

Review Article

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The Markan Jesus

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The Identity of Jesus in Mark: An Essay on Narrative Christology (Studium Biblicum Franciscanum 49) by Jacob Chacko Naluparayil, Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2000 (pp. xviii + 636).

This is a revised version of the doctoral dissertation defended by Dr. Jacob Chacko Naluparayil in 1999 at Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Jerusalem. The book, written in clear, articulate and almost flawless English, engages the reader to follow the progression of thought with ease, to understand the logic of the argumentation with clarity and to evaluate various views on different points and subtle nuances mentioned therein with proper discretion and critical acumen. The concluding summaries provided at the end of each section and of every chapter will enable the reader to recapitulate the often intricate and at times extensive argumentation in proper perspective.

A perusal of the brief introduction (pp. xvii-xviii), conclusion of part one (pp. 285-87) as well as of part two (pp. 550-52) and the general conclusion (pp. 553-5 will 6) undoubtedly ably equip one to comprehend the main content of the work and its primary thrust.

This scholarly study, neatly divided into two almost equal parts (pp. 1-287 and 289-

552) and each part containing three chapters, is the end-product of a systematically planned and meticulously executed research containing overabundant (sometimes too lengthy) footnotes and an extensive bibliography (pp. 557-623) with a well-documented index of authors (pp. 625-36).

The study is an earnest attempt to answer a very pertinent and extremely significant question in Mk: Who is Jesus according to the Marcan Gospel? Naluparayil (= N.) commences his response in the first chapter by offering a historical survey of the key opinions on this question spanning over a period of one century: (1) the Messianic Secret as the clue to understand the Christological orientation of Mk proposed by W. Wrede in 1901 and its sequel in the following decades; (2) the Divine Man Christology of divergent strands in the middle of the 20th century; (3) The Son of God Christology and the Son of Man Christology beginning from the 70s; and (4) 'the Polar Christology' and 'the Integrative Christology' attempting to negotiate a balance between the Son of God Christology and the Son of Man Christology in the subsequent years. Of these four modes and shades of views, N. opines, the Son of God Christology and the Son of Man Christology are most prominent among the Marcan scholars at present.

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But why do committed, sincere scholars employing scientific methods propose such divergent, conflicting and even contrary hypotheses on the Marcan understanding of Jesus? It is, N. affirms, “due to two fundamental factors: (1) dissimilar use of the text by its separation between the traditional sources and the redactional elements, (2) defect of the tools, viz., of methodologies being applied for the purpose” (p. 3).

To overcome these two defects and to ease a way out of the impasse in which biblical scholars on Marcan Christology find themselves N. undertakes the present research. He holds that Mk did make use of sources, namely, Q and Pre-Markan Collections (the subject of inquiry in chs. two and three) and he is convinced that the proper methodology for such a research would not be redaction criticism, the last phase of historical criticism (a diachronic method) but narrative criticism, the most popular synchronic method. Of various theorists of narrative criticism he opts basically for the views of S. Chatman (his *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, London: Cornell University, 1978) and he also integrates some of the insights of B. Uspensky's *A Poetics of Composition: The Structure of the Artistic Text and Typology of a Compositional Form*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973. He applies this method to Mk in the second part of his work (chs. four, five and six).

In the second chapter N. investigates the identity of Jesus in 12 ‘overlap’ passages of Mk and Q. This investigation leads him to the following conclusions. (1) Mk shares with Q “the two characteristics of the Christological designation: the Son of Man as standing for the divine person present in Jesus and other Christological titles playing a qualifying role to the divine person” (p. 162). (2) Mk “makes a unique contribution

by bringing into the central stage ‘the Son of Man’s destiny of suffering, death, and resurrection’ and using it to interpret and to give content to all other important Christological titles,” (p. 163) and, secondly, Mk also affirms “that the Son of Man is the Messiah” (ibid.).

In the third chapter the attention is focused on the identity of Jesus in Mk and in the Pre-Markan Collections. N. locates eight pre-Markan units in Mk, spread out from the beginning to the end of the Gospel. This inquiry enables him to affirm the following. (1) ‘The Son of Man’ functions in the pre-Markan collections as “a unique and exclusive self-designation for Jesus and it refers to the three dimensions of his personality: his divine prerogative on earth (2:28), his suffering and death (14:21, 41, 62), and his eschatological role as the Judge and Saviour (13:26; 14:62)” (p. 278). (2) “The prominent Christological titles that are categorically accepted by Jesus and used by others include ‘the Christ’ and ‘the Son of God’ and they function as qualifying titles to the divine person designated by the name ‘the Son of Man’” (p. 281). (3) And as far as Mk is concerned, he not only preserves faithfully but also reinforces deliberately the traditional pattern of the pre-Markan collections “with regard to the use of both the self-designation ‘the Son of Man’ and the Christological titles ‘the Christ’ and ‘the Son of God’”. This results in the virtual subordination of all other Christologies to the Son of Man Christology” (p. 282).

