



UNDERSTANDING THE ANARTHROUS PREDICATE

ΥΙΟΣ ΘΕΟΥ 'SON OF GOD' IN MARK 15:39

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Abstract:

The meaning of the centurion's remark in Mark 15:39 at the events of Jesus' death on the cross remains hidden in the anarthrous predicate υἱός θεοῦ ἦν (*hyios theou ēn*). Understanding the phrase *hyios theou* is therefore the key to unravelling the meaning expressed by the statement. It is the *crux interpretum* of the text and in deed the essence of the crucifixion narrative in Mark. The phrase is traditionally translated as "the Son of God" to imply an acknowledgement by a Roman soldier of the unique messianic status of Jesus. The history of interpretations of this text equally reveals occasional scholarly doubts regarding the genuineness of the remark. This work sets out to interpret the anarthrous predicate with a view to shedding light on the meaning of the centurion's remark. It uses the historical-critical method of exegesis and concludes that the phrase is to be understood qualitatively as implying the definiteness of an arthrous predicate. In the context of this interpretation the work understands the remark of the centurion as implying especially for Mark and the markan audience a Christological representation of the nature and role of Jesus as the unique Son of God.

Keywords: centurion, confession of faith, gospel of Mark, Son of God

Introduction

The Gospel of Mark gives an account of the trial, crucifixion and death of Jesus in a dramatic style enriched by the intention to capture even the unwritten dimensions of the event. The account displays Mark's ironic intent at representing Jesus in his role and function as the Messiah. He uses the actors and speakers in the story to sometimes

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make in derogatory manners, declarations which to the markan audience are acceptable Christological representations of Jesus. Remarks that corroborate what the markan Christian community knows and wants to hear of Jesus. This interplay of crucifixion activities, audience reactions/commentaries and silence by non-followers and followers of Jesus reaches its climax in two directions. The audience reactions by non-followers culminate in the centurion's remark about Jesus as 'Son of God.' The climax of audience reactions by the public followers of Jesus is expressed in the silent observation at a distance by women who followed him from Galilee (Mark 15:40-41). There is also a reaction from an undeclared sympathiser to the cause of Jesus; a member of the council, Joseph of Arimathea who requests for the body of Jesus (Mark 15:43). This is opposed to the taunts on the part of the chief priests and the scribes in Mark 15:31-32. In these reactions are represented: the Jewish authorities, the Roman authorities, the Jewish society and the followers of Jesus. Mark underscores the fact that in the face of the event of the arrest, trial, crucifixion and death of Jesus, there is the need for an action in favour or against. It is an event whose consequences take participants beyond the borderline. One of such leaps beyond the borderline is the attribution of divinity to Jesus by the centurion in Mark 15:39: "truly this man was 'Son of God'".

The term 'centurion' is from the Latin *centurio* which means hundred; it was a title given to the leader of a group of one hundred soldiers, the smallest military unit of the Roman army. A centurion was generally a non-career soldier who rose by promotion through the ranks after approximately a period of fifteen to eighteen years. In some cases, however, some centurions got direct commission from civilian life or got promoted from the Praetorian Guard. They enjoyed greater respect during the time of Julius Caesar and were responsible for the efficiency of the army. The centurion in Mark 15:39 was most probably from one of the neighbouring nations under the Roman control; from these nations, auxiliary troops were often drawn for the services of the Prefect. He was responsible for the execution of the victims and is shown to have been keeping watch over the victims as they died. His declaration troubles biblical scholars especially because he belongs to the group of Gentiles who in the context of the crucifixion are prominent in the role of mocking the crucified Jesus. Is his statement therefore a confession of faith or a taunt? It is one of the rare occasions in the gospel of Mark in which the attribution of sonship of God to Jesus does not meet with the silence/secrecy-caveat.

