

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

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Current scholarship is increasingly characterized by a quest for a non-messianic Jesus. According to this perspective the significance of Jesus can be accounted for within the religious, social and political categories of first-century Palestine. The options are many and varied: prophet, rabbi, "divine man," social reformer, political revolutionary, mystic, magician, example of authentic existence, and so on. In some instances such investigations provide helpful insights, heretofore unseen or unappreciated, into the gospels. Nevertheless the program as a whole is largely determined by the modern west's dismissal of the categories of God, Satan, and the supernatural as meaningful or even necessary explanations for the universe. Nearly a century ago Albert Schweitzer concluded his massive study of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century lives of Jesus by revealing how strongly they were influenced by the rationalism, liberalism and historicism of the scholars who wrote them.¹ George Tyrrell's oft-quoted observation that nineteenth-century liberalism peered into the well of history to see Jesus but saw only its own reflection is increasingly apropos today. "We are again on the way," writes Helmut Koester, "toward a human Jesus who is just like one of us, one who holds values that are very close to our ideological commitments, . . . a Jesus who, as a real human person, can stand as an example and inspiration for worthy causes."²

I should like to test the validity of the drift toward a purely human Jesus by examining the one characteristic that left the most lasting impression on his followers and caused the greatest offense to his opponents—namely, his *exousia*, his sovereign freedom and magisterial authority. Recent interest in literary approaches to Biblical texts recognizes that the crucial message in a text often can be grasped only if it is implied or even unspoken. Mark in particular operates from the literary axiom that the more significant a truth, the less openly it can be declared. Each of the gospels is designed not only to transfer a quantum of information about Jesus but also to impart to the reader an impression of him.

In this study I should like to suggest that the essential and distinctive characteristic of Jesus is to be found in his *exousia* and that his authority

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¹ A Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1971) 398-403

² H Koester, "Jesus the Victim," *JBL* 111/1 (1992) 7 Koester argues, though to a lesser degree than Schweitzer, that failure to acknowledge the eschatological element of Jesus is a failure to understand Jesus (p. 14)

is perhaps the most significant example of implicit Christology in the gospel tradition. Specifically I would assert that *exousia* as used by Mark derives not from human origins but from the authority of God that Jesus receives at his baptism, and that it constitutes the essence of his divine sonship and unique confidence to act in God's behalf.

I. THE USE OF *EXOUSIA* IN THE LXX AND INTERTESTAMENTAL LITERATURE, INCLUDING THE QL

Exousia occurs late in the LXX, and then largely in Daniel and the Maccabees. Of its nearly ninety occurrences in the LXX, fully half refer to kingship and magistracy.³ The second largest number refers to God's authority⁴ or to surrogates of God, such as priests (1 Esdr 8:22), Jerusalem (Sir 24:11), Israel (Ps 113:2), or the covenant (Sir 45:17). In only nine instances, or in roughly ten percent of its occurrences, is *exousia* used other than of royal or divine authority. In six of these it describes various forms of human authority,⁵ twice it is used of nature (Ps 135:8-9), and once it is used of the demonic (Dan 7:6 [Th]).

A similar pattern emerges in the Pseudepigrapha.⁶ Of twenty-three occurrences of *exousia*, four refer to royalty (1 *Enoch* 9:7; *T. Abr.* [A] 2:11; *Ep. Arist.* 206, 215), and four directly to God (1 *Enoch* 9:5; 25:4; *T. Job* 3:6; *Ep. Arist.* 253). Here too surrogates of God receive authority: In five instances they are angels and spiritual powers,⁷ and once the messianic priest (*T. Levi* 18:12). New, however, is the use of *exousia* for Satan and demons,⁸ which is even more in evidence at Qumran. Again, only in isolated instances is *exousia* used of human agency.⁹ Thus in both the LXX and Pseudepigrapha we find that *exousia* shows a strong preference for supernatural authority, whether divine or demonic, or for the investiture of royal authority.

The evidence from Qumran generally agrees with the foregoing, although the QL shows a preference for using *exousia* for the authority of spiritual powers, both angelic and (more frequently) demonic. Behind *exousia* in the LXX lies one of two Hebrew or Aramaic terms, *māšal* or *šalat*, which

³ Forty-four times 2 Kgdms 20 13, 1 Esdr 4 28, 40, Tob 1 21 (S), Esth 3 13, 8 13, Prov 17 14, Wis 10 14, Isa 39 2, Dan 3 2, 3, 97, 4 31 (S), 34 (S), 37a (S), 37b (S), 37c (S), 5 7 (S), 16 (S), 29 (S), 6 4 (S), 7 27 (Th), 28 (S), Bel 25, 1 Macc 1 13, 6 11, 10 6, 8, 32, 35, 38, 11 58, 14 4, 2 Macc 3 6, 24, 4 9, 24, 7 16, 10 13, 3 Macc 7 12, 21, 4 Macc 4 5, 5 15, 6 33

⁴ Eighteen times Jdt 8 15, Esth 4 17, Wis 16 13, Sir 10 4, 17 2, Dan 4 3 (Th), 26 (Th), 27 (S), 31 (S [twice]), 5 4 (S), 7 14 (S [thrice]), 14 (Th [twice]), 26 (S), 27 (S)

⁵ Tob 2 13 (S), 7 10 (S), Eccl 8 8, Sir 9 13, 30 11, 33 20 With reference to humans, however, *exousia* tends to designate exceptional forms of power, e.g. the right to give a daughter in marriage (Tob 7 10 [S]) or the power over life itself (Eccl 8 8, Sir 33 20)

⁶ According to A-M Denis, *Concordance grecque des Pseudepigraphes d'Ancien Testament* (Louvain-la-Neuve Université catholique de Louvain, 1987) 339-340

⁷ *T. Abr.* (A) 9 8, 13 10, 11, *T. Levi* 3 8, 3 *Apoc Bar* 12 3

⁸ *T. Job* 8 2, 3, 16 2, 4, 20 3

⁹ 1 *Enoch* 98 2, *T. Reub* 5 1, *Ps Sol* 9 4, *Ep. Arist.* 102

occur, according to Charlesworth,¹⁰ some seventy-five times in the Dead Sea scrolls. At places the fragmentary condition of the texts makes positive identification of the target word or its context impossible, in which case the term is excluded from consideration. *Māšal* and/or *šālat* refer frequently to God's dominion¹¹ and equally often to divine surrogates such as spiritual powers and angels,¹² or less frequently to the Messiah (4QPBl 1 1.1; 4QpIsa 7+ 3.25), the saints (11QMelch 1+ 2.9; 1QH 12.23; 1QM 1.5), or the priesthood (1QS 9.7). As expected, the term(s) also appear for the rule of kings (11QTemple 59:15; 59:20; 4QPBl 1 1.1; 11QtgJob 32.6), governments (4Q511 2 1.9; 1QS 3.17), and the military (1QM 6.2). Frequently, however, *māšal* and/or *šālat* refer to Satan's dominion of evil and darkness,¹³ or to "the seekers after smooth things" (4QpN 1+ 2.5; 3+ 2.4), the wicked priest (1QpHab 8.9), or the Kittim (1QM 1.6). As was the case in the LXX and Pseudepigrapha, the scrolls display a reticence to use *māšal* and/or *šālat* of natural phenomena or simple human agency.¹⁴

