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RECOGNIZING JESUS: A STUDY OF RECOGNITION SCENES IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

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Introduction

In recent years, New Testament scholarship has yielded a number of studies that compare the Gospel of Mark to Greek tragedy, and these are usually done with consideration of Aristotle's categories found in the *Poetics*.[1] These studies seek to establish a number of similarities between Mark and Greek tragedy, particularly with regards to plot, structure and other tragic elements such as recognition.[2] What these studies lack, however, is a clear description of how the plot of Mark is established, and how things like recognition scenes function with regard to it. This article is an attempt to fill this gap. Mark's plot is

1. Paul Hoffmann, *De Anagnorismo* (Bratislava: A. Favorke, 1910); E.W. Burch, 'Tragic Action in the Second Gospel: A Study in the Narrative of Mark', *JR* 11 (1931), pp. 346-58; T. Moser, 'Mark's Gospel—A Drama?', *TBT* 80 (1975), pp. 528-33; Gilbert G. Bilezikian, *The Liberated Gospel: A Comparison of the Gospel of Mark and Greek Tragedy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977; repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010); B. Standaert, *L'Evangile selon Marc: Composition et genre littéraire* (Bruges: Zevenkerken, 1978); Stephen H. Smith, 'A Divine Tragedy: Some Observations on the Dramatic Structure of Mark's Gospel', *NovT* 37 (1995), pp. 209-31; Scott S. Elliott, '"Witless in your Own Cause": Divine Plots and Fractured Characters in the Life of Aesop and the Gospel of Mark', *Religion & Theology* 12 (2005), pp. 397-418.

2. These types of studies have also been extended to John's Gospel. See Kaspar Bro Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger: Recognition Scenes in the Gospel of John* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Jo-Ann Brant, *Dialogue and Drama: Elements of Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004).

centered on the identity of Jesus,[3] who is described as both the Christ and the son of God in the Gospel's opening line, or incipit. The purpose of this article is to examine three recognition scenes and describe how each of these scenes interacts with the information given in the incipit: the recognition of Jesus as the son of God by the demon named Legion (5.1-20, especially v. 7), the recognition of Jesus as the Christ by Peter (8.29) and the recognition of Jesus as the son of God by the centurion (15.39). By hinging each recognition scene on the epithets given in the incipit, Mark is able to unify the plot and center it on the identity of Jesus. In turn, by establishing Jesus' identity at the outset of the Gospel, Mark is able to set an ironic tone for the Gospel—a tone intrinsic to recognition scenes.

As is the usual custom with this type of study, I will consult Aristotle's description of the categories of recognition scenes, and compare those categories with the scenes found in Mark. What will be found is that Mark is aware of the recognition motif, and by crafting the recognition scenes through allusion to the epithets given in the incipit, he is able to both unify and propel the events of the plot.[4]

3. This was recognized in P. Vielhauer, 'Erwägungen zur Chirologie des Markusevangeliums', in P. Vielhauer (ed.), *Aufsätze zum Neuen Testament* (TBü, 31; Munich: Kaiser, 1965), pp. 199-214.

4. I have decided that the incipit is central to my argument for two reasons. The first is that it appears at the beginning of the Gospel before the narrative begins. This is what Jay calls 'high level perception' (Jeff Jay, *The Tragic in Mark: A Literary-Historical Interpretation* [HUT, 66; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014], p. 192), which is made complete in 1.1. The other type of perception, which I will call 'lower level perception', is reserved for the characters within the plot who interact with Jesus. Examples such as 1.11 and 9.7 are considered 'lower level perceptions' because they affect the characters of the plot and not the audience. In both examples, Jesus is called the 'son of God' by *deus ex machina*, which is meant to convince the characters within the narrative and not the audience. Because the audience knows the true identity of Jesus from 1.1, it is able to appreciate the full irony of several botched attempts to recognize Jesus despite many instances of 'lower level' revelations. What is more, the incipit tells the audience that Jesus is the Messiah, a title not otherwise given to Jesus until 8.29. Since Jesus is given both titles in the incipit, the reader is then fully aware of Jesus' messianism and status as the son of God from the outset of the narrative and is thus able to consider the full implications of each title as the narrative progresses.

The second reason why the incipit is central to my argument is because it appears in both of our earliest manuscripts, Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, both written in the fourth century. As will be discussed below, the problems associated with the title

This article is divided into three sections. The first section will show what Aristotle regards as a recognition scene in his *Poetics*, and it will discuss how Aristotle understands recognition scenes as a means for unifying the plot. The second section will discuss the incipit of the Gospel and the controversies surrounding the appearance of the epithet 'son of God'. The third and final section will apply Aristotle's defintions of recognition to each scene listed above. This section will also demonstrate how each scene generates irony based on its relation to the incipit.

Aristotle's Poetics

The most comprehensive discussion of ancient literary style occurs in the *Poetics*. If the recognition scenes in Mark correspond to Aristotle's categories, we must conclude that Mark had some awareness of Greek tragic style. In this section, I will outline Aristotle's discussion of recognition scenes with regards to (1) their types; (2) the relationship between recognition and plot; and (3) how recognition scenes are designed to generate an emotive response in the audience.

