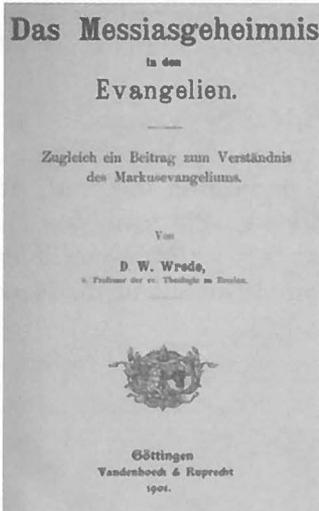


The Messianic Secret in Wrede versus The Messianic Secret in Mark



RONALD V. HUGGINS
Associate Professor
NT and Greek
Midwestern Baptist
Theological Seminary
Kansas City, MO 64118
rhuggins@mbts.edu

INTRODUCTION

The term “Messianic Secret” refers to a tremendously influential idea first floated by the German theologian William Wrede (*VRAY-duh*) more than a century ago in his book *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien* (1901), which was subsequently published in English in 1971 under the title *The Messianic Secret*.¹ Wrede argued that Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah during his lifetime, but that his disciples, after having come to believe in his messiahship after his death, had to invent an explanation as to why he never said so during his life. The explanation they came up with, according to Wrede, was that Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah *in public* during his life, but that he did tell his inner circle of disciples *in private*. According to Wrede, then, the disciples, motivated by their faith in Jesus, lied.

¹ William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret* (trans. J. C. G. Greig; Cambridge: James Clarke, 1971).

Wrede describes this after-the-fact-conjured-up-idea of the Messianic Secret in the following terms: “*during his earthly life Jesus’ messiahship is absolutely a secret and is supposed to be such; no one apart from the confidants of Jesus is supposed to learn about it; with the resurrection, however, its disclosure ensues,*” and then Wrede goes on to say more specifically in reference to the Gospel of Mark: “*This is in fact the crucial idea, the underlying point of Mark’s entire approach.*”²

One may of course ask how, if the inner circle of disciples claimed Jesus told them privately that he was the Messiah, Wrede, who was not present during any of the private conversations between Jesus and his disciples, knew for a fact that he did not? One of the things we need to understand from the beginning of our discussion is that Wrede, as one of the company of nineteenth-century, so-called “liberal-lives-of-Jesus” authors, was faced with the particular problem of trying to reinvent Jesus in such a way as to render him acceptable and comprehensible from the perspective of a rationalistic, anti-supernatural world view. This meant that Wrede *could not* accept the evidence of the Gospels, in any sense, at face value, because, from such a perspective, demons don’t exist, miracles don’t happen, and people don’t prophetically predict future events at all, never mind the details of their own future deaths and resurrections. Wrede was faced in other words with the task of coming up with an explanation of Jesus that could be based on the evidence only in so far as the evidence could be credited in view of the assumptions of a wholly rationalistic world view. And we needn’t fault him on one level for attempting it. In the past, for example, I have had occasion to write scholarly articles on Joseph Smith Jr, the founder of Mormonism. Although I do not accept Wrede’s out-of-hand, across-the-board dismissal of the miraculous, I have never felt in any way required to blindly accept any and every miraculous claim I happen to encounter. So, in the course of writing history relating to Joseph Smith Jr, I occasionally encountered claims of the miraculous, but I also very often found what seemed to me at least to be compelling reasons to ultimately regard them as better explained by wholly natural causes. Very often, for example, I would find earlier non-supernatural accounts of the same incidents to which new or different miraculous features were later artificially attached.³ Nor are my

² Ibid., 68 (italic orig.).