The foregoing reveals that in the LXX and intertestamental literature *exousia* is used predominantly of supernatural powers and authorities, especially of God and God's works, representatives and emissaries. In addition Qumran shows a propensity to use the Hebrew and Aramaic equivalents, *māšal* and/or *šālat*, of the demonic supernatural, especially of Satan and his works and minions. In the LXX, and there primarily in Daniel and Maccabees, *exousia* is often used for kingship. Kings of course were not only the highest form of human rule. In the ancient Near East they were believed to derive their authority from God. Repeatedly in the literature *exousia* is given by God or a supernatural power to kings, priests, the saints, and so on. It is thus authority from without, conferred rather than innate, official rather than native.¹⁵ The combined evidence allows us to conclude

¹⁰ J Charlesworth, R Whitaker, L Hickerson, S Starbuck and L Stuckenbruck, *Graphic Concordance to the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Tubingen J C B Mohr [Paul Siebeck], Louisville Westminster/John Knox, 1991)

¹¹ Fourteen certain identifications 4Q405 23 1 11, 23 1 12, 1QM 13 10, 4Q510 1 1 2, 1QH 7 23, 13 11, 4Q511 1 1 3, 35 1 8, 1QS 9 24, 10 1, 11tgJob 9 4, 1QapGen 20 13 (twice), 4QAmram 2 1 3

¹² Eleven times 1QM 10 12, 17 7, 4Q405 23 1 8, 1QH 12 9, 1QS 3 20, 4Q511 1 1 1, 4QAmram 1 1 11, 1 1 12, 2 1 5, 2 1 6, 3 1 1. Contrary to Foerster's judgment that *exousia* is not used of spiritual powers outside the NT ("exousia," *TWNT* 2 562, followed by I Broer, "exousia," *TDNT* 2 11), these texts (see also n 7 *supra*) show that the term could be applied to angelic and spiritual powers

¹³ Twenty-three times, 1QM 1 15, 14 9, 14 10, 17 5, 18 1, 18 11, 1QS 1 18, 1 23, 2 19, 3 21, 3 22, 3 23, 4 19, 4QBer 10 2 8, 4QCata 2+ 1 8, 4QM1 8+ 1 7, 4QM6 3 1 6, CD 12 2, 4Q510 1 1 6, 4Q511 2 1 3, 10 1 3, 6QBen 2 1 3, 4QAmram 2 1 1

¹⁴ References involve only the dominion of the sun and moon (1Q34b 3 2 3) or darkness at night (1QH 12 6), mortal rule (19 1 1, CD 13 12, 1QapGen 22 24), the spirit of error (1QH 13 15), wisdom sayings or *mēšalim* (1QpHab 8 6, 4QTestim 1 9) and law (1QM 1 1)

¹⁵ J H Moulton and G Milligan observe that in the papyri and nonliterary texts *exousia* carries the sense of authority conferred by law "hence the common usage in wills, contracts, and other legal documents, to denote the 'claim,' or 'right,' or 'control,' one has over anything" (MM 225)

that *exousia* normally was reserved for or derived from supernatural authority.

II. THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK¹⁶

An overview of the 102 occurrences of *exousia* in the NT shows that it is used of God, Jesus, and the authority conferred on the Church and/or disciples by the gospel, but also of Satan, spiritual powers, and various forms of human authority. *Exousia* typically resides in or emanates from God or the supernatural realm. When it concerns human and earthly powers it generally describes political, religious, or military authorities.

In Mark and Matthew *exousia* is reserved specifically for Jesus or the apostles.¹⁷ The term is found nine times in Mark—six with reference to Jesus (1:22, 27; 2:10; 11:28, 29, 33), twice of the apostles (3:15, 6:7), and once in the simile of the man who “gave authority over his house to his servants” (13:34), which doubtless is an allusion to the disciples of Jesus. In the three instances where Jesus is not the subject, *exousia* connotes the conferring of his authority on the disciples.¹⁸ Thus every occurrence of *exousia* in Mark reflects either directly or indirectly the authority of Jesus.

¹⁶ Periodical literature on the authority of Jesus includes H Anderson, “Jesus Some Aspects of the Question of His Authority,” *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism Festschrift for H C Kee* (ed J Neusner, Philadelphia Fortress, 1988) 290–310, O Betz, “Die Frage nach dem messianischen Bewusstsein Jesu,” *NovT* 6 (1963) 28–48, I Broer, “*exousia*,” *TDNT* 2 9–12, D Daube, “*Exousia* in Mark 1 22 and 27,” *JTS* 39 (1938) 45–59, D J Doughty, “The Authority of the Son of Man (Mk 2 1–3 6),” *ZNW* 74/3–4 (1983) 161–181, J Edwards, “The Baptism of Jesus According to the Gospel of Mark,” *JETS* 34/1 (1991) 43–57, A Feuillet, “L’*exousia* du Fils de l’Homme,” *RSR* 42 (1954) 161–192, B Gerhardsson, “Gottes Sohn als Diener Gottes Messias, Agape und Himmelsherrschaft nach dem Matthäusevangelium,” *ST* 27 (1973) 73–106, P Guillemette, “Un enseignement nouveau, plein d’autorité,” *NovT* 22/3 (1980) 222–247, J Kremer, “Jesu Antwort auf die Frage nach seiner Vollmacht Eine Auslegung von Mk 11,27–33,” *BibLeb* 9 (1968) 128–136, C Marucci, “Die implizite Christologie in der sogenannten Vollmachtsfrage (Mk 11,27–33),” *ZKT* 108 (1986) 292–300, W Osborne, “The Markan Theme of ‘Who Is Jesus?’,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 3/1 (1989) 302–314, R Riesner, “Moderne Jesus-Bilder und der Christus der Evangelien,” *TBei* 22/6 (1991) 320–331, F Schmider, “Die Prophetenwirksamkeit Jesu und der Glaube an Jesus in den Evangelien,” *BK* 38/4 (1983) 149–153, L Sabourin, “Il enseigne avec autorité,” *Studia Missionalia* [Spiritual Masters] 36 (1987) 25–63, K Scholtissek, “Nachfolge und Autorität nach dem Markusevangelium,” *TTZ* 100/1 (1991) 56–74, E Schweizer, “Anmerkungen zur Theologie des Markus,” *Neotestamentica Deutsche und Englische Aufsätze 1951–1963* (Zurich/Stuttgart Zwingli, 1963) 93–104, G S Shae, “The Question on the Authority of Jesus,” *NovT* 16 (1974) 1–29