Having established the significance and function of ‘the Son of Man’ in Q as well as in the pre-Markan collections and having pointed out its specific characteristics in Mk, N. in the second part of his study applies the three typical features of narrative criticism, namely, plot (ch. four), point of view (ch. five), and characterization (ch. six) to Mk.

The Marcan plot is the ‘good news’ (*euangelion*) and it is explicitly articulated by the narrator at the very outset of his work: “the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mk 1:1). Following the paradigm of narrative criticism, this plot is developed in four successive steps: ‘introduction’ (1:14-8:26), ‘movement’ (8:27-10:52), ‘climax’ (11:1-15:41) and ‘denouement’ (15:42-16:8). Mk 1:2-13, according to N., “introduces and designates the content of 1:14-16:8” (p. 303).

The Marcan plot is developed in the following manner. The ‘introduction’ (1:14-8:26) deals with the reign of God ushered in through the person and ministry of Jesus the Son of Man. The second step, the ‘movement’ (8:27-10:52), focuses on the divine destiny of suffering and death — ‘the way’ of the Son of Man and discipleship. In the third step, the ‘climax’ (11:1-15:41), the Son claiming his heritage and identity is brought to death. And, finally, in the ‘denouement’ (15:42-16:8) the ultimate failure of discipleship and the hope of the resurrected Jesus. Thus, according to N., each part focuses on the Son of Man. Studying each stage of the plot from three perspectives, namely, setting, principal event, and the narrative scope, N. points out how the plot is systematically developed and how it is “structured with the prospect of transforming the reader [= the implied reader] into an ideal disciple and the messenger of the good news” (p. 429).

In the fifth chapter N. studies Mk from the angle of point of view. In his study he uses it in the ideological sense to mean the evaluative viewpoint. Evaluative viewpoint is communicated through three media, namely, speech acts, internal analysis and speech characteristics. These three media are applied to the five characters of Mk: (1) the narrator, (2) God, (3) Jesus, (4) the disciples of Jesus, and (5) the Jewish leaders. By analyzing these five characters

from two planes, that is, the identity plane (= Who is Jesus?) and the ideological plane (= the evaluative viewpoint), N. affirms that “the correct viewpoint of the narrative is designated as ‘thinking the things of God’ which is epitomized in the person of Jesus the Son of Man” (p. 515). God, Jesus, and the narrator are the proponents of this viewpoint. In contrast, the viewpoint of the disciples and of the Jewish leaders is ‘thinking the things of humans’. The viewpoint of the implied reader converges with that of Jesus. He is solicited to practise Jesus’ viewpoint “whose personified form is the Son of Man, that has been implanted in him in the course of reading the narrative, viz., to follow ‘the way of the Son of Man’” (p. 517).

In the sixth and final chapter N. affirms that Jesus is the protagonist in Mk. This is established from three perspectives: (1) examining the traits of Jesus from the views of other characters; (2) traits emerging from what Jesus does and says; and (3) focusing on his dominant traits and designations. Based on these threefold converging narrative features N. upholds that “‘the Son of Man’ operates as the name of the divine person present in Jesus of Nazareth” (p. 554)

The work of N. offers many valuable and significant contributions. In addition to what is already stated in paragraphs 1-3, the following are most noteworthy. (1) The question of the literary and theological structure of Mk has elicited extremely variant and even contrary responses from scholars, ranging from utter silence, systematic and cynical scepticism to constructive proposals for the structure (using mainly redaction criticism). Employing narrative criticism N. has proposed basically the same structure for Mk whereby the value of the Gospel is enhanced. Moreover, this also discloses how narrative criticism at the synchronic level

can supplement redaction criticism at the diachronic level. (2) An enthused and committed reader of Mk experiences 'an inner dialogue and urge' within him/herself to understand Jesus better and to follow him faithfully. This 'inner dialogue and urge' finds theretical support in N.'s work. (3) Many comment that Mk has portrayed a pessimistic, even scandalous portrait of the disciples. The study of N. sheds light on this issue: it is primarily a literary foil so that the implied reader affectively and effectively responds to the viewpoint and value-system of Jesus, the protagonist. (4) 'The Gospel of Mark ends abruptly' is an oft-repeated refrain. The work of N. clarifies that although in 'the narrtive time' the predctions of Jesus in 14:28 and 16:7 do not find fulfilment, they are indeed fulfilled in 'the story time' (cf. 13:9-13).