Definition and Categories of Recognition

Recognition is a translation of the Greek word ἀναγνώρισις, and Aristotle defines it as: 'a change from ignorance to knowledge leading to friendship or enmity, and involving matters which bear on prosperity or adversity'.[5] For Aristotle, the best type of recognition is accompanied by a reversal of events.[6] A clear example of this is found in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, in which a messenger comes to Thebes to comfort its king, Oedipus, who is concerned with ridding the city of a plague. As the story goes, Oedipus is unknowingly responsible for the plague, and

'son of God' in the incipit are due to its unusual appearance in Sinaiticus. In this manuscript, the title is superscripted above the main line of text, leading some scholars to suggest that the title was not meant to be included in the original manuscript and that it was added later. The problem with this suggestion—as will be discussed below—is that it is a mere assumption that the title was not meant to be added simply because it is superscripted. The fact that it appears within the line in Vaticanus—also written in the fourth century—leads me to conclude that it was meant to be included in the text, making its inclusion in the incipit legitimate.

5. Aristotle, *Poet*. 1452a.29-32.
6. Aristotle, *Poet*. 1452a.22-23.

the messenger inadvertently reveals this truth to Oedipus. Thus, the best type of recognition is one that is deeply rooted in the story's plot, and one that leads to either good or bad fortune.

Aristotle categorizes six types of recognition scenes:[7] (1) recognition through tokens; (2) recognition that is contrived by the poet; (3) recognition through memory; (4) recognition by reasoning; (5) recognition based on wrongful inference; and (6) recognition that emerges from the events themselves.[8] Sometimes a character is able to recognize another by observing some type of visible token, such as a scar or necklace. This type of recognition is considered by Aristotle to be the least artistic. Other times, a character comes to a point of recognition because the author wants them to. An example of this is Orestes, whose recognition occurred because the poet contrived the events leading to it, and not because the plot demanded it.[9] Recognition can also occur because a character's memory is triggered by something they see. This is similar to recognition through tokens, such as when Eurycleia recognizes Odysseus's scar and recalls the story surrounding it. But recognition by memory can also occur when a character simply reencounters another.

The next type of recognition occurs by way of reasoning, and it goes like this: *someone like me has come; nobody but Orestes is like me; so Orestes is the one who has come*. Contrarily, recognition can also occur based on wrongful inference. This happens when somebody recognizes another correctly, despite the fact that others believe that person to have a different identity. The last type of recognition flows naturally from the events of the plot, is not reliant on tokens or other manufactured signs, and fits within the sequence of events. It is observable from this type just how important a cohesive plot was to Aristotle—it is only from a cohesive plot that the best types of recognition scenes occur.

7. Hubbard's translation emphasizes five types, and places recognition through false inference in a subcategory of recognition through reasoning. For clarity, I have separated them into six distinct categories. For a similar format, see D.A. Russell and Michael Winterbottom (eds.), *Classical Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 70-72.

8. Aristotle, *Poet.* 1454b-c.

9. This may strike us as odd, since the author is always responsible for the plot. I think that Aristotle is making the point that some plots are more believable than others, and this distinction marks the difference between a 'good' and a 'bad' plot.

The recognition scenes in Mark's Gospel correspond to numbers (3), (5) and (6) of Aristotle's categories listed above: Legion's response to Jesus indicates that he remembers Jesus from a previous experience of some type, while Peter and the centurion both recognize Jesus' true identity despite the false inference of others. Of central importance, however, is how each recognition scene fits into the plot.

Recognition and Emotional Response

According to Aristotle, the purpose of a recognition scene is to generate an emotive response in the audience.[10] He identified two emotions that were common to the most successful plays in his time, and these were fear and pity. He defined pity (ἔλεος) as:

> a pain from some apparent evil, either destructive or painful, happening undeservedly which someone himself might expect to suffer or any of those that belong to him [to suffer], and this when it appears near.[11]

He defined fear (φόβος) as:

> a pain or disturbance from imagination of imminent evil, either destructive or painful. For not all evils are feared, for example whether one is to become unjust or stupid, but whichever make possible great pains or destructions, and these if they are not far off but appear nearby so as to be imminent.[12]

The English terms 'fear' and 'pity', though often used in translation of these passages, do not fully describe the power of these terms. Thus, they deserve more description. Pity is empathetic in nature, and is characterized by a fear that something *could* happen to me. It is the type of emotion that draws you to the suffering character with a desire to comfort him or her. Imagine, for example, that you are witnessing a parent who has just lost a child in a tragic accident. The feeling that grips you as you watch that parent mourn is pity.

Fear, on the other hand, is pure terror. Fear is the type of emotion that makes you want to flee for your life. It is the realization of imminent danger, such as when—as one might observe in any classic horror film—the evil we are trying to escape is not far off, but is

10. By audience, I mean a first-century reader or hearer of the Gospel who is embedded in Greco-Roman culture. The terms 'audience' and 'reader' are used interchangeably here.

