AphQ</i>	<i>American Philosophical Quarterly</i>
ArBib	The Aramaic Bible
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BCOTWP	Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BibOr	Biblica et orientalia
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAT	Commentaire de l'Ancien Testament
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
CEB	Common English Bible
CEJL	Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature
<i>CM</i>	<i>Communication Monographs</i>
CNT	Commentaire du Nouveau Testament
CSB	Christian Standard Bible
CSCO	Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium
DJD	Discoveries in the Judean Desert
<i>DSD</i>	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
EBib	Études Bibliques
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
ECDSS	Eerdmans Commentaries on the Dead Sea Scrolls
EKK	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
ELB	Elberfelder Bibel
ESV	English Standard Version
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament

FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten Testaments
GABR	Guides to Advanced Biblical Research
GDB	Giovanni Diodati Bibbia
GLECS	<i>Comptes Rendus du Groupe Linguistique d'Études Chamito-Sémitiques</i>
GNT	Good News Translation
HBT	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HTKNT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JCom	<i>Journal of Communications</i>
JPS	Jewish Publication Society for America Version
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JRE	<i>Journal of Religious Ethics</i>
JSHJ	<i>Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus</i>
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism: Supplement Series
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
JSP	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
JSPSup	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
KNT	Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
LBS	Library of Biblical Studies
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LD	Lectio divina
LHB	Library of Hebrew Bible: Old Testament Studies
<i>Linguist. Philos.</i>	<i>Linguistics and Philosophy</i>
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LSG	La Bible Louis Segond
LUT	Luther Bible
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NA <sup>27</sup>	Nestle-Aland 27th Edition Greek New Testament
NAC	New American Commentary
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCV	New Century Version
NET	New English Translation
NETS	New English Translation of the Septuagint
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary

NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDNTT	New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum: Supplement Series
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTL	New Testament Library
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTTS	New Testament Tools and Studies
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OST	Ostervald
OTL	Old Testament Library Commentary Series
OTM	Old Testament Message Series
OTS	Old Testament Studies
OtSt	Oudtestamentische Studiën
<i>PhilosQ</i>	<i>Philosophy Quarterly</i>
POS	Pretoria Oriental Series
P.Oxy.	Papyrus Oxyrhynchos
PTMS	Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series
PTSDSSP	Princeton Theological Seminary Dead Sea Scrolls Project
QM	Qumranica mogilanensia
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RevQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
RIV	Riveduta Bibbia
RVR	La Biblia Reina-Valera
SBFAn	Studium biblicum Franciscanum analecta
SBLDS	Society for Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLEJL	Society for Biblical Literature Early Judaism and Its Literature
SBLRBS	Society for Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SEV	Sagradas Escrituras
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SNTSMS	Society of New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra pagina
<i>SPQ</i>	<i>Social Psychology Quarterly</i>
SSEJC	Studies in Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity
SSN	Studia semitica neerlandica
StBL	Studies in Biblical Literature (Peter Lang)
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>

TENTS	Texts and Edition for New Testament Study
TGr.T	Tesi gregoriana: Serie Teologia
THKNT	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>ThPh</i>	<i>Theologie und Philosophie</i>
<i>TJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum/Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism
<i>TynB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
UBSGNT	United Bible Society's Greek New Testament
<i>TZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

## Introduction

Weak mortals, chained to the earth, creatures of clay as frail as the foliage of the woods, you unfortunate race, whose life is but darkness, as unreal as a shadow, the illusion of a dream, listen to us, who are immortal beings, ethereal, ever young and occupied with eternal thoughts, for we shall teach you about all celestial matters; you shall know thoroughly what is the nature of the birds, what the origin of the gods, of the rivers, of Erebus and Chaos; thanks to us, even Prodicus will envy your knowledge.