Confession of faith is used here to imply that the expression by the centurion is an acknowledgment of Jesus as the Unique Son of God. The acknowledgment becomes in the context of the early Christian creed a belief on the part of the Gentile in Jesus as the Messiah or the Christ. The statement is therefore seen to denote his conversion to a followership of Christ. Taunt on the other hand denotes the fact that the statement

implies a mockery. A Roman Soldier in the context of the senselessness of the claims of Jesus and his followers ironically calls him Son of God at the very moment of his death to underscore in Jesus' death the failure of his claim to divinity. Determining which of these is the sense of the text is the motive of this work. The work takes a look at what the expression 'Son of God' entails for the Greco-Roman world of Jesus' time, its content in Judaism and in the New Testament. It highlights what the expression might mean for the Gentile from whose lips it came and what it could mean to a Jewish audience. It then undertakes a syntactical interpretation of the anarthrous predicate *hyios theou* in the Greek phrase ἀληθῶς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος υἱὸς θεοῦ ἦν (*alēthōs houtos ho anthrōpos hyios theou ēn*) in Mark 15:39. This is done with a view to arriving at an objective meaning of the phrase. The term anarthrous predicate refers to a predicate whose noun is not accompanied by a definite article. Arthrous predicate on the other hand is one with a definite article. In the sentence above *houtos ho anthrōpos* (this man) is the subject, *hyios theou* (Son of God) is the predicate without an article, and *ēn* (was) is the verb. The literal English translation of the phrase is "Truly this man was (a) Son of God". Grammatically, it is different from 'truly this man was the Son of God'. 'The Son of God' implies definiteness while 'Son of God' denotes indefiniteness.

The work concludes however that the absence of the definite article in the case of Mark 15:39 is due essentially to the Greek word order and therefore does not affect the definiteness of the affirmation. The phrase therefore implies 'the Son of God' in its unique and definite sense. This sense or meaning is a re-enforcement of the audience's understanding of Jesus as the unique Son of God and therefore Messiah. Mark has used the centurion's Hellenistic acknowledgement of Jesus' innocence for a more profound motive and agenda in his Gospel of depicting Jesus as the Son of God (Messiah).

The Title 'Son of God'

It was common in the Ancient Near East to address a king as 'Son of God' or even God. One of the five great names of the titulary chosen by Pharaoh was 'Horus'. The name represented the king as an earthly embodiment of the old falcon-god Horus who was the dynastic god of Egypt.ⁱⁱ The same claim to divinity was made by the Semitic ruler of Akkad and Israelite kings were equally called God (Ps 45:6). One of the five names of the one to sit on David's throne is *'el gibbôr* which means 'mighty God (Isa 9:6). Kings were also referred to as 'the Son of God'; it was a royal title. Thus, the Nathan prophecy of 2 Sam 7 describes a father-son relationship between God and the would-be Israelite-Judean king of the seed of David (v. 14; 1 Chr 17:13).

ⁱⁱ Alan H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar* 3rd Ed. (Oxford, Griffith Institute, 1957), 72.

Heavenly beings like angels are described in the Old Testament as sons of God (cf. Gen 6:2, Pss 29:1; 89:7; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). J. McKenzie attributes this usage to a primitive conception of heavenly beings as constituting a part of the divine and superhuman order of being.ⁱⁱⁱ Being the 'son of' makes one a member of that specie or family to which is applied the genitive; this was evident in common Hebrew idioms. The title is applied to Israel as a people in a covenant relationship with Yahweh (Ex 4:22; Deut 14:1; 32:19; Is 1:2; Hosea 2:1) to underscore its adoption by Yahweh. Later usage depicts a use of the title for devout individual Israelites (Ps 73:15; Wisdom 2:13). In non-Christian Jewish literature, it is used to describe the righteousness of people and of charismatic individuals. In Samaritanism Moses is described as the 'Son of the house of God.' In 4 Esdras the Messiah is referred to by God as 'my son' (7:28-29).

The term is used in a Hellenistic setting to denote demigods, heroes, kings and priests. In Hellenistic martyrologies torturers at an execution of victims of public condemnation are required to observe the manner in which their victims die. These torturers testify to the innocence of a victim by declaring the person a 'son of god'. It expresses especially for the heroes their innocence and exemplary character. In the Greco-Roman setting, gods were equally identified as sons of other gods; Apollon and Hermes were sons of Zeus. Heroes were called 'sons of God;' Dionysus was recognized from birth as divine and was said to attain with Heracles the rank of the immortal gods. Heracles was identified as the person who had to serve God and combat evil throughout life.