¹⁷ The only use of *exousia* in Matthew apart from Jesus or the apostles concerns a centurion in 8 9 Luke’s use of *exousia* reflects the broader pattern evident in the NT as a whole Beyond the parallel passages in Mark, Luke uses *exousia* once of God (12 5), once of the apostles (10 19), once of a centurion (7 8/Matt 8 9), twice of the devil (4 6, 22 53), and four times of rulers (12 11, 19 17, 20 20, 23 7) Likewise in John, apart from one reference to Pilate (19 10) *exousia* refers to Jesus (5 27, 10 18, 17 2), God (19 11), or disciples endowed with God’s authority (1 12)

¹⁸ In two instances (3 15, 6 7) the disciples are endowed with power to prevail over demons On the issue of conferring authority fully one-fourth of the occurrences of *exousia* in the NT denote its being given by God or Christ to the disciples or Church On the transfer of Christological authority to ecclesiastical authority see Scholtissek, “Nachfolge” 62–74

1. "A new teaching—with authority!" (Mark 1:21–28). Mark opens Jesus' public ministry in 1:21–28 by establishing his supremacy over the highest authorities in both the temporal and supernatural realms. The temporal realm is represented by the scribes, whose erudition, no less than their prestige among the people, was legendary. The scribes stand in the tradition of the fathers (7:8–13), however, whereas Jesus receives his authority directly from the Father (1:11). The scribes derive their authority from Torah, but Jesus appeals to a superior authority resident in himself.¹⁹ What is thus essential for Mark, in contrast to Q (which reports the content of Jesus' teaching in the sermon on the mount/plain), is not so much what Jesus taught as who Jesus is as a teacher.²⁰

Even more impressive is Jesus' supremacy in the supernatural realm. Beginning with this story (see also 3:7–12; 5:1–20) the exorcisms in Mark present the gripping conflict between the kingdom of God and the dominion of Satan, between the One anointed with God's Spirit and those held captive by unclean spirits. The inbreaking of God's kingdom in Jesus first begins, according to Mark, not in the human arena but in the cosmic arena, in order to bind the "strong man" (3:27) who exercises power over the natural order. Indeed, as supernatural powers themselves the demons recognize the mission and authority of Jesus before humanity does (1:24; 3:11; 5:7). Nevertheless the encounter is a no-contest event. "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?" cries the demoniac. "I know who you are, the Holy One of God" (1:24).²¹ The pericope concludes

¹⁹ Of the nineteen references to scribes in Mark, all but one (12:28–34) place them in opposition to Jesus and his teaching, or in a negative light. Daube accounts for their opposition in 1:21–28 by arguing that two classes of scribes had developed in Jesus' day: (1) an inferior class of elementary teachers called *sōpērīm* (*grammateis*) and (2) a smaller group of elite scribes who taught with *rāšūt* (*exousia*). Jesus belonged to the latter group, in Daube's judgment, and this accounts for the amazement of the crowds in remote Galilee where only the lesser scribes were usually found (Daube, "Exousia"). The NT, however, shows no awareness of a class of super-scribes nor that Jesus belonged to it. The question of the Sanhedrin in the temple (11:28) indicates that Jesus presumed an authority quite unknown to the scribes. Nor is Daube's attempt to equate *rāšūt* with *exousia* successful. *Rāšūt* occurs in only three fragmentary texts in the Dead Sea scrolls (1QM 12:4, 4QM1 1+13, 4QM1 8+16), none of which appears to carry the force of *māšal* or *šalat*. The authority of the Tannaim, at any rate, was a temporal authority according to the Mishna. The gospels in fact posit different sources for the authority of Jesus and the scribes. The authority of the scribes was derived from Torah and hence a mediated authority. Jesus, however, possessed an immediate authority that was grounded in himself—a fact that did not escape his contemporaries. A modern Jewish NT scholar recognizes the same uniqueness in Jesus. He "is the only ancient Jew known to us who not only proclaimed that the endtime was at hand, but at the same time that the new time of salvation had already begun" (D. Flusser, *Jesus* [Rowohlt's Bildmonographien 140, Reinbek, 1968] 87–102, quoted in Riesner, "Moderne Jesus-Bilder" 328), cf. also Scholtissek, "Nachfolge" 59.

²⁰ Jesus is the subject of sixteen out of seventeen occurrences of the verb *didaskēin* in Mark and of all eleven uses of the noun *didaskalos*. Thus Guillemette: "In Mark 1:24–26 Jesus is not simply an intermediary, he is God who acts, he is the Holy One of God and the word of Jesus is at the same time the word of God" ("Un enseignement" 241).

²¹ It is not unlikely that Mark intends to correlate Jesus with Samson here. Jesus is identified as the "Nazarene" and "the Holy One of God" as is Samson in Judg 16:17 (LXX), who in the A text is called *naziraios theou* and in the B text *hagios theou*. Judg 16:17B is the only other place in the Bible where an individual is called *hagios theou* (albeit without the article).

with the astonishment of "everyone" (*hapantes*): "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority!" (1:27).²² The cornerstone of Jesus' public ministry is set. In both his word and work Jesus is endowed with the sovereign authority of God.

2. *The authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:1–12)*. A further instance of *exousia* is found in the healing of the paralytic (2:1–12). Once again Jesus and the scribes run aground, although not, as in 1:21–28, in conflict over learning or teaching. The issue here is the forgiveness of sins, which according to Jewish tradition was the exclusive prerogative of God.²³ This prerogative is acknowledged in v. 7: "Who is able to forgive sins except God alone?" The scribes consequently do not claim to forgive sins, and they are scandalized when Jesus presumes to do so. The scandal is heightened by the fact that, without having been told, Jesus knows what is in the hearts of the scribes (2:8). Moreover Jesus does not claim to forgive sins against himself (which lay in his prerogative) but against another (2:5, 10). According to Lev 24:16 blasphemy in the name of the Lord is punishable by death, the very offense of which Jesus is accused in Mark 14:63–64.²⁴ Jesus, according to Mark, knows the crisis in the minds of the scribes—and apparently wills it. The focus in 2:1–12 thus shifts from the physical paralysis of the lame man to the spiritual paralysis of the scribes. The crux of the story comes in v. 10: "But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." The use of *exousia* here contrasts with *dynatai* in v. 7. There the scribes ask: "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" The shift from *dynatai* to *exousia* means that the Son of Man not only has the power but the right to forgive sins.²⁵ "The authority of Jesus has become the central issue. The question here is whether Jesus exercises divine authority on earth (v. 10), and whether therefore Jesus stands in the place of God (v. 7c)."²⁶