11. Aristotle, *Rhet*. 1385b.12-16. Translations are my own.

12. Aristotle, *Rhet*. 1382a.21-25.

directly behind us. In other words, fear is not directed towards others like pity, but it is to be understood as an emotion that engenders self preservation.[13] As Davis suggests, 'as spectators we pity; as participants we fear'.[14]

Recognition scenes are meant to generate these types of emotions. This concept is built on the premise that the audience can place themselves 'in the shoes' of the suffering character. I am most affected by watching those things I can perceive happening to me. This is why recognition must be tied to and flow naturally from a believable plot.

This is an important point when considering recognition scenes in Mark. The son of God and Messiah to the Jewish people is not recognized by those who *ought* to recognize him. Not only is this painfully ironic, it generates pity. Jesus goes unrecognized by his closest friends and by the priests and other teachers of the law. Even Peter, who recognizes Jesus as the Christ, is sharply rebuked for his inability to know what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah. Yet Jesus *is* recognized by demons (Legion) and a Roman centurion. Therefore, I propose that Mark is purposefully drawing a distinction between those who correctly identify Jesus and those who do not. His goal is to draw attention to this ironic disparity, and he chooses a motif that not only communicates the disparity, but also forces the audience to contemplate its implications.[15] What does this mean for a group who can recognize neither the son of God nor their Messiah? What does it mean for me if I do not recognize that this is who Jesus really is?

13. Nagy categorizes fear and pity as two types of grief that have opposite effects on the audience. For example, while fear produces a type of grief that repulses the audience, pity produces a type of grief that creates empathy in the audience. In other words, 'when you feel fear and pity, you are repelled by or attracted to the grief'. Fear is slightly more complex in that it does not simply reflect what I feel about the grief of others, it is also a reflection of a fear for myself; I am therefore afraid that I might suffer in the same way. A more appropriate word for 'fear' might then be 'terror' (Gregory Nagy, *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours* [Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2013], pp. 64-65).

14. Michael Davis, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Poetics of Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1992), p. 39.

15. Stone contrasts the Gospel of Mark with *Oedipus Rex* and draws a number of parallels. He points out the importance of the non-recognition scenes, and suggests that these types of scenes are integral to the plot and dramatic irony of the Gospel (Jerry H. Stone, 'The Gospel of Mark and "Oedipus the King": Two Tragic Visions', *Sound* 67 [1984], pp. 55-69).

Recognition and Plot

Recognition is integral to the plot, and the plot is the most important part of narrative structure.[16] The analogy of how an artist organizes a painting is helpful here: a narrative without a cohesive plot is like a painting of colours thoughtlessly smeared on a canvas—a chaotic and random arrangement of the colours detracts from the viewer's ability to effectively understand the painting's meaning.

Recognition fits within the elements of plot. The plot must have a beginning (ἀρχή), middle (μέσον) and end (τελευτή). A good narrative does not begin or end just anywhere, but follows a proper order in the sequence of action. In addition, the plot must have unity. In other words, an occurrence in the narrative must be related to those before and after it, and not portrayed as a random happening. These features in a narrative convey a sense of wholeness, when each occurrence in the narrative has a plausible and necessary connection with the others.

A recognition scene is the evidence of a cohesive plot because it is dependent on what has happened, and it affects what will happen;[17] each recognition scene in Mark alludes directly to the incipit, and each recognition scene propels the plot because Jesus' identity is of central importance to the narrative. In a similar way, the *failure* to recognize Jesus' true identity also propels the plot: Jesus' crucifixion is only necessary because the priests and teachers of the law fail to identify him correctly.[18]

The Incipit

The opening line of the Gospel reveals who Jesus is, and in doing so, provides the basis for the plot. The plot is driven by Jesus' identity, and can be summarized like this: Jesus is introduced as the son of God and Christ, whereupon he teaches about the kingdom of God and performs various miracles. Though he is recognized by some unlikely characters, he remains unidentified by those he is trying to convince of his message. As a result of not being correctly recognized and identified,

16. Aristotle, *Poet*. 1450b. See also Smith, 'Divine Tragedy', p. 210.

17. Smith, 'Divine Tragedy', p. 213.

18. The ultimate irony lies in the fact that, although failing to recognize Jesus leads to his death, his death constitutes his victory. Stone identifies failing to recognize Jesus as just as integral to the plot as recognizing him is. See Stone, 'Gospel of Mark', p. 61.

he is betrayed by those closest to him and is executed for his claims. Even after his resurrection, we are unable to discern whether or not Jesus is correctly identified, depending on whether or not one accepts Mark's longer ending.[19] Thus, the recognition scenes I am discussing in this article fit curiously within the plot: why is Jesus correctly identified by the 'wrong' people? The answer is that non-recognition serves as a method by which the plot is brought to—what Aristotle would call—a necessary end (τελευτή).

So what do the recognition scenes accomplish? The answer is given to us by Aristotle: recognition scenes are meant to generate an emotional response. Though Jesus must not be correctly identified in order for the plot to culminate in a necessary way, the recognition scenes serve to frustrate the reader and generate a sense of pity for Jesus. And this experience comes as a result of the information given in the incipit.

In this section, I will discuss two things: (1) the textual issues surrounding 'son of God' in the incipit; and (2) the incipit as it relates to the recognition scenes I have outlined above.