In the New Testament, the title denotes one called by God to accomplish a unique and important role in the history of salvation. In the context of the Easter resurrection the title 'Son of God' attains a new significance. It implies a recognition of the divinity of Jesus as the unique Son of God and the object of supreme form of worship and adoration. It was used by the primitive Church to express its faith in the unique character of Jesus as the unique son of the Father who is equal to the Father and realizes in his own person the sonship of Israel. This use implied a recourse to an already existing but inadequate terminology in the Old Testament and in the Hellenistic vocabulary and thought pattern.^{iv} *"It is more likely that an already extant designation for Jesus as Son of God from Old Testament Jewish tradition was amplified by Hellenistic components in which the divine origin of extraordinary persons played a role".^v*

ⁱⁱⁱ John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965), 830.

^{iv} G. T. Montague, "Son of God in the Bible", *New Catholic Encyclopedia* Vol. 13, (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America, 1967), 428-429.

^v Ferdinand Hahn, "υἱός (hyios)", *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* Vol. 3, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 383.

It was taken up by Christians and given a profound significance in which the exclusivity or uniqueness of Jesus' sonship of God was emphasized. As 'Son of God,' Jesus is not one of the sons of God like the kings or heroes represented in the Ancient Near East, the Old Testament or the Hellenistic literature, rather he is the unique and exclusive divine Son of God. It expresses the Easter and Pentecost faith at its developed form. Within this faith is contained the post-Easter recognition in the risen Christ, of the one who mediates God's fullness of salvation, and an anticipation of his eschatological function at the *parousia*. The title denotes the asserting by Christians of the true and unique identity of Jesus as divine. It expresses Jesus' relationship with God as Father; thus, as son he knows God in a way not known by any human. It implies the concept of knowledge arising from the relationship of son with the father (Matt 11:27) and from the concept of commissioning (Gal 4:4f). This uniqueness establishes the son's revelatory function; through it human beings are granted participation in Jesus' sonship and correlation.^{vi} Thus as son Jesus represents the Father to human beings and confers on them the adoption by the Father.

Syntactical Study of the Anarthrous Predicate υἱὸς θεοῦ *huios theou*

The anarthrous predicate υἱὸς θεοῦ in the phrase ἀληθῶς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος υἱὸς θεοῦ ἦν attracts attention and calls for explanation. Is it to be translated as 'Son of God', 'God's Son' or '(the) Son of God'? Particular to the sentence is the copulative verb at the end of the predicate. An understanding of this predicate determines the course of every interpretation given to the text. The translation would, strictly speaking and literally be 'a Son of God' or 'Son of God.' Is the centurion therefore saying 'truly this man was a Son of God'? In the rule of Greek syntax, predicate nouns are generally anarthrous; they take an article when they are intended as something specific or well known.^{vii} A definite article would imply emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual while the omission of the article would shift the emphasis only to the nature and quality of such a person. It is therefore the question of uniqueness or quality.

Philip Harner however, sustains that the categories of qualitiveness and definiteness are not mutually exclusive; it is always a delicate exegetical exercise on the part of the interpreter to take a decision on the emphasis intended by a particular Greek writer. The qualitative significance is often primarily expressed whenever an anarthrous predicate noun precedes the verb; it is intended to underscore the nature or character of the subject. Harner however, acknowledges that some connotation of

^{vi} Ferdinand Hahn, "υἱός (hyios)", *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* Vol. 3, 384.

^{vii} F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (trans. and ed. Robert W. Funk; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961), n. 273.

definiteness may also be implied.^{viii} He holds that while in John 1:1 the qualitative force of the anarthrous predicate *en archē ēn ho logos* is underscored over and against definiteness, in Mark 15:39 the qualitative force is primary but with the possibility of some connotation of definiteness.^{ix} In his explanation of Mark 15:39 Max Zerwick sustains that the definite article is not necessarily significant because the predicate is genitive.^x He cites his grammar of *Biblical Greek* in which it is sustained that along with proper names and prepositional phrases, nouns with a following genitive do not necessarily require an article.^{xi} The basis for the absence of the article for Zerwick is therefore because the predicate is genitive.