Jesus thus appears to be recognized by the demoniac as one like Samson, powerful and set apart, "who plunders the house of the strong man" (Mark 3 27) See Schweizer, "Er wird Nazoräer heissen," *Neotestamentica* 51–55

²² Mark regularly registers the public effect of Jesus' authority by superlatives *ekplēssō* (6 2, 7 37, 10 26, 11 18), *thaumazō* (5 20, 15 5, 44), *ekthaumazō* (12 17), *thamboumai* (1 27, 10 24, 32), *ekthamboumai* (9 15, 16 5), *existēmi* (2 12, 5 42, 6 51), *phoboumai* (4 41, 5 15, 33, 36, 6 50, 9 32, 10 32, 11 18, 16 8) See C E B Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (CGTC, Cambridge Cambridge University, 1985) 73

²³ Exod 34 6–7, Ps 103 3, Isa 43 25, Mic 7 18 There is no evidence that the Messiah would have authority over sins The classical description of the Messiah in *Pss Sol* 17–18 speaks of his righteousness, even sinlessness (17 36), but not of his ability to forgive sins

²⁴ The fear of blasphemy caused Jews to avoid pronouncing the divine name whenever possible Following Num 15 30, the Mishna decreed expulsion from the community as punishment for taking God's name in vain (*Ker* 1 1–2, *Sanh* 7 5) The same punishment was decreed at Qumran for uttering God's name frivolously (1QS 7)

²⁵ J D G Dunn says that "it is impossible to soften the Christological force of 2 7 and 10 Jesus is able and has authority to forgive sins, not merely to declare them forgiven" (*Jesus, Paul, and the Law Studies in Mark and Galatians* [Louisville Westminster/John Knox, 1990] 27)

²⁶ Doughty, "Authority" 168 Doughty, however, is mistaken in concluding that Jesus is portrayed here as a "divine man" (*theios anēr*) Some of those who were so designated had healing powers, but none presumed to forgive sins

The authority of Jesus is not a theoretical matter for Mark. Jesus wants the scribes to know (v. 10) the truth of which he speaks (v. 9). His power to forgive, no less effective because of its invisibility, will be proved by the healing of the paralytic. The power to forgive and the power to heal are one. The pronouncement in v. 10 means that the One who has authority to forgive sins in heaven is present in the Son of Man to forgive sins "on earth."²⁷ The startling result is that Jesus does not here invoke the power of God—as does Nathan, for instance, who says to David, "The Lord has put away your sins" (2 Sam 12:13). Rather, Jesus presents himself as one who confidently stands in the place of God. In answer to the question, "Who except God alone?" (v. 7), hearers and readers are invited to supply the name of Jesus. The exclamation of the crowd gives voice to the uniqueness of the event: "We have never seen anything like this" (2:12). It was this very conviction in fact that led the early fathers to the acknowledgment that, in the claim to forgive sins in Mark 2:10 and elsewhere, Jesus was the *Logos* of God.²⁸

3. *The authority of Jesus elsewhere in Mark.* The foregoing pericopes are typical of a sovereign freedom presupposed and practiced by Jesus throughout the gospel. In 1:21–28 Jesus first appears as the strong man who binds Satan and plunders his goods, to use the imagery of 3:27.²⁹ The exercise of his authority encompasses natural forces as well as supernatural forces, however.³⁰ The descriptions of his *exousia* over nature are instructive in several of these instances. In the calming of the storm (4:35–41) his "rebuke" of the wind and "muzzling" of the waves are phrased in the language of exorcism, recalling the power of God over chaos at creation. Both episodes are effected solely by the word. Likewise Jesus' walking on the water (6:45–52) connotes that Jesus treads where only God can walk³¹ and designates Jesus by the same expression (*egō eimi*) that is used for God's self-disclosure to Moses (Exod 3:14 LXX).

²⁷ No attempt is made here to discuss the complex issues associated with the term Son of Man except to note the relationship between Son of Man and *exousia*, which was already established in Dan 7 13–14 "Then came one like a son of man And to him was given dominion (LXX *exousia*) and glory and kingdom" Contrary to A Farrer (*A Study in Mark* [London Dacre, 1951] 271), Son of Man and *exousia* are not synonymous in Mark, for nowhere are people amazed that Jesus calls himself the Son of Man, nor do his opponents take exception to his doing so They are amazed, however, at Jesus' authority, which evidently surpassed anything expected of the Son of Man Doughty correctly observes "The issue for Mark is not whether Jesus is rightly regarded as the Son of Man, but whether, as Son of Man, Jesus has divine authority on earth" ("Authority" 179)

²⁸ Iren *Haer* 5 17 3, Clem *Paed* 1 2 6 1 See J Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600) The Christian Tradition* (Chicago University of Chicago, 1971) 1 155

²⁹ Further instances of Jesus prevailing over the demonic occur in 1 34, 39, 3 11, 15, 5 1–20, 6 7, 13, 9 14–29

³⁰ Calming a storm, 4 35–41, feeding the five thousand, 6 30–44, walking on the water, 6 45–52, feeding the four thousand, 8 1–10, withering the fig tree, 11 12–21, and (presumably) darkness at the crucifixion, 15 33

³¹ God alone can walk on the waves Job 9 8, 11 (cf Ps 77 19, Isa 43 16)

Further evidence of authority over nature is seen in the ability to cure illness. By all accounts Jesus performed miracles of healing,³² all of which in Mark appear prior to the triumphal entry in chap. 11. To a lesser extent, of course, there are reports of miraculous healings in the HB as well as in rabbinic circles and Hellenistic wonder-workers, including a few Roman emperors. Jesus' healing power is not the result of magic or an aberration of nature, however, but rather is in character in the sense that it flows from the same source as his authority to forgive sins (2:1-12), exorcise demons (9:14-29) and master the forces of nature (4:35-41).

The *exousia* of Jesus also comes to expression in social relations. Of first concern is the calling of disciples, which inaugurates the mission of Jesus in Mark (1:16-20). The importance of the new community is signified by its number, which corresponds to the twelve tribes of Israel. Evidence from the first century indicates that as a rule Jewish rabbis were chosen by their students and hence did not call disciples. But from a mountaintop, an imagery reminiscent of Yahweh's summons to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod 19:20), Jesus sovereignly summons the Twelve into a new community (Mark 3:13-19) and to a mission that is founded on a relationship with himself ("in order that they might be with him," v. 14). He confers his authority on the Twelve and sends them out with dominion over demons (6:7-13) and with freedom from the tradition of the elders (7:5-13).