The 'Son of God' and its Textual Issues

As I argued above, the epithets 'son of God' and 'Christ' are essential to the cohesiveness of Mark's plot. However, one major question that scholars have been asking is whether or not the epithet 'son of God' should be included in the incipit.[20] I will argue here that the epithet 'son of God' was meant to be included and, despite a very small amount of evidence to the contrary, most likely appeared in the original

19. The debate concerning Mark's ending is quite interesting but it goes beyond the scope of this article.

20. The discussion surrounds the absence of the epithet in א* Θ 28c. Moloney 'tentatively accepts it' (Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002], p. 29), and follows Kazmierski (C.R. Kazmierski, *Jesus, Son of God: A Study of the Marcan Tradition and its Redaction by the Evangelist* [FzB, 33; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1979]). Collins suggests an accidental omission is unlikely and that the epithet is most likely secondary (A.Y. Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007], p. 130). See Craig Evans, 'Mark's Incipit and the Priene Calendar Inscription: From Jewish Gospel to Greco-Roman Gospel', *JGRChJ* 1 (2000), pp. 67-81 (67); Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 27A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), p. 141.

manuscript.[21] In order to do this, I will examine Mk 1.1 as it appears in two fourth-century codices, Sinaiticus and Vaticanus.[22]

I will begin with Sinaiticus. The epithet in Mk 1.1 appears superscripted as two *nomina sacra* written between the first and second lines. The superscripted lettering is much smaller than that of the body of the text, which could suggest that the *nomina sacra* were later added by the first hand, or 'correcting hand' (א[a]). This could also suggest that 'son of God' was not original to the Gospel, and was added later.

However, there are a number of problems with this theory. The first is that many manuscripts—many more than do not—include the epithet 'son of God'.[23] In addition, the superscription in Sinaiticus may be due, as Metzger suggests, to an oversight in copying occasioned by the similarity of endings of the *nomina sacra*.[24] Guelich suggests the same, and says that a series of six genitives (ΤΟΥ ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΥ ΙΥ ΧΥ ΥΥ ΘΥ) may have confused the scribe, leading him to forget the epithet only to add it later.[25]

Another clue that may lead us to conclude that the epithet was original to the Gospel is how it appears in Vaticanus. As mentioned, the epithets appear as superscripted *nomina sacra* in Sinaiticus, but in Vaticanus, 'son' in the epithet 'son of God', does not appear as a *nomen sacrum* (ΥΙΟΥ), while 'God' does (ΘΥ). In addition, the epithet appears in the main body of the text of Mk 1.1 and is not superscripted as it appears in Sinaiticus. Why did the scribe who penned Vaticanus not render 'son' as a *nomen sacrum* as it appears in Sinaiticus?

21. Though there is a possibility that the epithet 'son of God' was not original to Mark's incipit, the question of why someone wanted to add it is important. If someone did add it later on, it was someone who knew Mark's Gospel well and thought that the epithet fit with the Gospel's theme of Jesus' identity. I will argue here that 'son of God' was included in Mark's incipit, though my treatment of the recognition scenes in Mark is still valid whether the epithet was originally present or not.

22. UBS[4], p. 10.

23. The NA[27] apparatus notes a number of manuscripts that include υἱοῦ θεοῦ. Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ θεοῦ is read by א[a] B D L W 2427, whereas Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ is read by A Δ *f*1 *f*13 33 180 205 565 579 597 700 892 1006 1010 1071 1243 1292 1342 1424 1505 Byz. Irenaeus and Epiphanius also read Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, though Epiphanius omits Ἰησοῦ. See UBS[4], p. 117; NA[27], p. 88.

24. B.M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 73.

25. R.A. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26* (WBC, 34A; Dallas: Word, 1989), p. 6.

There are a few options. The first option is that Sinaiticus was penned first, and that Vaticanus altered the epithet. The scribe would then have written 'son of God' in the main body of the text, but 'de-sacralized' the epithet. This option is less likely, considering the nature of *nomina sacra* and their meaning within the early church context.[26] A second option has Sinaiticus and Vaticanus following separate textual traditions—one that rendered 'son' as a *nomen sacrum* and one that did not. This option is not likely either since both codices are Alexandrian, and originated within a similar context.

The third—and most likely—option is that Sinaiticus used the same exemplar tradition as Vaticanus, but Sinaiticus was penned by someone who thought that, like 'God', 'son' should also be rendered as a *nomen sacrum.* In other words, Sinaiticus was based on Vaticanus or its tradition, but altered the appearance of the epithet 'son of God'. Not only does this eliminate the textual problem that Sinaiticus generates, it also moves us closer to accepting the epithet 'son of God' as original to the Gospel.

The Incipit and Recognition

As I mentioned above, the cohesiveness of the plot is dictated by Jesus' identity as described in the incipit. I have also argued that, by establishing Jesus' identity in the incipit, Mark is able to generate dramatic irony: Jesus is recognized by the 'wrong' people, but not recognized by the 'right' ones.