³ See esp., Ronald V. Huggins, “From Captain Kidd’s Treasure Ghost to the Angel Moroni: Changing *Dramatis Personae* in Early Mormonism,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 36.4 (2003): 17-42; but also “‘Without a Cause’ and ‘Ships of Tarshish’: A Possible Contemporary Source for Two Unexplained Readings from Joseph Smith.” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 36.1

doubts concerning miraculous claims limited to those made outside the Christian tradition. I am, for example, similarly dubious about the famous Bible translator J. B. Phillips's claim to have been visited by C. S. Lewis a few days *after* Lewis's death.⁴ I had, given Phillips's reputation, been inclined to accept the story when I first read it in his book *Ring of Truth: A Translator's Testimony* (1967), but later, when certain facts relating to Phillips's very real and ongoing mental struggles came to my attention, it provided a context which rendered the story of Lewis's post-mortem visit more doubtful.⁵ Or again in fairness it is not simply the miraculous reports made by Christians that I am ultimately willing to entertain. That the extraordinary visual rainbow phenomenon (not a normal rainbow, mind, but a rainbow circling the sun and clinging to nearby clouds) associated with the cremation of the Tibetan Buddhist teacher Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche actually occurred seems undeniable. Biblical scholars employ a criterion for determining authenticity known as Multiple Attestation: if an idea, a saying, or an event is attested in a number of independent witnesses it is more likely to be authentic, historical, and so on. The rainbow phenomenon connected with Trungpa's cremation was attested by a multitude of witnesses, some friendly, some not.⁶ But whether or not it was truly supernatural in origin, as his followers claim, is something that for me remains at least

(2003): 157-79; and "Joseph Smith and the First Verse of the Bible," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46.1 (2003): 29-52.

⁴ J. B. Phillips, *Ring of Truth: A Translator's Testimony* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1967), 89: "A few days after his [C. S. Lewis's] death, while I was watching television, he 'appeared' sitting in a chair within a few feet of me, and spoke a few words which were particularly relevant to the difficult circumstances through which I was passing. He was ruddier in complexion than ever, grinning all over his face and, as the old-fashioned saying has it, positively glowing with health."

⁵ In particular after having read the biography by his wife Vera Phillips, along with Edwin Robertson, entitled, *J. B. Phillips: The Wounded Healer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985).

⁶ See, e.g., Stephen T. Butterfield, *The Double Mirror: A Sceptical Journey into Buddhist Tantra* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1994), 152; Jeremy Hayward, *Warrior-King of Shambhala: Remembering Chogyam Trungpa* (Boston, MA: Wisdom, 2008): 373; Diana J. Mukpo (with Carolyn Rose Giaman), *Dragon Thunder: My Life with Chögyam Trungpa* (Boston, MA: Shambala, 2006), 392. Allen Ginsberg, "On Cremation of Chogyam Trungpa, Vidyadhara" *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* (Fall 2003): 73. The reader may observe the phenomenon themselves by going to Youtube and watching the video called "Cremation of Chogyam Trungpa," keeping in mind, of course, the ease with which movies can be doctored.

possible. Yet even supposing the phenomenon was in some sense supernaturally based, I would hardly be ready to automatically grant that it had its origin in God, since, from the perspective of the Biblical world view, the possibility of a demonic source would more immediately recommend itself. In any case, if I were to take it upon myself to write a book against such modern miracles as I have described, a debt to fairness would really require me to come up with an alternative explanation, that was at least plausible. Wrede too, if he wishes to dismiss Mark's account of Jesus, owes a debt to fairness as well. Even granting that he might be operating in good faith doubting the possibility of miracles and therefore seeking some other explanation for the phenomena of Mark, does the explanation he provides fulfill his debt to fairness? Does his Messianic Secret idea have sufficient explanatory power to provide an alternative explanation that is at least coherent and plausible? It is my contention here that it is precisely at this point that Wrede's concept fails. Before we proceed further we need to remember just what would have to be true about Mark's narrative in order for Wrede's Messianic Secret idea to be valid: Mark could not admit that *anyone* besides the inner circle of Jesus's disciples *at any time* had *any inkling* that Jesus was putting himself forth as the Messiah. If, in the course of Mark's narrative, the cat of a Messianic Jesus got out of the bag in a significant way even once, Wrede's thesis fails. With that in mind let's begin.

COMING TO TERMS WITH TITLES IN MARK

Jesus is called a number of things in Mark, including crazy, by his mother and brothers (Mark 3:21), and demon possessed, by some Scribes come down from Jerusalem (Mark 3:22). To the latter, Jesus responds that in saying such a thing those Scribes were coming dangerously close to committing an "eternal sin," the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. The answer itself tells us something about who the Jesus of Mark thinks he is. What sort of man would, could, issue such a warning? In any case in the Markan narrative we find as well other titles associated with Jesus, and in the unfolding of that narrative we see these titles coalescing in such a way as to be identified one with another.