E. C. Colwell's rule which Zerwick himself has drawn attention to is more acceptable for an understanding of the passage. When a nominative predicate precedes the verb, it is syntactically applicable to have the predicate without a definite article in Greek without changing the uniqueness proper to the absent article. In other words, the article is implied.^{xii} Examples of this would be ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος (*en archē ēn ho logos*) in John 1:1 (In beginning was the word) and βασιλεύς εἰμι τῶν Ἰουδαίων (*basileus eimi tōn Ioudaiōn*) in John 19:21 (King I am, or I am (a) king, of the Jews). Both sentences have the predicates before the verbs. In John 1:1 there is no article before *archē* (beginning). With an article, it should be ἐν τῇ ἀρχῇ (*en tē archē*: in the beginning) preceded by ὁ λόγος ἦν (*ho logos ēn*: the word was); in this reverse case, the verb *ēn* is in front of the predicate. In John 19:21 (*basileus*: king) is not preceded by an article. With an article, it should have the verb in front εἰμι ὁ βασιλεύς (*eimi ho basileus*: I am the king). The acceptable translations however for John 1:1 and 19:21 despite the absence of articles are: 'In the beginning was the word', and 'I am the king of the Jews' respectively. This implies that the absence of the article is because of the word-order rather than the intention of the speaker/writer to denote something different from what the sentence would mean with an arthrous predicate. The indefiniteness of an anarthrous predicate is determined by where it stands in relation to the verb; when it is after the verb it is considered indefinite. On the other hand, when it precedes the verb (as in John 1:1; John 19:21 and Mark 15:39) the absence of the article is conditioned by the predicate's position before the verb and does not affect its definiteness. Thus, the

^{viii} Philip B. Harner, "Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns: Mark 15:39 and John 1:1", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92 (1973), 75 and 87.

^{ix} Philip B. Harner, "Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns: Mark 15:39 and John 1:1", 87.

^x Max Zerwick, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* (trans. and rev. Mary Grosvenor; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1996 [Mark 15:39]), 163.

^{xi} Max Zerwick, *Biblical Greek* (trans. Joseph Smith, Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2001), nn. 183 and 171-72.

^{xii} E. C. Colwell, "A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 52 (1933): 20-21.

anarthrous υἱὸς θεοῦ (hyios theou) in the centurion's statement should be taken as a definite predicate and therefore synonymous with ὁ υἱὸς θεοῦ (ho hyios theou). The predicate is implied and the sentence should be translated "truly this man was 'the Son of God'", or 'God's Son' which is more inclusive.

Beyond the possible definiteness of the predicate nouns, there is always the question of their qualitative significance. The word-order of Mark 15:39 emphasizes more the qualitative significance of the predicate noun rather than its definiteness or indefiniteness. It is not about Jesus as 'a' son or 'the' Son of God but about the meaning of Jesus' sonship to God as implying suffering and death. Mark intends in the phrase of the centurion that the nature and character of the sonship of Jesus to God consists in his suffering and death. That sonship underwent the experiences of suffering and death, expressed itself through them, and revealed itself to humans in this way.^{xiii}

It can therefore be stated that the anarthrous predicate may have been intended by Mark to harbour some definiteness (even though the author could have given it an article and placed it after the verb). The word-order however suggests that the author gives more attention in this passage to the meaning of Jesus' sonship to God. The markan centurion suggests especially the nature and character of Jesus's sonship evident in his suffering and death. By these realities he identifies him as divine. The English translation 'the Son of God' or 'Son of God' may not therefore satisfactorily capture this intent of the author without being exclusive. The most acceptable and inclusive should then be 'God's Son' because it allows for the qualitative significance without ruling out the possibility of the uniqueness of the sonship. It equally allows room for the Hellenistic and Judeo-Christian implications of the title.