As Jesus performs miracles and teaches, there are a number of scenes during which Jesus is identified as the son of God by the demons he exorcises. These instances tie the demonic recognition scenes closely

26. Porter argues that *nomina sacra* were consciously used as theological devices and not simply as abbreviations. In light of this argument, it is not plausible to suggest that Vaticanus would have expanded an already-existing *nomen sacrum* into the longer form that was not so theologically significant. Hurtado argues that *nomina sacra* were used for visual purposes as well as an act of devotion. This supports my argument for the priority and greater reliability of the text of Vaticanus in this place. See Stanley E. Porter, 'What Do We Know, and How Do We Know It? Reconstructing Early Christianity from its Manuscripts', in Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts (eds.), *Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament* (Early Christianity in its Hellenistic Context, 1; Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 41-70 (66); Larry Hurtado, *Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 118, 132.

to the incipit by their use of the epithet 'son of God'. The centurion also recognizes Jesus as the 'son of God'. This statement not only ties his recognition scene to the incipit, but also has political implications due to its close connection with the kinds of ideas known to us from the Priene Calendar Inscription. Peter's recognition scene differs slightly from the other two because of its allusion to the Christ epithet.

I will now discuss each recognition scene as it pertains to the incipit, and will do so in the following order: (1) Legion's recognition of Jesus; (2) Peter's recognition scene; and (3) the Centurion's recognition scene.

Legion's Recognition

Throughout the narrative, Jesus encounters a number of individuals who are possessed by one or more demons. While many scholars have attempted to study these instances historically,[27] I suggest here that the exorcisms in Mark's Gospel function primarily as literary devices.[28] This is evidenced by their close connection to the incipit, especially Legion's recognition in 5.7.[29] In this section, I will discuss: (1) Aristotle's category of recognition by memory as it relates to Legion's recognition; (2) Legion's recognition and exorcism as a literary device; and (3) Legion's recognition as a source of dramatic irony.

Legion Remembers Jesus

Upon exiting his boat, Jesus is approached by a man who falls down (προσεκύνησεν) before him in worship (5.6). He recognizes Jesus as the 'son of the Most High God', and begs that he not be tortured. This act of submission on the part of the possessed man is characteristic of

27. See G.H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Historical Jesus* (WUNT, 2.54; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994); W. Cotter, *Miracles in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

28. This is not to suggest that an exorcism did not happen. I am suggesting that Mark's rendering of the event is a literary one, not a historical one.

29. Geert van Oyen discusses a number of methodological concerns with a historical approach to examining exorcisms in Mark. He suggests that reading the Gospel as a whole serves to bring meaning to the smaller textual units. For the full discussion, see Geert van Oyen, 'Demons and Exorcisms in the Gospel of Mark', in Nienke Vos and Willemien Otten (eds.), *Demons and the Devil in Ancient and Medieval Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 99-116.

possessed individuals who encounter Jesus in Mark (1.22; 3.7-12; 9.20), and suggests that the demons in Mark somehow recognize Jesus' authority. The reader is not told how or why this is so, but it is to be understood that the demons know Jesus as the son of God from some previous experience.

This type of recognition fits within Aristotle's category of recognition by memory. This type of recognition occurs when one's awareness is roused by seeing or hearing something. We are told that Legion sees (ἰδών) Jesus from afar and runs to him, whereupon he falls down in worship. At this point, he has a dramatic reaction and cries out in a loud voice: 'what do you have to do with me, son of the Most High God? I adjure you before God, do not torture me!' The exact meaning of the term 'son of the Most High God' is debated among scholars.[30] Witmer notes that the term 'son of God' is used in various ways in canonical and non-canonical literature, and suggests that it is difficult to be certain how it is being used here.[31] Though this epithet deviates slightly from the one in the incipit, Jesus is being labeled as the 'son of God'. In addition, this recognition is triggered through memory, which is one of Aristotle's categories.

Recognition and Exorcism as Literary Devices

One of the major questions surrounding the exorcisms in Mark is why Jesus commands the demons to be silent about his identity. This is a difficult question since presumably there were many people present at the exorcisms who would have witnessed the events. Needless to say, such an audience could easily have reported the events, making Jesus' request puzzling. This is why I understand the recorded exorcisms in Mark as literary devices rather than 'historical' events.[32]

30. Bauckham notes this phrase and places it within the discussion of Jewish monotheism. It then becomes a question of how unique God is among other gods, and thus redefines what 'monotheism' actually means. See Richard Bauckham, 'The "Most High" God and the Nature of Early Jewish Monotheism', in Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 107-26. See also Loren T. Stuckenbruck and Wendy E.S. North (eds.) *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism* (JSNTSup, 263; London: T. & T. Clark, 2004).

31. Amanda Witmer, *Jesus, the Galilean Exorcist: His Exorcisms in Social and Political Context* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2012), p. 180.