Further instances of Jesus' *exousia* are seen in the reordering of social relationships. The responsibility of a son to provide for his parents is declared to supersede the legal option of Corban (7:8-13). Motherhood and sibling relations are redefined according to doing the will of God rather than blood lineage (3:31-35; 6:1-6). In contrast to the tradition of the elders Jesus embraces the alienated of the Mosaic and rabbinic tradition: a leper (1:40-45), tax collectors and sinners (2:13-17), and even unclean Gentiles, including a Syrophenician woman (7:24-30).

Jesus' *exousia* also manifests itself in the political realm. This is most evident in Luke, which alone of the gospels records two rebuffs of Herod Antipas, Jesus' political sovereign in Galilee (Luke 13:31-32; 23:6-12). Yet even in Mark, which derives from a Roman provenance either during or within memory of Nero's outrages against Christians (and because of which its author must exercise discretion in political pronouncements), Jesus declares what is—and what is not—due to Caesar (12:13-17). Equally illustrative is Jesus' silence in the face of Pilate's interrogation (15:1-6), whose inscription on Jesus' cross, "The king of the Jews" (15:28), may express the prefect's pique.

Above all, however, the *exousia* of Jesus manifests itself *vis-à-vis* the rabbinic tradition, the religious hierarchy, and the temple tradition. Foremost here is Jesus' reinterpretation of the Sabbath: "The Sabbath was

³² Jesus' ability as a wonder-worker was acknowledged by his enemies, although it was attributed to Satan rather than to God (Mark 3:22). The same judgment would be preserved centuries later in the Talmud (*b Šabb* 104b, *y Sanh* 25d). See R. T. Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1903) 112-115.

made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath; so the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (2:27–28). The establishment of the Sabbath was the crowning act of creation (Gen 2:1–3), succeeding even the creation of humanity. Sabbath observance, therefore, is incumbent on Israel as a constitutive order of creation. Hence the Sabbath ordinance is the longest and most pivotal in the Deuteronomic version of the Decalogue.³³ Alone of all the nations Israel had been given the Sabbath, and Sabbath observance sanctified Israel in God's sight (*Jub.* 2:17–33). Thus when Jesus as Son of Man declares himself to be master of the Sabbath—and even violates its ordinances by plucking grain (Mark 2:23–26) and healing on the Sabbath (1:21–28; 3:1–6)—he presumes the very authority by which the Sabbath was instituted by the Creator.

This sovereign disposition toward the Sabbath is typical of Jesus' challenges to the rabbinic tradition as a whole. Such challenges are found primarily at the outset and conclusion of Mark, as if to signify that from beginning to end the antidote to the "leaven of the Pharisees" (8:15) is the *exousia* of Jesus. He violates laws of purity by touching and cleansing a leper (1:40–45) and by association with sinners and tax collectors (2:13–17). He places in question the issue of purification by violating food prohibitions in fasting (2:18–22) and by eating with unwashed hands (7:1–23). He contravenes marriage laws in his teaching on divorce (10:1–12), and he openly denounces the scribes (12:38–40). In the question on the son of David he tacitly assumes supremacy over Israel's greatest king who, according to 2 Sam 7:14, would be the progenitor of the Messiah (12:35–37).

Rabbinic discussions in first-century Palestine were oriented primarily around four compass points of law: Sabbath observance, ritual purity, foods, marriage. Each of the four would later develop into either individual tractates or entire divisions of the Mishna. Each of the four is also vigorously challenged by Jesus. His conflict with the oral tradition is reminiscent of the curses and blessings of Yahweh: The authority of Jesus poses both a cause of offense and a possibility of renewal. According to Mark the intent of Jesus is not to destroy the Law but to transform the subsequent tradition in accord with the original commandment of God (7:8), or by appealing to the order of creation (10:5–6). Jesus speaks and acts as though his authority is not only a corrective to a tradition gone awry but also the very source in which it is rooted. In such encounters Jesus exhibits an authority not accountable from the various traditions in which he stands. It is the source of his authority about which a delegation of the Sanhedrin questions Jesus following his disruption of the temple operation to which we now turn.

4. "By what authority?" (*Mark 11:27–33*). The temple in Jerusalem, in all its Herodian immensity and grandeur, with its commanding view of Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives and its unrivaled historical and theological

³³ See P. J. Miller, Jr., "The Human Sabbath: A Study in Deuteronomic Theology," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 6/2 (1985) 81–97.

significance, becomes the inevitable stage for the challenge to Jesus' authority. The question put to Jesus following his clearing of the temple—"By what authority do you do these things?"—again results in a dispute, although this time with the Sanhedrin itself.³⁴ The "chief priests, scribes, and elders" of v. 27 were the three groups of which the Sanhedrin was composed, although in this instance they represent a delegation from the Sanhedrin rather than the entire council. This is the only instance in Mark in which the Sanhedrin approaches Jesus (apart from 14:55 ff.), and this leaves no doubt that the issue of Jesus' authority was a matter of concern at the pinnacle of the religious establishment.

What the Sanhedrin means by "these things" is not entirely clear, although the most obvious suggestion points to the preceding clearing of the temple (11:15–19).³⁵ The overturning of tax tables and scattering of livestock were grounds in themselves for the opposition of the Sanhedrin. The temple episode, however, was only the most recent incident in a history of such provocations, which, as we have seen, included Jesus' presumption to forgive sins (2:5), accept sinners (2:15), call tax collectors into fellowship (2:14), exorcise demons (1:25–26), redefine the Sabbath (2:28), and lay an ax to the root of the oral tradition (7:1–13), the temple (11:12–20), and now the Sanhedrin.

The question, "By what authority?" (v. 28), indicates that for the Sanhedrin the issue is not simply what Jesus did but his right to do what he did. It also reveals that Jesus' adversaries recognize his unique empowerment, which on an earlier occasion had been attributed to the demonic (3:22). A second and related question, "Who gave to you this authority?" (v. 28), acknowledges that no one possesses such authority on his own. Thus, similar to the question of 2:7 ("Who can forgive sins but God alone?"), the issue of Jesus' divine presumption is again center stage.

Remarkably, everything that needs to be known about Jesus can be summed up in "one word" (*hena logon*, 11:29) or, more precisely, one event—the baptism of John. "Was John's baptism from heaven or of human origin?" asks Jesus (v. 30). Not the rival schools of Hillel or Shammai but the absolutes of heaven or earth establish the categories necessary to answer the Sanhedrin. As on the earlier question of Sabbath observance (2:23–3:6), the counterquestion implies that Jesus stands not under the Sanhedrin but over it.³⁶ His counterquestion demonstrates the authority about which he is questioned.