In his very first verse, Mark informs us as his readers who Jesus is in terms that even the players in the story only come to learn in time: "The

beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”⁷ By appending “Christ,” to the name Jesus, Mark is letting us know, in no uncertain terms, that Jesus *is* the Messiah. He also tells us that he is the “Son of God.” Mark does not reveal at this point whether “Christ” and “Son of God” are two ways of saying the same thing, or two different titles. He does not tell us, in other words, whether “Son of God” is a Messianic title. But he will definitely do so before he is finished. In any case the latter title “Son of God,” is confirmed in a positive sense by Mark a few verses later when God the Father’s voice at the Baptism declares from heaven to Jesus: “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Mk 1:11). Mark gives us no inkling as to whether or not anyone else saw the dove or heard the voice, making it possible, supposing Son of God is going to be represented as a title synonymous with “Messiah,” that Wrede might still be able to say that the Messianic Secret is still intact at that point, by asserting that nobody else heard the voice. The same can be said later on, on the mount of the transfiguration, where it is only Jesus’s most intimate inner circle, Peter, James, and John, who hear the voice of God once again declaring from heaven that Jesus is his beloved Son (Mk 9:7). But then, at a number of points as, throughout the rest of Mark’s Gospel, we have Jesus repeatedly telling demons to be quiet because “they knew him.” i.e., they knew who he was (1:34). Mark reports that Jesus’ attempt to silence them wasn’t altogether successful, that some of the demons got out what they wanted to say, sometimes in very public places. So in the very first chapter a man with an unclean spirit cries out in the Capernaum synagogue: “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” (1:24). Then again in chapter 3 Mark goes so far as to say that “Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, ‘You are the Son of God!’” This was not in other words an isolated event. And then finally there is the incident where the Legion in the Decapolis, “shouted at the top of his voice, ‘What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?’” (Mk 5:7). So, let us be very clear here. The title Son of God in these contexts implies that Jesus is something more than human, he is at the very least also some sort of divine, heavenly figure, acknowledged by God and instantly recognized and feared by the demons. But that being said, does Mark see the title “Son of God,” as also Messianic? If he does, then Wrede’s theory

⁷ The textual variants relating to the words “Son of God” in this verse are not, in my view, ultimately significant enough to cast doubt on the presence of the title in the original.

doesn't work since the application of the title to Jesus is made far too openly and often. So then, is "Son of God" a Messianic title for Mark? The answer: "Yes it is." We see the two titles merged in the question the High Priest puts to Jesus at his trial: "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" (Mk 14:61). From the perspective of Mark's literary presentation, then, the title "Son of God," paralleled that of "Messiah," or "Christ." Had Mark been engaging in an attempt to explain why Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah, he would not have represented the High Priest as more or less equating the terms, after having had the title "Son of God," slip out so often in the public declarations of the demons.

JESUS IS THE MESSIAH

But what is even more significant is that the High Priest's question was not restricted to whether Jesus was the Son of God. He also asks Jesus point blank if he was the Messiah. Jesus's response is definitive, emphatic: "I am" (*egō eimi*).⁸ Now if Mark is giving us to understand that the High Priest, in front of the whole Sanhedrin, asks Jesus directly whether he is the Messiah and Jesus answers the question emphatically in the affirmative, how on earth could anyone suppose such a scene would be invented by someone trying to cover up the fact that Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah?

Quite the contrary, what Mark is reporting is Jesus affirming his Messiahship in the worst possible context in terms of ease of refutation. How easy would it have been for Jewish readers of Mark, who were antagonistic to the early Christian movement, to simply go and ask Jewish leaders with long memories, who perhaps had even had Jesus up before them, whether Jesus had indeed made such an affirmation? Despite many and ingenious attempts by a number of scholars to distance Mark from the historical events he reports, really no one can deny that his Gospel was written within living memory of those events.⁹ If Mark was really engaged in trying to conceal the fact that Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah, he would never have had Jesus answer the question so inconspicuously. He could have easily gone with something more like what Matthew has at the same point in

⁸ Interestingly, in this context Mark's version of Jesus' answer is more direct than the parallel answers in the same context in Matthew's and Luke's Gospels.