Aristophanes, *Av.* 685–690

With the above chorus in play, this stage-centered Greek comedy is dramatized by a shift away from the stage to the spectators. The Athenian audience made up of mere mortals is asked to participate by way of listening and learning. They have been watching comic events about bird-deities, but now they are being asked to enter that very fantastical world in order to wonder about the sphere of the divine. Will they accept that possessing wings qualifies as evidence of deity (*Av.* 695–700)? Will they entertain the possibility that birds, not the Olympian gods, are gods to men (*Av.* 1236)? How many of them will attempt to gain wings for themselves? Might this possibly require a change of worship? Not all Greek plays are created equal. To a spectator, however, becoming a part of a theatrical reality is what makes the difference. Even Prodicus, the public-face of Stoic atheism who denies divinity, might turn out to covet this revealed knowledge about the divine.

Mark's literary achievement makes similar demands of its audience. The parenthetical imperative, "Let the reader understand" (Mark 13:14), demands active participation. Readers are called to engage in a mysterious narrative drama, whose main character is somehow able to bridge the division between heaven and earth. Very much like the audience of Aristophanes' *Aves*, Mark's readers are invited to proactively listen to and learn from the voices of those who remain perplexed about this new reality. What sort of person does such mighty works with his hands (6:2)? Who in the world can command celestial spirits (1:27)? How is it that even the wind and the sea obey him (4:41)? All

major characters within the narrative – the crowds, the Jewish antagonists and the disciples – raise questions about identity and almost all dimensions of Mark’s story revolve around the question ‘Who is Jesus?’ (Mark 1:27; 2:7; 4:41; 6:2–3; 8:27; 10:18; 14:61).<sup>1</sup> But these identity questions on the lips of the characters within the story-world compel readers toward more inquiry: Is there any evidence that warrants the application of the term ‘divine’ to Jesus? Is Jesus’ narrative characterization in line with traditional Jewish conventions about God? In what sense, if in any, can one speak of Jesus belonging to the identity of Israel’s God? Given the longstanding readership of this gospel, it comes as no surprise that the answers to such questions are as diverse as the individuals who tackle them.<sup>2</sup> Some agree that divinity better accounts for the repertoire of Jesus’ identity, others remain very skeptical.

The pericope of Jesus healing the paralytic (2:1–12), which stands at the heart of this research, has always been at the center of this identity debate. The starting point rests on whether Jesus is presented as the source of the paralytic’s forgiveness. Jesus’ utterance, “Child, your sins are forgiven” (v. 5) and his healing performed for the purpose of demonstrating that “the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (v. 10) have produced various and conflicting conclusions. Scholarly opinions diverge on whether Jesus forgave the paralytic or merely declared God’s forgiveness. Some argue that forgiving is a divine prerogative, while others claim to have found important messianic, priestly, angelic or prophetic precedents. In the hands of interpreters who have analyzed the complex subject of forgiveness in ancient Jewish texts in order to unlock the meaning of this pericope, Jesus has become a messianic figure, a priestly mediator, an eschatological prophet, an angelic redeemer or a character manifesting divine power, authority and identity. The exegetical data is complex, the Jewish background of forgiveness is rich and the interpretative models articulated to explain them are varied.

The following survey will consider six of these proposals as a means to supply a perception of the issues involved, indicate the complexity of the task at hand and introduce the rationale for this study and the method for accomplishing it.

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<sup>1</sup> C. Tuckett, *Christology and the New Testament: Jesus and His Earliest Followers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 109; W. R. Telford, “Mark’s Portrait of Jesus,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Jesus*, ed. D. Burkett (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 13–29 (23); A. Winn, *The Purpose of Mark’s Gospel: An Early Christian Response to Roman Imperial Propaganda* (WUNT II/245; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 19.

<sup>2</sup> For a survey on divine identity in Markan scholarship, see D. Johansson, “The Identity of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark: Past and Present Proposals,” *CBR* 9 (2011), 364–393 (365) and Telford’s helpful bibliography in W. R. Telford, *Writing on the Gospel of Mark* (GABR 1; Blandford Forum, Dorset: Deo Publishing, 2009), 17–19, 347–349, 392–393.