The main weakness of the work is rooted in its methodology, viz., narrative criticism presupposes totally free literary composition of the literary work as in the case of story, drama, fiction, etc. whereas the Gospels, though literary compositions, are not fully free compositions because they are founded on the Jesus' event and controlled by oral tradition and living faith. Therefore, using the parameters of story or drama in the interpretation of Mk is not fully correct.. This is precisely the reason why the apocryphal gospels wherein there is free rein to one's fertile imagination do not figure among the canonical Gospels. Moreover, by imposing the macro-structure of story or drama on Mk N. seems to have obviated (intentional!) some of the specific features of the Marcan text. For instance, Mk 7:24-8:9 obviously has a Gentile orientation — a perspective not considered in the work. Likewise, the texts on John the Baptist (1:2-8, 14a; 6:14-29; 9:11-13; 11:27-33) function as a key to unlock the mystery of Jesus' person and the nature of his ministry but this viewpoint does not figure in the book at all. The plot of the

narrator is indeed "the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mk 1:1) which is developed in 1:14-16:8 but its *beginning occurs* in the ministry of John the Baptist (note the syntax of the Greek text in Mk 1:1-4) and so Mk 1:1-13 has a specific meaning and significant function in introducing Jesus, the Messiah, whose person and ministry are narrated in 1:14-16:8.

Another methodological flaw is the claim of Mk's dependency on Q — an extremely conjectural view; and the author's postulate on the nature and function of the pre-Markan collections is equally tenuous.

N.'s oft-repeated affirmation, "the Son of Man is (stands for) the divine person present in Jesus," is very puzzling. To begin with, there is no common consensus among the NT scholars with regard to the origin, nature and function of 'the son of man'. What is indeed clear is that 'the son of man' occurs invariably in the Gospels and it is found exclusively on the lips of Jesus except four instances in the rest of the NT (Acts 7:56; Heb 2:5; Rev 1:13; 14:14). Even if it is used by Jesus as a self-designation it does not necessarily imply his divinity.

In his work N. tries to answer the question: Who is Jesus according to Mk? This question calls for an answer from the perspective of faith, that is, a theological answer. Such an answer is found in the very title of the Gospel (1:1) — confessed in the two narrative peaks of the Gospel: Jesus is the Christ (8:29) and Jesus is the Son of God (15:39). There is a steady progression in understanding the content and significance of these titles: Christ and Son of God. However, the full disclosure of Jesus' person and mission can occur only in the light of the Resurrection of Jesus (9:9). The narrator invites the reader (the actual reader as well as the implied reader) to understand the person and mission of Jesus, to believe in him (1:15) and to follow him with

authentic commitment and genuine dedication (8:34-38; 10:35-45). The method for such a response from the faith perspective would be a healthy fusion of redaction criticism and narrative criticism.

The work of N. is, on the whole, a good contribution to the understanding of Mk. Persons and institutions engaged in the theological formation of Christian leaders would enhance their knowledge of Mk by reading N.'s book.

Book Review

Dialogue & Liberation: Indian Theology between the Local and the Global By Thomas Kochuthara, New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 2000. Pp.384. Rs.550. ISBN 81-85574-45-6

Thomas Kochuthara, Professor of Systematic Theology at Oriens Theological College, Shillong, offers us a masterly synthesis of Christian theologies that we come across today. A major argument of the book is that the whole spectrum of theologies in the world can be grouped in to three categories, based on the aspect most emphasized in them: theologies of knowledge, justice and worship.

In the first part of the book we have the theologies of knowledge as represented by the transcendental theologies of Lonergan and Rahner, the process theology, the evolutionary perspective of Teilhard de Chardin and the political theologies of Metz and Moltmann. The second part presents theology of justice that has its goal the promotion and establishment of justice. The various shades of liberation theology are described in this section. Notable lapses are the Feminist theologies and the Minjung theology. The third part of the book describes the Eastern Theologies under the umbrella of worship. It contains also a

description of the St. Thomas Christians of Kerala, focusing on the Syro-Malabar Church. The last chapter, titled 'Dialogue & Worship' recaptures many of the earlier ideas along with a description of the impact of Globalization on theology.

Through the three categories the author marshals most of the world's leading theologians and schools of theology. The presentation is descriptive and tends to be shallow. Yet students of theology will find the book a very useful tool to be acquainted with these theologies.

The author's major contention is that the past initiatives in Interreligious Dialogue in India are preoccupied with knowledge and justice, which led to their failure. Hence the situation must be rectified by the emphasis on worship, the rallying point of communion for the followers of other religions as well as the core of the Eastern Tradition. However the book does not elaborate the theological developments in Interreligious Dialogue. A critical reader may miss the rich texture of current theological discussions in India, centred on Interreligious Dialogue and the understanding of the mystery of Jesus Christ in the context of religious pluralism. All readers may not share the view that Western theologies are only knowledge oriented or that Interreligious dialogue did not pay attention to worship. Mystics like Thomas Merton and Bede Griffiths have emphasized how contemplation is the highest and best form of Interreligious Dialogue.

Except for the sexist language the book is well written and reader-friendly. Some of the assertions like the one on page 213 that the ecumenism with the Protestant churches has led to the secularization of the Catholic Church are questionable. This does not diminish the significance of the book which is a timely contribution.

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