Initially it seems either irrelevant or evasive for Jesus to raise the case of John. Ironically, however, the counterquestion contains the seeds of the truth the Sanhedrin hopes to learn, for it was at the baptism by John that the heavens were parted, the Spirit of power descended into Jesus (*eis au-*

³⁴ If, as seems probable, the rulings later preserved in the Mishna were valid at the time, then Jesus' life depended on his answer, for "the false prophet and he that prophesies in the name of a strange god" were to be strangled (*m Sanh* 11 1)

³⁵ John 2 13–22 preserves an independent witness linking the question of the religious authorities to Jesus' clearing of the temple

³⁶ John 18 19–22 and Acts 23 1–5 preserve two instances of the risk incurred in countering the authority of the Sanhedrin, see Kremer, "Jesu Antwort" 131–133

ton, 1:10), and the voice from heaven declared him God's Son. The baptism of Jesus, in other words, was the event that inaugurated his *exousia*, his conscious oneness with the Father, and his sovereign freedom and empowerment for ministry. If the Sanhedrin wants to know whence Jesus received authority to do "these things" it must reconsider John's baptism. A decision about John is a decision about Jesus. If John's baptism were simply of human origin, then there may be something to the Sanhedrin's accusation. But if John's baptism was of God—as the crowds believed and the Sanhedrin evidently feared—then Jesus' authority is the authority of God.

Commentators often see the reference to John as an indictment of the temple authorities: Had they received John's preaching of repentance, it is suggested, they would have found no offense in Jesus. The nerve of the issue lies deeper, however, for John's exhortation to repentance is mentioned only in passing in Mark (1:4) whereas his reference to the Coming One is direct and explicit (1:7–8). In truth, John's significance for Jesus—and in this instance for the Sanhedrin—is as a herald of Jesus' divine sonship, with which Mark begins (1:1) and ends (15:39) his gospel. The "these things" of which the Sanhedrin inquires can be understood only if they are seen as consequences of the authority of the Son of God. What Jesus does as God's servant has meaning only because of who he is as God's Son. The *exousia* of Jesus is in fact the *exousia* of God.³⁷

III. THE PROVENANCE OF THE *EXOUSIA* OF JESUS

Having established the *exousia* of Jesus in Mark, we must now raise the question of continuity. To what extent does the bearing of Jesus as it is reflected in *exousia* derive from traditions older than Mark, and even from Jesus himself? Or does it originate in the Markan redaction of the gospel? We begin first by considering the broader presentation of Jesus in Mark.

It has become an axiom in NT scholarship today to regard as secondary statements in the gospels that attribute messianic titles or status to Jesus. The Christology of the gospels, whether explicit (e.g. titular) or implicit (as in *exousia*), is generally considered either to have arisen as a result of the early Church's encounter with the categories of Greek thought in the Gentile mission—such as "divine man," "son of God," and so forth—or to have been projected onto the gospel accounts by the early Church as

³⁷ "All [Jesus'] actions and words are connected with John and go back to the spirit of God's descent on him after he had accepted baptism at John's hand. Jesus has the right to act the way he does because of what the voice from heaven said to him. He, more than the authorities, is more at home in the temple, because God has called him his dear son" (B. van Iersel, *Reading Mark* [Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1989] 148). On the relationship between divine sonship and authority see also A. Schlatter, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1987) 319–320; Shae, "Question" 27; Edwards, "Baptism of Jesus" 53–54.

a result of its desire to attribute to the historical Jesus an honor commensurate to the Church's postresurrection experience of his Lordship.

The hypothesis that messianic titles and divine status first arose in the Gentile mission continues to be in need of reexamination, however. The first evangelists to the Gentiles were Jews, and the divinizing of Jesus surely constituted no minor compromise to the monotheism that such Jews—and Jesus himself—held. The ace in the hand of every Jew in the face of Gentile polytheism and idolatry was the *Shema*: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut 6:4). The hypothesis that Jews would be willing to surrender their trump card of monotheism in exchange for acceptance of the gospel by "Gentile sinners" (Gal 2:15) and idolaters (Rom 1:23) is not without problems. The purported creativity of the early Church in producing a portrait of Jesus that eventually resulted in the Nicene formulation of "true God of true God" from an historical Jesus who, according to modern historiography, was simply a first-century Jew about whom little is known and who was uncertain (if not confused) about his identity and the kingdom he espoused constitutes a considerable leap of faith. A more satisfying solution to my mind is that on the issue of Jesus' self-consciousness the dominant gene, so to speak, of Mark's portrait was transmitted by Jesus himself.³⁸

Similarly an earlier generation of liberal scholars was persuaded that a self-understanding such as is depicted in this study would have been unthinkable within first-century Jewish monotheism and could not have characterized the historical Jesus. This view is less tenable today. Although Mark's presentation of Jesus is in many respects unique, it is not without certain parallels in Judaism. The Teacher of Righteousness at Qumran, for example, distinguished himself from the community to which he brought deliverance in these words: "Through me hast Thou illumined the faces of full many, and countless be the times Thou hast shown Thy power through me. For Thou hast made known unto me Thy deep, mysterious things" (1QH 4.5–5.4).

Even more pronounced was Hillel's self-understanding. "If I am here, everything is here; if I am not here, what is here?" (*b. Sukk.* 53a), declared the sage who died no more than a decade before Jesus was crucified. More than one of the rabbi's sayings is reminiscent of sayings attributed to Jesus.³⁹ It was not unknown for Hillel to apply to himself Biblical quotations that referred to God. "Hillel's self-understanding was so extraordinarily high that later rabbinic tradition often could not admit that Hillel had made such elevated claims for himself; it was asserted, rather, than Hillel was actually speaking of God."⁴⁰

This is a helpful caveat against categorically disqualifying sayings of preeminence attributed to Jesus in the gospels as impossible for a first-century Jew. In other respects, of course, many sayings of Jesus differ sig-

³⁸ See Betz, "Frage" 34, 37, Feuillet, "L'exousia" 192

³⁹ Compare *m. 'Abot* 1 14 and *Sipre Zuta*, for example, with Matt 12 30

⁴⁰ D. Flusser, *Entdeckungen im Neuen Testament Jesus-worte und ihre Überlieferung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn Neukirchener, 1987) 1 210

nificantly from those attributed to the Teacher of Righteousness or to Hillel. The latter understood themselves as mediators of God's word, but they did so as representatives of all people, each of whom receives a more or less similar commission from God. According to the testimony of the gospels, on the other hand, Jesus has no equals, and the authority with which he is invested and of which he is supremely conscious is not interchangeable with that of anyone else.⁴¹