## 1. Forgiveness and Jesus' Identity in Mark 2: A Short History of Interpretation

### 1.1. *Jesus Forgives as a Divine Being*

As early as the third century, claims are made that Jesus' authority to forgive qualifies as evidence of deity. If Jesus forgives sins, notes Novatian in *De Trinitate* 13 (250 CE), he must be truly God, for no one can forgive sins but God alone. Chrysostom, writing one century later, clearly retains this view in his *In paralyticum demissum per tectum* 6 (381–398? CE).

For what was it Jesus' detractors said? "No man can forgive sins, but God alone." Inasmuch then as they themselves laid down this definition, they themselves introduced the rule, they themselves declared the law. He then proceeded to entangle them by means of their own words. "You have confessed," he says in effect, "that forgiveness of sins is an attribute of God alone; my equality therefore is unquestionable." And it is not these men only who declare this but also the prophet Micah, who said, "Who is a God like you?" and then indicating his special attribute he adds, "pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression."

Biblical commentaries in late antiquity understand Mark 2:10 as an implicit statement of Jesus' divinity.<sup>3</sup> In 1678, de Veil similarly remarks that Jesus forgave the paralytic by virtue of having a divine nature<sup>4</sup> and three centuries later this view is still being affirmed. In French scholarship, this type of reasoning characterizes the work of Lagrange (1910)<sup>5</sup> and in the English-speaking world, the work of Gealy (1938), who notes that:

We lose the point of the narrative unless we see that the very question of the scribes, "Who can forgive sins but one, even God?" is intended to force the reader to the conclusion that since Jesus has forgiven sins before their very eyes, he is therefore in some sense God. When it comes to forgiveness, Jesus is on the divine, not on the human side.<sup>6</sup>

Hargreaves (1965) too sees Jesus' authority to forgive as an affirmation "that Jesus was God."<sup>7</sup> To a significant degree, the position advanced by Chrysostom continues to find expression in more recent works. For Hofius (2000), Jesus is not God's ambassador announcing to the paralytic that his sins have

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<sup>3</sup> W. Lamb, ed. and trans., *The Catena in Marcum: A Byzantine Anthology of Early Commentary on Mark* (TENTS 6; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 245.

<sup>4</sup> C. de Veil, *Explicatio literalis Evangelii secundum Matthaeum & Marcum, ex ipsis scripturarum fontibus, Hebraeorum ritibus & idiomatis, veterum & recentiorum monumentis eruta* (London: Sam. Roycroft, 1678), 6.

<sup>5</sup> M.-J. Lagrange, *Évangile selon saint Marc* (EBib; Paris: Victor Lecoffre, 1910), cxxxiv–cxl.

<sup>6</sup> F. Gealy, "Son, thy Sins are Forgiven," *JR* 18 (1938), 51–59 (55).

<sup>7</sup> J. Hargreaves, *A Guide to St Mark's Gospel* (London: SPCK, 1965), 39.



been forgiven by God. Jesus is himself the source of forgiveness.<sup>8</sup> Sung (1993),<sup>9</sup> who wrote the most extensive dissertation on forgiveness in Judaism, together with Klumbies (2001)<sup>10</sup> and Rose (2007)<sup>11</sup> remain convinced that this is so. Many others move beyond simply recognizing a divine authority to seeing Jesus participating in the divine identity. So Gathercole (2006) asserts that Mark 2 “appears to be a claim about Jesus’ divine identity”<sup>12</sup> and Tait (2010) notes that Jesus “shares the divine functions if not the divine being itself.”<sup>13</sup> In his monograph, Grindheim (2011) similarly suggests that “Jesus appears to have put himself in a role that was reserved for God and thus implicitly claimed to be God’s equal,”<sup>14</sup> while Lamarche (1996) sees in Jesus a new face of God, “Un nouveau visage de Dieu est en train d’apparaître à travers les actions et les paroles de Jésus.”<sup>15</sup>