32. Oyen attempts to answer this question by suggesting that the exorcisms place the emphasis on the reader to discover who Jesus is. This discovery will then

So what purpose did silencing the demons have, and why did Mark choose to explain the encounters in this way? Wrede attempted to answer this question by suggesting that the exorcisms—in addition to the other miracles in Mark—were an attempt by the evangelist to make sense of Jesus' ministry in light of his resurrection.[33] Having heard the resurrection accounts, Mark presented the exorcism and miracle stories in such a way as to promote a supernatural aspect of Jesus' ministry.[34] In other words, when Jesus is presented as silencing the demons' messianic declarations, it is the work of the evangelist accounting for the lack of messianic claims made by Jesus himself.[35]

Wrede's theory has been largely criticized,[36] though I believe that Wrede was asking the right questions. For example, it makes little sense that Jesus would silence the demons in the midst of a large crowd who would have seen and heard the exchange. Even more bizarre is that Legion could have loudly exclaimed (φωνῇ μεγάλῃ) that Jesus was the son of the Most High God, yet certain bystanders could continue to not recognize him as such. It makes more sense to understand the exchange between Jesus and Legion literarily as opposed to historically. This approach leads us to consider how Legion's exorcism fits into the overall theme of Jesus' identity in the Gospel. Since Legion's declaration alludes so sharply to the epithet found in the incipit, we can conclude that the incipit provides the essential information to interpret this recognition scene.

lead the reader to discern what 'Jesus means to me (the reader)' (Oyen, 'Demons and Exorcisms', pp. 113-16). This hardly answers the question, since the reader is already aware of who Jesus is. The reader's response is one of emotional commiseration, not a subjective freedom to discover who Jesus is.

33. In German, see W. Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien* (Göttigen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901). In translation, *The Messianic Secret* (trans. J.C.G. Greig; Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, 1971).

34. See Georg Strecker, 'The Theory of the Messianic Secret in Mark's Gospel', in Christopher Tuckett (ed.), *The Messianic Secret* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), pp. 49-64.

35. James D.G. Dunn, 'The Messianic Secret in Mark', in Tuckett (ed.), *Messianic Secret*, pp. 116-31.

36. For example, see Dunn, 'Messianic Secret', pp. 117-26; Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel according to St Mark* (London: Continuum, 2001), pp. 66-69.

Legion's Recognition as Irony

Legion's recognition of Jesus as the son of God also construes dramatic irony. Though his disciples have questioned Jesus' identity (4.41), the demonic Legion recognizes him instantly. The inability of the disciples to recognize Jesus combined with Legion's instantaneous recognition produces the ironic element of the scene.

The ironic nature of the scene leads the audience to feel a level of pity: Jesus is misunderstood by those closest to him, yet his enemies identify him correctly. This emotive response is due to the information given in the incipit: if Jesus' true identity had not been made known, the audience would not feel the same level of pity.

Peter's Recognition of Jesus as Christ

Peter's recognition of Jesus as the Christ marks the climax of Mark's plot.[37] The epithet 'Christ' appears only four times throughout the Gospel: the incipit (1.1), Peter's recognition (8.29) and twice as a negative pronouncement (14.61; 15.32).[38] Given that it occurs rather seldom, its use is prominent, and given that it occurs only once before Peter's recognition insinuates an allusion to the incipit. This section will discuss Peter's recognition (1) in light of Aristotle's categories of recognition; (2) as a literary device to bring about the climax of the narrative; and (3) as construing irony.

Peter's Recognition and Negative Inference

After Jesus feeds a crowd of four thousand and heals a blind man in Bethsaida (8.1-21, 22-26), he and his disciples travel to the area of Caesarea Philippi. This area was decorated with a number of statues devoted to various Greek deities. And so, perhaps walking among the images of these Greek gods, Jesus asks his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' The disciples collectively answer that Jesus is being hailed as John the Baptist, Elijah or even one of the prophets. Jesus then asks a more direct question, 'Who do you say that I am?' Peter, acting as the spokesman of the group, declares that Jesus is the Christ.

37. Hooker describes this point of the story as the divide between those who recognize Jesus' true identity and those who do not (Hooker, *Mark*, p. 203).

38. Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20* (WBC, 34B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), p. 9.

This recognition scene fits within Aristotle's category of recognition through the wrongful inference of others. Jesus asks a two-fold question: 'Who are other people suggesting I am?' and 'Who do you think I am?' Jesus' true identity has not been recognized despite the numerous miracles and speeches that have occurred until this point in the narrative, and now Jesus is giving the disciples an opportunity to correctly identify him in light of all they have seen. Had Jesus been interested in further obscuring his identity, his second question would not have been necessary. However, recognizing that Jesus is dissatisfied with how others are perceiving him, Peter offers a more accurate assessment. Thus, by asking a more direct question, Jesus is leading his disciples toward the correct response.

Because others had misidentified Jesus, Peter was able to identify him correctly. It is clear that the disciples did not arrive at this conclusion on their own, since they were rebuked for a lack of understanding in 8.17-21. If the disciples were unable to understand the meaning behind the miracles, it is improbable that they would have recognized who was preforming the miracles. Thus, Peter's recognition fits within Aristotle's category of recognition through the wrongful inference of others, and Jesus prompts this type of recognition by asking a two-fold question.

Peter's Recognition as Pivotal to the Narrative

Peter's recognition scene uniquely affects the plot of Mark's Gospel. It is located almost exactly half-way through the narrative, and marks a distinct shift in subject matter.[39] In this scene, Peter acknowledges Jesus as the Christ—alluding directly to the incipit—but is rebuked by Jesus for not fully understanding the implications of that role (8.33). Peter's recognition is therefore a literary device that affords a shift from Jesus' teaching ministry to a focus on the events that lead to his death.