The Intended Meaning for the Centurion, Mark and the Markan Audience

It is pertinent therefore to attempt to establish what the phrase meant to the centurion, what Mark intended to communicate and what the audience of Mark may have understood. Identifying the intentions of the centurion and Mark, as well as grasping how the markan Christians understood the message may be challenging and even contestable. To those who may insist that it is only about what it means for the contemporary readers, the answer remains that it is possible to get closer to the former. In Hermeneutics, a valid contemporary application of a passage is always the result of what was a potentially valid application for its original audience.

The declaration attributed to the centurion as a Gentile would generally imply something different from the Jewish understanding of Jesus' sonship of God. Based on

^{xiii} Philip B. Harner, "Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns", 81, *sv.* 80.

Hellenistic martyrology discussed above, 'son of god' would imply for a non-Jew a recognition of the extraordinariness of a person's character for which the person is described honourably as divine, righteous, innocent or a hero. In relation to Mark 15:39, the centurion is testifying to the innocence of Jesus by describing him as a 'son of god'. In other words, the use of the term 'son of god' by the centurion implies 'a just or innocent man' rather than the Messiah or the Christ. This is the sense underscored in the Lukan parallel to the narrative in Luke 23:47 where the phrase 'just man' is used.

The centurion's motivation for this conclusion derives from the extraordinary events which surrounded Jesus' death; the darkness, and the loud cry of Jesus (Mark 15:33, 34,37).^{xiv} The loud cry was especially unusual for an exhausted and dying person. In this context, the phrase does not therefore entail the unique Son of God as a messianic title but a title of honour and corroborates the absence of the article. It is a title which identifies Jesus within generic specie in which others also belong. By extension then, the expression reflects the legend of martyrdom in the Roman world in which those who suffered unjustly as heroes were proclaimed 'sons of god' in recognition of their innocence. The centurion would therefore have been informed by this tradition for which as witness to the death of Jesus he declared him a son of God. This implies his recognition of Jesus' innocence, impeccability of character/ outstanding qualities and heroism.

The second evangelist himself is not unfamiliar with the phrase 'Son of God'; it occurs in the Gospel (see 1:1 in some manuscripts, and 3:11). He is equally not unaware of the theological contents of the phrase; he is sure of his choice of words and the word-order. In Mark 3:11 the predicate is preceded by a verb and therefore has an article Σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ (Sy ei ho hyios tou theou: You are the Son of God) while in Mark 15:39 the predicate precedes the verb and therefore does not have an article. Grammatically both passages express the identity of Jesus but differ in their word-order and these differences in the word-order makes one arthrous predicate and the other anarthrous predicate. The remark in Mark 15:39 occurs at the end of the Gospel, at the events of the death of Jesus; and at an event taken over entirely by non-Jews in a Gospel where mission to the whole world (Mark 14:9) is a theme. It may therefore be difficult to suggest that the author, while conscious of and implying the qualitative significance of the phrase is not equally intending his audience to grasp the statement as a recognition by a non-Jew of Jesus' uniqueness as the Son of God. Having introduced Jesus at the prologue in 1:1 as the 'Son of God' it follows generally that in using the same phrase

^{xiv} A. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (The New International Greek New Testament Commentary NIGNTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 658-659; Whitney T. Shiner, "The Ambiguous Pronouncement of the Centurion and the Shrouding of Meaning in Mark", *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 78 (2000), 8-10.

towards the end of the Gospel, the author intends to affirm inclusively the purpose of the Gospel equally evident in 1:11 and 9:7. That purpose is to convince his audience in the context of their persecution that Jesus is the Son of God.^{xv} And said by a Gentile, it further embellishes the aim of not demonizing the Gentiles but making them a part of the believing community. The author is therefore taking advantage of a simple declaration by the centurion to advance his more profound Christological theme.