Evidence of Jesus' consciousness of divine sonship and *exousia* appears in all layers of the gospel traditions, not only in the synoptic tradition but also earlier in Q (e.g. Matt 11:27//Luke 10:22) as well as in Paul. Its recognition not only makes the gospels intelligible but also is the primary reason why the quest for a nonmessianic Jesus remains unsatisfied. Especially in Mark the *exousia* of Jesus emerges in what he does. Unlike the rabbis, for example, Jesus assumes a commanding role in calling his disciples (1:16–20; 2:13–17; 3:13–19). Equally unlike them, he expects no successors. Moses foresaw the prophet to come (Deut 18:15), Elijah prepared the way for the Coming One (Mal 3:1), John the Baptist anticipated a successor stronger than himself (Mark 1:7). Jesus, however, announces the arrival of the kingdom (1:15), and one's response to Jesus determines one's standing in it (8:38; 10:15; Matt 10:32//Luke 12:8).⁴²

In addition to his deeds, Jesus' manner of speech is illustrative of his *exousia*. The OT prophet prefaced his pronouncements with "Thus says the Lord" as a guarantee of Yahweh's authority, but Jesus assumes that authority himself, solemnly pronouncing: "Truly I say to you" (*amēn legō hymn*). Jesus' use of *amēn*⁴³ as an introductory formula rather than as a concluding prayer response (as was customary in Judaism) is, in the words of Jeremias, "without any parallel in the whole of Jewish literature and the rest of the New Testament."⁴⁴

A second innovation is the well-known *abba* formula. Apart from the baptismal scene Mark records four references to God as Father (8:38; 11:25; 13:32; 14:36), all spoken in the presence of the disciples following Caesarea Philippi. Generally speaking, prior to Caesarea Philippi Mark portrays Jesus' divine Sonship by what he does and only afterward by what he says. All but three references of Jesus' *exousia*, for example, occur before Peter's confession, as do all but one exorcism (9:17 ff.). But after Caesarea Philippi Mark repeats, as it were, Jesus' question to Peter to all the disciples (and readers): "Who do you say that I am?" Only after Peter's confession does Jesus speak of himself as "the Son" (12:6; 13:32) and refer to God as his Father. Again, all but two of the thirteen *amēn* sayings fall

⁴¹ On the differences between Hillel and Jesus cf *ibid* 215

⁴² So E Schweizer "With an authority such as only God can claim, [Jesus] promises the kingdom to those whose faith resembles the empty hand of a beggar" (*The Good News According to Mark* [Atlanta John Knox, 1970] 207), also I H Marshall, *The Origins of New Testament Christology* (Downers Grove InterVarsity, 1976) 50–51

⁴³ Thirteen times in Mark 3 28, 8 12, 9 1, 41, 10 15, 29, 11 23, 12 43, 13 30, 14 9, 18, 25, 30

⁴⁴ J Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York Scribner's, 1971) 35–36, so too H-W Kuhn, "amēn," *TDNT* 1 69–70, H Schlier, "amēn," *TWNT* 1 341–342

after Caesarea Philippi, thus evincing that following that event Mark allows Jesus to verbalize what formerly he enacted in order to interpret and clarify his *exousia* and divine Sonship.

So much for the position of *abba* in the gospel. What about its meaning?⁴⁵ Evidence in Jewish Palestine is extremely rare, if not lacking, of "my Father" being used as an individual address to God. Jesus, however, addresses God intimately and personally as *abba* (14:36). T. W. Manson⁴⁶ is correct in saying that "the experience of God as Father dominates the whole ministry of Jesus from the Baptism to the Crucifixion" and hence is the source of Jesus' *exousia* and filial consciousness. Jesus' warm confidence in the nearness of God and his readiness to respond, which is everywhere evident in his parables as well as in his language about God, is distinct from the more distant and formal addresses to God customary in Judaism.

Equally without precedent, yet present in all layers of the traditions, is Jesus' instruction to his disciples to address God as *abba*.⁴⁷ Nowhere is the unshared Sonship of Jesus more evident than in the fifty-one occurrences (excluding parallels) of "Father" in the synoptics, in which Jesus either speaks of God as "my Father" (twenty-nine times), or teaches his disciples about God as "your Father" (twenty-two times)—without, however, including himself with the disciples in addressing God as "our Father."⁴⁸ The presence of *abba* in the gospel traditions preserves a seminal memory of Jesus' filial consciousness not only in relationship to the Father but also in contrast to the derivative sonship of his disciples.

Having reviewed Mark's broader portrait of Jesus, let us briefly return to our three primary texts for clues concerning the provenance of Jesus' *exousia*. Mark 1:21–28 establishes Jesus' *exousia* over Satan in the exorcism of the man with an unclean spirit. The language recalls the mighty Samson, the only other individual called "holy one of God" in the Bible, thus establishing the same motif of Mark's first and pithiest parable (3:27), which is set within the Beelzebul controversy (3:20–30). There Jesus depicts his ministry according to a Mighty One who binds the strong man and plunders his goods. The first miracle and the first parable in Mark, in other words, represent Jesus vanquishing the kingdom of Satan. We have no evidence in the NT or beyond of the early Church preserving its own teaching in the form of parables. Parables were, however, the preferred mode of

⁴⁵ The foremost treatment of *abba* remains J. Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 11–65. Recent critiques of Jeremias (see M. R. D'Angelo, "Abba and 'Father' Imperial Theology and the Jesus Traditions," *JBL* 111/4 [1992] 611–630) modify his conclusions at isolated points but fail to alter his central thesis that there are (as yet) no examples of the use of *abba* for God in Jewish texts as early as the gospels.

⁴⁶ T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus: Studies in Its Form and Content* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1963) 102.

⁴⁷ Mark, 4 times, Q, 8/9 times, Matthew, 23 times, Luke, 6 times, John, 107 times. The increased references to God as Father in the later evangelists testify to what they believed was of the essence of Jesus' bearing.

⁴⁸ The "our Father" of Matt 6:9 is not an exception because there Jesus instructs his disciples how to pray.

Jesus' teaching, doubtless preserving his *ipsissima vox*. The presence of the image of the Mighty One who overcomes the strong man in an exorcism as well as in a parable (3:27) is an argument in favor of its origin in Jesus rather than in Mark or the early Church.

The substance of 2:1–10 preserves an equally strong claim to originate in Jesus, for in the history of religions there is no known parallel to his claim to forgive sins.⁴⁹ There appears to be no precedent for ascribing forgiveness of sins to Jesus unless that claim were rooted in his *exousia*.⁵⁰ Mark, in fact, differentiates himself from the narrative at 2:10 to alert the reader to the unprecedented nature of Jesus' pronouncement: "But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins—he said to the paralytic. . . ." "In the same way as he will later interrupt a discourse by Jesus to address himself directly to the reader (13:14), the narrator interrupts the present story to point out how extremely significant it is for the reader to really understand that Jesus has the authority to forgive sins on earth."⁵¹ Thus in his own interjection as well as in the report of the crowd's amazement (2:12) Mark highlights the singular nature of this event: In the claim to forgive sins Jesus has acted as God—yet without blasphemy.