### 1.2. *Jesus Has a Divine Authority*

Many scholars like Weiss and Weiss (1892),<sup>16</sup> Wohlenberg (1910),<sup>17</sup> Klostermann (1926)<sup>18</sup> and Schweizer (1971)<sup>19</sup> argue that forgiving is a divine prerogative without concluding that Jesus’ authority to forgive implies a divine

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<sup>8</sup> O. Hofius, “Vergebungszuspruch und Vollmachtsfrage: Mk 2,1–12 und das Problem priesterlicher Absolution im antiken Judentum,” in idem, *Neutestamentliche Studien* (WUNT 132; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 115–127.

<sup>9</sup> C. Sung, *Vergebung der Sünden: Jesu Praxis der Sündenvergebung nach den Synoptikern und ihre Voraussetzungen im Alten Testament und frühen Judentum* (WUNT II/57; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 217.

<sup>10</sup> P. Klumbies, *Der Mythos bei Markus* (BZNW 108; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), 162.

<sup>11</sup> C. Rose, *Theologie als Erzählung im Markusevangelium: Eine narratologisch-rezeptionsästhetische Untersuchung zu Mk 1,1–15* (WUNT II/236; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 184–185.

<sup>12</sup> S. J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 58.

<sup>13</sup> M. Tait, *Jesus, the Divine Bridegroom in Mk 2:18–22: Mark’s Christology Upgraded* (AnBib 185; Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2010), 93–99 (98).

<sup>14</sup> S. Grindheim, *God’s Equal: What Can We Know about Jesus’ Self-Understanding?* (LNTS 446; London/New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 6–76 (76); M. Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark’s World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 136.

<sup>15</sup> P. Lamarche, *Évangile de Marc* (EBib 33; Paris: Gabalda, 1996), 98.

<sup>16</sup> B. Weiss and J. Weiss, *Die Evangelien des Markus und Lukas* (KEK I/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892), 35–36.

<sup>17</sup> G. Wohlenberg, *Das Evangelium des Markus* (KNT 2; Leipzig: Deichert, 1910), 76–77.

<sup>18</sup> E. Klostermann, *Das Markusevangelium* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; HNT 3; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1926), 27.

<sup>19</sup> E. Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark*, trans. D. Madvig (London: SPCK, 1971), 61.

status. Klostermann makes reference to YHWH's self-description as a forgiving God in Exod 34:6–7 and to the monotheistic remark of Isa 43:25 in order to conclude that forgiving sins belongs exclusively to YHWH. He even acknowledges that in Mark 2, Jesus is a source of forgiveness,<sup>20</sup> but what this means Christologically is not considered. Along the same lines, for Schweizer, who recognizes that “Judaism has never expected the Messiah to forgive sins,” the significance of Jesus' ministry of forgiveness is that he simply acts as a representative of God.<sup>21</sup> For Minette de Tillesse (1968), the fact that Jesus forgives the paralytic, confirms that he is more than a messiah (“Marc voyait en Jésus plus qu'un simple Messie”),<sup>22</sup> but he never explains whether ‘more than a messiah’ falls within the category of divinity. The tendency to avoid explicit theological implications also characterizes the English work of Gould (1896),<sup>23</sup> Swete (1898),<sup>24</sup> Moule (1965)<sup>25</sup> and Mann (1986).<sup>26</sup>

### 1.3. *Jesus Forgives as a Prophet*

A third approach has been to understand this pericope as highlighting Jesus' prophetic ministry. Taylor (1952), who at a different pericope argues that Jesus is a divine being in human form,<sup>27</sup> is among the first to highlight Jesus' prophetic role in Mark 2. Another variation of this theory, evident in the works of Maisch (1971)<sup>28</sup> and Guelich (1989),<sup>29</sup> holds that forgiving sins is a prerogative enjoyed by YHWH alone, while Jesus' utterance in Mark 2:5 is a prophetic announcement of God's salvation. This is very much the focus of Hägerland's monograph entitled, *Jesus and the Forgiveness of Sins: An Aspect of His Prophetic Mission* (2011).<sup>30</sup> Hägerland's concern is not only to distinguish between myth and memory in Mark 2, but also to find other examples in Judaism of men forgiving sins in the place of God. At the heart of the monograph stands a single paradigm: the pronouncement in Mark 2:5b would

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<sup>20</sup> Klostermann, *Das Markusevangelium*, 27.