39. Boring calls 8.22–10.52 a transitional section that binds the two parts of the Gospel together, though he warns that this particular transition should not 'divide' as much as 'bridge' or 'hinge' two sections that overlap and connect (M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary* [London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006], p. 231). Moloney identifies a shift in Jesus' teaching from parables to conditional formulae concerning surrounding passion predictions (Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, pp. 171-72). Collins notes the transitional nature of 8.27–10.45 that focuses on the 'blindness' of the disciples (Collins, *Mark*, p. 397).

This scene is unique with regards to the recognition motif because it functions as both a recognition scene and a non-recognition scene. It is a recognition scene because Peter correctly identifies Jesus as the Christ, yet his misunderstanding of what that entails muddles what would otherwise be a conclusive moment. If Peter had correctly identified Jesus as the Christ and fully understood the implications, the narrative could have concluded. However, Mark chooses to communicate that the full implications of being the Christ include death and resurrection. And so, both Peter's recognition and ignorance function to connect the epithet 'Christ' to its necessary implications.

It is also at this moment that the audience realizes the end result of Jesus' ministry, thus marking the climax of the narrative. This moment also generates fear and pity—pity because Jesus is still not fully understood by those closest to him, and fear because despite his many miracles, Jesus will be put to death.[40]

Peter's Recognition and Irony

The irony of this scene is that Peter, though he correctly identifies Jesus as the Christ, fails to understand the full implications of what this means. A seemingly glorious moment of recognition is muddled by a sharp rebuke, and the audience is left wondering if the disciples will ever truly recognize Jesus. The audience remembers that even the demons recognize who Jesus is, and that demons fall down before him in worship (5.6). Jesus' prediction of his death in 8.31 heightens the ironic nature of the scene for both Peter and the audience, since it is clear that Peter does not expect that the Christ should die.

The Centurion's Recognition of Jesus as Son of God

The final recognition scene is that of the centurion in 15.39. Like the two before it, this scene alludes to the incipit and thereby functions as a literary device. This recognition scene would also have had a special meaning to a Roman audience. By using language similar to that of the

40. The text shows that Jesus spoke of his death and resurrection (8.31) and was still rebuked by Peter. This rebuke may demonstrate Peter's lack of faith that a resurrection would occur, thus making a clear statement about what the epithet 'Christ' actually meant to Peter.

Priene Calendar Inscription,[41] both the incipit and the centurion's recognition function as a means of conveying the superiority of Jesus over Caesar.

This section will discuss the Centurion's recognition with regards to (1) Aristotle's categories of recognition; (2) its relationship as a literary device to both the incipit and the Priene Calendar Inscription; and (3) how it construes irony.

The Centurion's Recognition as Wrongful Inference

In 15.24, Jesus is brought to Golgotha and is crucified. Over his head is placed a sarcastically written accusation that reads, 'The King of the Jews'. This indictment provides the basis for mockery, as the chief priests and scribes taunt Jesus and suggest that, as the Christ and King of Israel, he should save himself. Jesus dies after enduring these taunts, whereupon a centurion standing opposite to Jesus says, 'Truly, this man was the son of God!' (15.39).[42]

This recognition scene fits into Aristotle's category of recognition through the wrongful inference of others. Functioning in a way similar to Peter's recognition scene, this recognition scene features a centurion who recognizes Jesus despite what others are saying about him.

The centurion's recognition comes after a number of false inferences. Jesus is labeled mockingly as the King of the Jews, the Christ and the King of Israel. Having witnessed (ἰδών) these things (including how Jesus died), the centurion recognizes Jesus as the son of God. This recognition is meant to be juxtaposed with the words of those who are

41. The Priene Calendar Inscription is a collection of inscriptions found in Asia Minor erected in celebration of Augustus's birthday in 9 BCE. As Porter points out, calling the whole collection the 'Priene Inscription' is a misnomer, since parts of the collection were found in a number of areas such as Apamea Kibotos, Dorylaion, Maionia and Eumeneia. Porter goes on to affirm that 'there are a number of features of the calendar inscription that Mark's Gospel holds in common to indicate that the Gospel was written in direct confrontation of the imperial cult' (Stanley E. Porter, 'Paul Confronts Caesar with the Good News', in Stanley E. Porter and Cynthia Long Westfall [eds.], *Empire in the New Testament* [MNTS, 10; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011], pp. 164-97 [167]). If this is so, Mark's description of Jesus as the 'son of God' would have resonated with an audience familiar with similar descriptions of the Caesars. It is not surprising then that Mark would have a centurion identifying Jesus as the 'son of God' thereby increasing the dramatic irony of the crucifixion scene.

42. See Jay, *Tragic in Mark*, pp. 239-42.

mocking Jesus. Those who presumably know the Scriptures do not recognize Jesus, yet the centurion does. By contrasting these two groups, Mark is able to heighten the dramatic irony of the scene (see below), and emphasize the centurion's recognition in light of the wrongful inference of the priests and scribes.