⁹ More conservative scholars place the date of Mark's composition as early as 50 AD and more liberal scholars between 65 and just after 70 AD.

his Gospel. There Jesus answers the High Priest with the words: "You said [it]" (Matt 26:64). But Mark doesn't. Mark has Jesus come right out with an affirmative answer.¹⁰ Or does he?

Few scholars doubt that *egō eimi* at Mark 14:62 represents a strong affirmative answer to the High Priest's question. There is at least one, however, who attempted to insert room for doubt there in such a torturously ingenious manner that one cannot help but admire his sheer audacity. I refer to Marcus Borg's attempt to suggest that Jesus did not answer "I am," but "am I?" Writes Borg: "the Greek behind the English 'I am' is ambiguous. It can be translated either as an affirmation ('I am') or as an interrogative ('Am I?')." ¹¹ The great irony in Borg's attempt to create an interval of ambiguity in the response of Jesus at this point is that it ultimately only serves to facilitate an even more devastating critique of Wrede's Messianic Secret idea than would have otherwise been possible. Let me explain.

First of all, there actually is a Messianic Secret of a sort going on in Mark, but nothing of the kind Wrede envisages. Jesus actually doesn't go around saying, "Hey guys, look at me, I'm the Messiah!" So even in the case of Peter's great confession, Jesus does not declare to his disciples that he is the Messiah, rather he asks them who *they* say he is, and it is Peter who steps up and answers, "you are the Messiah" (Mk 8:29), after which it says that Jesus "sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him" (vs. 30).

But if the whole reason the Early Church invented the idea that Jesus only told his disciples he was the Messiah in secret was cover for the fact that nobody outside the circle of the disciples ever heard Jesus say it, why does Mark have him *not* declare himself Messiah when he is discoursing privately with the disciples, but then come out right in the open and admit it in front of all the Jewish leaders? If the dialogue of Mark 8 was an invention put back onto Jesus's lips long after the fact, then why not just have Jesus openly proclaim himself the Messiah there? If Wrede was right on this point we should have expected Jesus to be more explicit in declaring his Messiahship to his disciples in his private discourses. Wrede's explanation fails to account for the reason behind Jesus's hesitance to openly declare himself to be the Messiah,

¹⁰ See the discussion of the textual variant at this point in Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2007), 696.

¹¹ Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus, Uncovering the Life, Teachings and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 263. See also, Marcus J. Borg & John Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week: A Day-by-Day Account of Jesus's Final Week in Jerusalem* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 130-31.

even when speaking with his disciples in private. Because he approaches Mark on the front end by attempting to impose a theory upon his gospel that is really foreign to it, Wrede ends by becoming insensitive to Mark's own way of presenting his narrative of the life of Jesus. In fact, the way Mark actually unfolds his story the clear message might well seem to be just the opposite of what Wrede had asserted about it. Starting from where Wrede does, he might have proposed a more plausible alternative reading that went like this: In spite of the fact that Jesus never once in the whole of Mark's Gospel actually on his own initiative declares himself to be the Messiah,¹² by the end of the book, that is what literally everybody has come to believe he is claiming. That's right: Mark's use of the Messianic Secret motif would actually better serve the exact opposite historical situation from the one Wrede was proposing. Namely, it could be used to make the case for a situation in which even though absolutely everybody came to understand that Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah, he never actually did. It would have been, in other words, a massive misunderstanding on the part of everyone, including his inner circle of disciples. There would, on this reading, be far less evidence Wrede would need to dismiss than on his theory. To make this theory work Wrede would have simply needed to (1) dismiss Peter's confession as a misunderstanding on Peter's and the other disciples' part as to what Jesus meant when he responded by commanding his disciples not to tell anyone, (2) insist that the voice at the Baptism only identified Jesus as God's beloved son, but not as the Messiah, and (3) claim that the first line of Mark, where Jesus is called Christ, was a later, non-Markan interpolation. After that he would have found little difficulty in claiming that Mark was actually written to establish that Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah at all, that the Evangelist's goal had actually been to *prove* what Wrede had originally accused him of trying to *conceal*. And this is where the irony comes into Marcus Borg's attempt to soften Jesus answer to the High Priest. If Jesus never did affirm there that he was the Messiah, but rather only said something along the lines of "Gee, do you think I might be?" then the reaction that follows immediately, the High Priest's tearing his robe, the charge that Jesus had spoken blasphemy, and that he was therefore deserving of death,