<sup>21</sup> Schweizer, *Mark*, 61.

<sup>22</sup> G. Minette de Tillesse, *Le secret messianique dans l'Évangile de Marc* (Paris: Cerf, 1968), 363.

<sup>23</sup> E. Gould, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1896), 37.

<sup>24</sup> H. Swete, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1898), 35.

<sup>25</sup> C. Moule, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 22–23.

<sup>26</sup> C. Mann, *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 27; Garden City: Doubleday, 1986), 224–226.

<sup>27</sup> V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1952), 200–201, 121.

<sup>28</sup> I. Maisch, *Die Heilung des Gelähmten: Eine exegetisch-traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Mk 2,1–12* (SBS 52; Stuttgart: KBW-Verlag, 1971), 86–90.

<sup>29</sup> R. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26* (WBC 34A; Dallas: Word, 1989), 86–87.

<sup>30</sup> T. Hägerland, *Jesus and the Forgiveness of Sins: An Aspect of His Prophetic Mission* (SNTSMS 150; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

have been heard as an implicit claim that the speaker is a prophet because “the notion that a human being can ‘forgive sins’ is not completely foreign to early Judaism.”<sup>31</sup> Josephus’s retelling of 1 Sam 12:16–25 in *A.J.* 6.92–93 and the *Prayer of Nabonidus* provide evidence that “the prophet is able to ‘forgive’ a sin in the sense of mediating God’s forgiveness.”<sup>32</sup>

#### 1.4. *Jesus Forgives as an Angelomorphic Messiah*

While Hägerland understands Jesus as an eschatological prophet in Mark 2:5, in his exegesis of 2:10 he insists that Jesus is an angelomorphic or angel-like messianic character. This conclusion is reached by recognizing a strong Danielic influence on 2:10 (Dan 7:13), and by comparing this verse with passages in which the Angel of YHWH “may be the grammatical subject of forgiveness” (Exod 23:21; Zech 3:4).<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, Mark 2:10 fails the test of historicity in his application of the criteria of incoherence and implausibility.<sup>34</sup>

#### 1.5. *Jesus Forgives as Messiah*

Another position is that Mark intends to portray Jesus as the messiah. This view can be traced as early as 1909, when Wellhausen remarked that in Mark 2:10 “Der Menschensohn ist messianische Selbstbezeichnung Jesu.”<sup>35</sup> The same assumption holds true for Nineham (1969), whose commentary on Mark in many ways admits that Jesus is a supernatural being in Mark 2:1–12;<sup>36</sup> however, the power of Jesus to forgive sins is messianic.<sup>37</sup> The argument for a messianic identity has found little echo in more recent scholarship and those that take this position normally do so with little or no evidence other than a brief assertion. Trimaille (2001), for example, suggests that reconciling sinners with God is “véritablement œuvre messianique,”<sup>38</sup> while Donahue and Harrington (2002) appeal in passing to the messianic figure of *Tg. Isa.* 53:4 to argue that Judaism expected a messiah who can forgive sins.<sup>39</sup> Without

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<sup>31</sup> Hägerland, *Jesus and the Forgiveness*, 165.

<sup>32</sup> Hägerland, *Jesus and the Forgiveness*, 165.

<sup>33</sup> Therefore, he speaks of “Angelomorphic Christology in Mark 2.10.” Hägerland, *Jesus and the Forgiveness*, 170–178.