The markan audience was constituted in the name of Jesus who it recognizes as the Son of God. It would not have been in doubt about identifying the text as relevant to their view of the unique sonship of Jesus to God especially in the context of his suffering and death. Relevance theory views communication as a cognitive process. To attain cognitive gains, people sieve out irrelevant information and select relevant ones, and draw inferences for interesting conclusions based on the principle of relevance.^{xvi} In the context of relevance theory therefore the markan audience would generally have identified with the statement based on its optimal relevance to the members' position on Jesus. While the darkness and loud cry in Mark 15:33, 34, 37) convinced the centurion of Jesus' innocence, the information regarding the torn veil in v. 38 was unknown to him. This information, in addition to the darkness and loud cry provided the audience with portents to contextually perceive the nature and role of Jesus as their Messiah.^{xvii} That it was affirmed for the first time by a Gentile underscored the position of non-Jewish Christians in the community and repositioned the audience for mission towards non-Jews. The context in which the revelation took place implied that for the Christ to be known and confessed he needed to go through suffering and death.^{xviii} The markan Christians, faced with persecution from the Gentiles were thus assured that their own persecutions were a process towards revealing and proving the quality of their faith in, and their sonship of God. Their persecution was to serve the evangelizing or missionary purpose of making Christ known by their courageous testimonies and dependence on God as Jesus did on the cross.

^{xv} Sharyn Dowd and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "The Significance of Jesus' Death in Mark: Narrative Context and Authorial Audience", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125.2 (2006), 295-296.

^{xvi} Francis Yus, "Relevance Theory", in Bernd Heine and Heiko Narrog (eds.) *Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Analysis*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 680; Dennis John Kavanaugh, *The Ambiguity of Mark's Use of *Hyios theou* in Mark 15:39*, A Doctoral Dissertation Presented to the Department of Bible Exposition, (Dallas Theological Seminary, 2011), 215.

^{xvii} Mark Goodacre, "The Centurion's Sarcastic Cry in Mark 15:39" [markgoodacre.org](http://ntweblog.blogspot.it/2009/04/centurions-sarcastic-cry-in-mark-1539.html). April 15, 2009. <http://ntweblog.blogspot.it/2009/04/centurions-sarcastic-cry-in-mark-1539.html> (accessed January 31, 2017).

^{xviii} Herbert W. Bateman IV, "Defining the Titles 'Christ' and 'Son of God' in Mark's Narrative Presentation of Jesus", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50.3 (2007), 558.

Conclusion

The centurion's anarthrous predicate in Mark 15:39 denotes the quality of Jesus' unique sonship manifested in his suffering and death on the Cross. Its definiteness is implied and it is to be translated as "truly this man was 'God's Son' or 'the Son of God'". The centurion was a Gentile with less likely knowledge of Judaism's theological significance of the title 'Son of God'. His remark was consequently a declaration of Jesus' innocence, heroism and extraordinary character and not a Christological confession. In the context of the υἱοῦ θεοῦ in 1:1 with which 15:39 forms an inclusion Mark reads a deeper meaning into the remark and thus influences his audience to perceive this relevance. He is conscious of this recognition of Jesus as God's Son in 1:11 and 9:7 and thus uses the centurion's Hellenistic acknowledgement of Jesus' innocence for a more profound motive and agenda in his Gospel of depicting Jesus as the Son of God (Messiah). The second evangelist underscores a confession of the divinity of Jesus in the profound Judeo-Christian understanding. Thus, the centurion's remark points to a truth not totally grasped by him that Jesus is the unique Son of God in the Judeo-Christian model.

The statement then becomes the only acknowledgement of Jesus' divine sonship which does not meet with the invitation to be silent (see Mark 8:30; 9:9). It is made at the events of Jesus' death to imply that it is at the moment of Jesus' suffering and death that his uniqueness as Son of God is manifested. Hence at Jesus' death the Markan centurion; a human being and a non-Jew perceives and affirms that sonship in his vindication of Jesus and recognition of his heroism. Within the framework of the Markan messianic secret, the author of Mark thus implies that, it is only at Jesus' death that human beings grasp the nature and meaning of his sonship. This makes sense especially in relation to the purpose for which Mark writes his Gospel; to remind the persecuted markan church that Jesus' sonship of God became manifest through suffering and death; an *apologia crucis*. Similarly, their own persecution as Christians is to serve as occasion for the confirmation of their identity as sons and daughters of God.

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