¹² In Mark 9:41 Jesus says to his disciples: "For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward." It is quite clear that for Mark the word "Christ" in "bear the name of Christ," referred to Jesus. Even so it may be thought not to amount to an unambiguous claim on the part of Jesus to the title, even though it seems quite clear he was speaking of himself.

would have been a total farce based on an enormous misunderstanding. If we take Borg's suggestion seriously it leads us to the following scenario: Jesus makes no declaration concerning himself there at all. The High Priest mistakenly thinks he did and overreacts in such a dramatic way that it shapes everything that follows. Hence, when Jesus is brought before Pilate, the main question he is interrogated about is, once again, whether he is the King of the Jews, the Messiah (Mk 15:2). When Pilate asks the people to choose between Jesus and Barabbas, he again refers to the Messianic claim in the hearing of the gathered crowd: "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" (15:9). The same theme is then carried even further by Mark when he describes the soldiers putting a robe of imperial purple on Jesus, twisting a crown of thorns for him, and bowing down in mock homage, saying 'Hail, King of the Jews!' (15:18). Jesus is then crucified as a Messianic pretender as confirmed in Mark by what was written on the *titulus*, the announcement of the charge affixed to the cross: "The inscription of the charge against him," writes Mark, "read, 'The King of the Jews'" (Mk 15:25). And then finally, as if to leave his readers in no doubt that when the Jewish leaders accused Jesus of claiming to be the King of the Jews, they meant that he was claiming to be the Messiah, Mark has the Chief Priests and Scribes mock Jesus in a way that clearly identified the two: "Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe" (Mk 15:32). So there we have it, the clear presentation of Mark is that by the time Jesus is crucified, pretty much everybody thought he'd claimed he was the Messiah.

WREDE COMES BACK WITH EXCUSES

So, then, given the fact that the whole narrative flow of Mark runs directly against the grain of the reading Wrede wants to impose upon him, how did Wrede himself dispense with the evidence standing so prominently against his theory? Simple. He asserted that it was not he but Mark who was totally confused. As we have already seen, Wrede claims that the Messianic Secret, as he conceives of it, represented "*the crucial idea, the underlying point of Mark's entire approach,*"¹³ but the implausibility of Wrede's own theory forces him to do a considerable amount of back-peddling to try and make the statement stick. By claiming that Mark himself is not the inventor of the Messianic Secret

¹³ Wrede, *Messianic Secret*, 68 (italic orig.).

idea,¹⁴ Wrede is able to win a little wiggle room for accusing Mark of failing to incorporate the idea in a consistent manner: “The impression,” writes Wrede, “that Mark has an internally consistent and historically comprehensible overall picture will stand examination only as long as we ignore items of evidence pointing in other directions.”¹⁵ This makes it possible for Wrede to declare further that “it is clear that in Mark a lot of things have to be read between the lines if we want to establish that in it there is a really comprehensible development.”¹⁶ Such statements are of course, nothing but special pleading arguments to conceal the weaknesses of Wrede’s own theory, but read between the lines Wrede certainly does. We see this with particular clarity in his treatment of Jesus’s answer to the High Priest concerning the coming of the Son of Man. It will be remembered that immediately after Jesus answered the High Priest’s question about his being the Messiah in the affirmative (*egō eimi*), he went on to say: “‘you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,’ and ‘coming with the clouds of heaven’” (14:62). It is in response to this latter statement that Wrede writes:

The tacit or explicit assumption behind this is that if the blasphemy lay in the pretension to divine glory and divine nature, Jesus like the high priest would have been taking the title “Son of God” to have a dogmatic, metaphysical sense and this is historically an impossibility...Now if this idea of the Son of God is present in Mark anyway and is therefore to be expected here too, we can no longer doubt that he is putting the term into the high priest’s mouth with the sense it has for the evangelist’s own Christian faith.¹⁷

Wrede comes near touching on a point here that many have noticed, namely, why should it be considered blasphemy for Jesus to admit he was the Messiah, causing the High Priest to react by tearing his robes? Should we not then look to the Son of Man statement that immediately follows for the cause of offense? Yet Jesus himself had dealt with precisely the issue of the divine status of the Messiah in his public teaching in the Temple shortly before:

¹⁴ Ibid., 145, 210.