<sup>34</sup> Hägerland, *Jesus and the Forgiveness*, 250.

<sup>35</sup> J. Wellhausen, *Das Evangelium Marci* (Berlin: Reimer, 1909), 15.

<sup>36</sup> D. Nineham, *The Gospel of Saint Mark* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 47–49.

<sup>37</sup> Nineham, *Mark*, 90. He also speaks of Jesus’ prophetic words of forgiveness (p. 93).

<sup>38</sup> M. Trimaille, *La christologie de Saint Marc* (Paris: Desclée, 2001), 110.

<sup>39</sup> J. Donahue and D. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (SP 2; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2002), 98–99. S. Kuthirakkattel, *The Beginning of Jesus’ Ministry According to Mark’s Gospel (1,14–3,6): A Redaction Critical Study* (AnBib 123; Rome: Institut Biblique Pontifical, 1990), 190; K. Koch, “Messias und Sündenvergebung in Jesaja 53 –

offering a reason for opting for a messianic typology, Lane similarly concludes his exegesis of this pericope by saying that “the purpose of Mark’s commentary is to make the community of believers aware that they have experienced the messianic forgiveness of the Son of Man.”<sup>40</sup> Messianic forgiveness has been detected in CD xiv 19 and 11Q13 ii 6, but not by Markan scholars concerned with assessing Jesus’ authority in Mark 2.<sup>41</sup>

### 1.6. *Jesus Forgives as a Priest*

There has also been the suggestion that Jesus’ forgiveness statement (Mark 2:5) is merely a kind of *priestly absolution* through which Jesus declares that God has forgiven the paralytic’s sins. The argument is that the נטלה-כפר phrase (“the priest shall make atonement for him/them and he/them shall be forgiven”) describing the outcome of the sacrificial ritual performed by the priest (Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7; 19:22; Num 15:25, 28; and 11Q19 xxvi 9–10; xxvii 1–2) is evidence that the priest communicates God’s forgiveness by pronouncing a *formula of absolution*. Therefore, what Jesus actually says to the paralytic is something the priest used to say in the Temple to sinners that brought sin offerings. Lohmeyer (1937),<sup>42</sup> Grundmann (1959),<sup>43</sup> Haenchen (1966),<sup>44</sup> Koch (1966),<sup>45</sup> Broadhead (1992)<sup>46</sup> and Dunn (2006) are most notably associated with this position. For example, Dunn claims that the controversy in Mark 2:1–12 is centered on the fact that Jesus

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Targum: Ein Beitrag zu der Praxis der aramäischen Bibelübersetzung,” *JSJ* 3 (1972), 117–148 (136).

<sup>40</sup> W. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 98.

<sup>41</sup> J. Baumgarten, “Messianic Forgiveness of Sin in CD 14:19 (4Q266 10 i 12–13),” in *The Provo International Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls: Technological Innovations, New Texts, and Reformulated Issues*, ed. D. Parry and E. Ulrich (STDJ 30; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 537–544; J. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 73; J. Scott, *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish and Christian Perspectives* (JSJSup 72; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 209.

<sup>42</sup> E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (KEK I/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1937), 53.

<sup>43</sup> W. Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (THKNT 2; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1959), 76.

<sup>44</sup> E. Haenchen, *Der Weg Jesu: Eine Erklärung des Markus-Evangeliums und der kanonischen Parallelen* (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1966), 102.

<sup>45</sup> K. Koch, “Sühne und Sündenvergebung um die Wende von der exilischen zur nach-exilischen Zeit,” *EvT* 26 (1966), 217–239.

<sup>46</sup> He notes that “Jesus does in Mk 2.1–13 what only a priest of God can do – offer God’s forgiveness for sins,” with the implication that the conflict is linked not only to Jesus’ forgiveness, “but ultimately to his identity.” E. Broadhead, “Christology as Polemic and Apologetic: The Priestly Portrait of Jesus in Mark,” *JSNT* 47 (1992), 21–34 (27).