Finally, several Semitisms in 11:27–33 argue against the theory that this pericope derives from the early Church's rivalry with the synagogue over the issue of authority. Semitisms include the subjectless *erchontai* (v. 27), the triple use of *en* (vv. 28, 29, 33) for the Hebrew and Aramaic *b-*, the final position of *hina tauta poiēs* in v. 28, and especially the use of *ex ouranou* (vv. 30–31) as a circumlocution for the name of God.⁵² The fourfold repetition of authority in the pericope also "enshrines the conviction of Jesus that His *exousia* was from God."⁵³ Finally the clash between Jesus and the scribes, which characterized the ministry of Jesus and eventually resulted in his execution (14:53–65), points to the historical experience of Jesus.⁵⁴

Not the least formidable obstacle to the quest for a nonmessianic Jesus who champions our causes and espouses our ideologies, to paraphrase Helmut

⁴⁹ R Bultmann's view (*History of the Synoptic Tradition* [New York Harper, 1972] 149) that Mark 2:10 derives from a Church rule to which the reference to Jesus was later added leaves unanswered the question of why the evangelists did not also apply such pronouncements to the disciples, especially to Peter. See Feuillet, "L'exousia" 163.

⁵⁰ V Taylor, *The Gospel According to St Mark* (2d ed., New York St Martin's, 1966) 201, R Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26* (WBC 34A, Dallas Word, 1989) 93.

⁵¹ B van Iersel, *Reading Mark* 64–65.

⁵² See Marucci, "Die implizite Christologie," 293–294, Shae, "Question" 6–7.

⁵³ Taylor, *Gospel* 468–469.

⁵⁴ The Jesus Seminar recognizes that "the words attributed [to Jesus] are in the style of a retort or rejoinder and so sound like Jesus must have sounded" and that "it is difficult to imagine how they could have been transmitted during the oral period, except as part of this story." The Seminar nevertheless dismisses the authenticity of the pericope. See R Funk and M Smith, *The Gospel of Mark Red Letter Edition* (Sonoma Polebridge, 1991) 178–179. Likewise Bultmann sees vv. 28–30 as "a genuine Palestinian apophthegm" and correctly recognizes that the Baptist's authority necessitates the acknowledgment of the authority of Jesus. He nevertheless regards the pericope as a creation of the early Church designed to answer adherents of the Baptist sect (*History* 19–20).

Koester, is that such a Jesus would have scarcely gotten himself crucified. The fact that 11:27–33 provides a plausible answer for the early Church's two salient memories of Jesus—that he acted with godlike authority, and that he was executed under Roman rule—argues strongly in favor of its authenticity. Thus 11:27–33 rightly identifies the source of Jesus' *exousia* in the empowerment of the Spirit and declaration of the Father at his baptism by John, and it likewise preserves the memory that Jesus' *exousia* was perceived by the temporal authorities as a threat, as witnessed in Antipas' visions of John the Baptist *redivivus* (6:14–16), the Sanhedrin's judgment of blasphemy (14:61–64), and Pilate's grounds for execution: that Jesus was believed to be "the king of the Jews" (15:26).

IV. CONCLUSION

Preserved within the gospel of Mark is a diverse and significant body of evidence of the *verus sensus Jesu*. Nowhere is the continuity between the memory of the early Church and the self-understanding of Jesus more discernible than in Mark's witness to his *exousia*, his divine legitimacy as God's Son and servant.⁵⁵

In Jewish literature prior to the NT, *exousia*, or its Hebrew equivalents *māšal* and *šalat*, most frequently characterize supernatural powers and authorities, both divine and demonic. Its single temporal reference, particularly in the LXX, is to kings, who were believed to rule at the behest of supernatural powers. Along with the other evangelists, Mark appropriates this term to describe the magisterial uniqueness and idiosyncrasy of Jesus. In his assault on the demonic, forgiveness of sins, supremacy over Torah and temple, speech about God as Father, and grounding pronouncements about matters in which God is sovereign in his own authority, Jesus exercises an authority that is God's prerogative. This is the more remarkable because Jesus "had no formal or official basis for his own authority."⁵⁶ Coming from

⁵⁵ "Did Jesus know that he had an identity which his followers later came to understand in terms of his being God?" asks R. Brown. "If he was God (and most Christians do agree on that), did he know who he was? I think the simplest answer to that is yes. Obviously there is no way of proving an affirmative answer because we do not have material describing all his life. Yet in the Gospel material given to us Jesus is always shown as being aware of a particular relationship with God that enables him to speak with awesome authority. There is never a scene in the Gospel portrait where he discovers something about himself that he did not know before. I realize that what I am saying runs against some popular views that would have Jesus discovering his identity at the baptism or some other time, but there is no evidence for such views. The baptismal scene is designed to tell the readers who Jesus is, not to tell him who he is" (*Responses to 101 Questions on the Bible* [New York: Paulist, 1990] 99). Again, "Jesus' claim to authority goes far beyond anything that can be adduced as prophetic prototypes or parallels from the field of the Old Testament and from the New Testament period. [Jesus] remains in the last resort incommensurable, and so basically confounds every attempt to fit him into the categories suggested by the phenomenology or sociology of religion" (M. Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers* [New York: Crossroad, 1981] 68–69); see also B. Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) ch. 5.

⁵⁶ J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1991) 1:349.

anyone else it would have signaled utter madness—as it did in the eyes of his enemies. What the devout Jew saw in Torah, or perhaps in the temple, the gospels see in Jesus, for Jesus replaces Torah and temple as the *locus Dei*.⁵⁷ When questioned about the source of his authority, Jesus points to his baptism by John, wherein the voice declaring Jesus Son of God and the Spirit empowering him as servant of God confer on him the *exousia* of God.

Thus in the gospel of Mark, as in John, Jesus appears as God incarnate in his bearing, speech and activity.⁵⁸ This astonishes, baffles, and even offends his contemporaries, from his closest circles outward. The religious leaders in particular regard his laying claim to a realm that belonged properly to God as the gravest possible trespass. Jesus gives the distinct impression, however, that he is not a trespasser but is entering into his rightful property.

⁵⁷ See R. Riesner, *Jesus als Lehrer Eine Untersuchung zum Ursprung der Evangelien Überlieferung* (WUNT 2/7, Tübingen J. C. B. Mohr, 1981) 39, 303. According to M. Smith, *Tannaitic Parallels to the Gospels* (SBLMS 6, 1951), "Jesus appears in the Gospels in a number of places where the parallel passages of T(annaitic) L(iterature) have God or the Law" (p. 159).

⁵⁸ John, of course, expresses Jesus' identification with God more explicitly than does Mark, who prefers to make the correlation on an implicit level.