¹⁵ Ibid., 14.

¹⁶ Ibid., 15.

¹⁷ Ibid., 74-75.

How can the scribes say that the Messiah is the son of David? David himself, by the Holy Spirit, declared, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.' David himself calls him Lord; so how can he be his son?" (Mark 12:35-37)

If the High Priest understood that Jesus was in fact melding the traditional figure of the Messiah with some sort of divine heavenly figure, and understood him to be identifying that figure with himself, there is really little doubt why he would regard it as blasphemy. This kind of strong reaction against the identification of Jesus with the heavenly Son of Man is also attested in the account of the stoning of Stephen when the Jewish leaders reacted to Stephen saying "Look...I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" with a similar response: "they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him" (Acts 7:57).

THE REAL PURPOSE OF MARK'S MESSIANIC SECRET?

One explanation which indeed flows more naturally from the evidence than Wrede's is that Jesus avoided the title Messiah because, at the time, it was too narrowly defined for him to squeeze the reality of what his coming really represented into it. So instead we see him adopting from the beginning of Mark's Gospel a term to describe himself that was useful precisely because it was ambiguous: "Son of Man." On the one hand, it has a very generic sense: a human being, a man, a son of man. On the other it has eschatological overtones deeply rooted in the Old Testament in its use in Daniel 7:13 and 8:17, as well as in the name God repeatedly calls the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek 2:1,3,6,8, et passim). From the beginning of Mark's Gospel Jesus makes assertions about his authority that are so breathtaking that by the time the 3rd chapter of Mark begins, he has already been accused of blasphemy and plans are being made by the Pharisees along with the Herodians to put him out of the way (Mark 2:7 and 3:6). The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, no questions asked, no sacrifices required, just straight out upon his authoritative word alone (Mark 2:8), a prerogative normally (and properly) understood to belong only to God (Mark 2:7). The Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28). At the end of all things the Son of Man will come in the Father's glory with his angels (Mark 8:38, 13:16), and he shall rise from the dead (Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:33-34). And all this is because "the Son

of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). From the beginning Jesus further underscores his authority as the Son of Man with breathtaking statements about his own importance. He came to call sinners, not the righteous (Mark 2:17). It would be inappropriate for his disciples to fast alongside John the Baptist’s disciples and the Pharisees because they had the bridegroom (Jesus himself) with them (Mark 2:19). And besides, to try and squeeze what Jesus was all about into the older religious patterns practiced by John’s disciples and the Pharisees would be like trying to put new wine in old wineskins, or a new patch on an old garment (Mark 18:21-22). One of the most frightening instances in which Jesus stresses his importance is when he warns the Scribes that accusing him of doing his divine works by the power of the devil is tantamount to risking committing an eternal, unforgivable sin (Mark 2:28-29). Indeed the very idea that Jesus considered himself in a position to authoritatively declare in that context which blasphemies people can or cannot be forgiven of is so far beyond audacious we can well understand why his family concluded he had lost his mind (Mark 3:20).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we have shown how, on a number of levels, Wrede’s explanation of the Messianic Secret motif in Mark fails completely. The better approach is to read carefully through Mark on his own terms (something Wrede does not seem to have been able to do) and letting that form our ideas of how Mark understood the title “Messiah” to relate to Jesus. When we do this we find that Jesus is first and foremost presented as a divined figure, filled with the power of God to heal, cast out demons, perform terror-inspiring miracles, and that in that primary capacity he is also the long expected Messiah of Israel, but one that comes with higher and vastly more expansive plans than anyone at the time would have ever thought of when they used the term. He came first “to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). He will come again, at the end of all things, in his Father’s glory, with his holy angels to set up his throne (Mark 8:38, 13:16).