The Centurion's Recognition, the Incipit and the Priene Calendar Inscription

The appearance of the epithet 'son of God' is out of place, since no one calls Jesus by that epithet during the mocking sequence. One might expect the centurion to say, for example, 'Truly this man was the King of Israel!' or 'Truly this man was the Christ!' However, the centurion calls Jesus by the epithet 'son of God' in light of what he has seen.[43] Given that the epithet is out of place, I conclude that it must refer to the incipit. The usage of the epithet by the centurion is also curious—what is the purpose of a centurion calling Jesus the 'son of God'?

The centurion's use of the epithet 'son of God' would have had a special meaning to a Roman audience. The vocabulary of the incipit resembles that of an ode to Caesar Augustus called the Priene Calendar Inscription (*OGIS* 458, c. 9 BCE).[44] The Priene Calendar Inscription states that Augustus is a saviour (σωτήρ), and that in the appearance (ἐπιφανεῖν) of the god Augustus "the natal day of the god began the good news for the world that came by reason of him' (ἦρξεν δὲ τῶι κόσμωι τῶν δι' αὐτὸν εὐαγγελίων ἡ γενέθλιος τοῦ θεοῦ). When this is compared to Mark's incipit, a number of similarities can be observed: (1) both the coming of Jesus and that of Augustus are understood as the 'beginning of good news' or 'gospel' (Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου; cf. ἦρξεν...εὐαγγελίων). (2) The good news is brought by a divine agent. In Mark, Jesus is this agent as the son of God (υἱοῦ θεοῦ), as is Augustus

43. Some have suggested that the centurion is being sarcastic and is joining with the mockers. This does not explain the curious use of 'son of God' here, and it does not explain why the centurion says it after Jesus has died. See Dennis R. MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 142.

44. See Evans, 'Mark's Incipit'. In this article, Evans argues that a number of elements in Mark resemble those found in the Roman Imperial Cult. See also Porter, 'Paul Confronts Caesar', pp. 170-75.

as 'saviour' (σωτήρ) and god (θεός).[45] As Evans has noted, Augustus is referred to and thought of as υἱοῦ θεοῦ or *divi filius* in a number of other inscriptions and papyri.[46] (3) The beginning of the good news signals the beginning of a new world order. The coming of the emperor was referred to as a παρουσία (Latin: *adventus*).[47] The Latin poet Virgil spoke of Augustus 'who shall set up the Golden Age' (*Aen*. 6.791-793). This new age is inaugurated because of the emperor's link with heaven.[48] In a similar way, Jesus is called the 'son of God' by God himself, and Jesus announces the coming of a new kingdom (1.11, 14).

Mark's allusion to the Priene Inscription would also have recalled beliefs about Augustus with regards to his death. According to Suetonius, Augustus's death was signaled by unmistakable signs (*Aug*. 97.1). Similarly, Jesus' death was signaled by darkness covering the land at noon, as well as a supernatural tearing of the temple curtain (15.33, 38). Hearing the taunts of others, the centurion disagrees with their assessments and names Jesus the 'son of God', which, on the literary level, refers clearly to the incipit.

The Centurion's Recognition as Irony

As a result of its allusion to the incipit, a confession of recognition by a Roman centurion is the most ironic element of the crucifixion narrative. As mentioned, such a confession has close ties with the Priene Inscription. The priests and scribes are portrayed negatively—they are Israel's teachers and should know better. As a Roman official, the centurion looks disloyal because, by his admission, he is claiming that Jesus is equal to or greater than Caesar. But the centurion, surprisingly, confirms what the incipit has proclaimed.

45. Expressions of Augustus as a 'saviour and benefactor' appear in Jewish literature. See Philo, *Flacc*. 74, *Leg. Gai*. 148, 149.

46. *IGR* 1.901, 4.309, 315; *ILS* 107, 113; *P.Ryl.* 601; *P.Oslo* 26. See Evans, 'Mark's Incipit', pp. 69-70; Craig Evans, 'The Anarthrous υἱοῦ θεοῦ in Mark 15,39 and the Roman Imperial Cult', *Bib* 79 (1998), pp. 221-41. Augustus as *divi filius* also appears in Latin literature: see Virgil, *Aen*. 6.791-793; Philo, *Flacc*. 74; *Leg. Gai.* 148, 149.

47. Though Mark does not use the term παρουσία, it can be found in a number of other New Testament writings that refer to Jesus' coming: Mt. 24.3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Cor. 15.23; 1 Thess. 2.19; 3.13; 4.15; 5.23; Jas 5.7, 8; 2 Pet. 1.16; 3.4; 1 Jn 2.28.

48. Evans, 'Mark's Incipit', p. 75.

Conclusions

This article has argued that three recognition scenes in Mark's Gospel are based on the information given in the incipit. The incipit introduces the reader to the Gospel's theme of Jesus' identity, something that is both recognized and unrecognized throughout the narrative. After revealing who Jesus is to the reader, Mark then chooses who does and who does not recognize Jesus. The results of his choices are at times surprising, since those who do recognize Jesus are not those whom the reader might expect. By using recognition scenes—a motif defined by Aristotle and used by many ancient authors—Mark is able to construe irony and generate an emotional response in the audience. Examining Mark in this way not only helps us understand how his Gospel was constructed, but also alerts us to the fact that Mark was aware of literary style.