CHAPTER TWO

SALVATION IN MARK

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1. Introduction

It is interesting that the terms σωτήρ and σωτηρία (except in Mark 16:21) are not used in Mark. Although the terms “salvation” and “saviour” are not present in Mark, the role of “saviour” is not absent. The verb σῶζω occurs in 3:4; 5:23, 28, 34; 6:56; 8:35; 10:26, 52; 13:13, 20; 15:30–31 (and 16:16). It is also generally accepted that the passion of Jesus plays a very important role in this Gospel, and Kähler (1969, 60) even refers to the Gospels as “Passionsgeschichten mit ausführlichen Einleitung”. It is often said that Mark 10:45 and 14:24 are the only references to the salvific meaning of the death of Jesus in Mark, and that these references were influenced by the early Christian tradition (Barth 1992, 13). Does this mean that salvation is not that prominent in the Gospel of Mark?

To determine the soteriology, one could begin by investigating the Christology of Mark. It is noteworthy that the Gospel of Mark starts by mentioning the titles “Jesus”, “Christ” and “Son of God”. Best is of the opinion that it is not the Christology that requires explanation, as He is already Christ at the outset of the Gospel, but rather the soteriology (1990, xxiif). What needs explanation is the meaning of the different titles being ascribed to Jesus, and especially its relation to the meaning of the life of Jesus as a whole. It remains striking that in the New Testament as a whole the term σωτήρ is used so seldom, even though the function of Saviour is quite obvious in the New Testament and in Mark. This may be because the term was ideologically loaded very heavily in New Testament times. It is interesting to note that Oscar Cullmann refers to the title σωτήρ as relatively late and one that could not have functioned as a title for Jesus in Palestine “da man ja den Eigename ‘Jesus’ einfach hätte wiederholen müssen: dem ‘Jesus Soter’ würde ja ein ‘Jeschua Jeschua’
entsprechen” (1963, 252). Ferdinand Hahn also ignores the title and function of saviour, although he admits that it deserves investigation (1966, 45). It is then significant that Matera states that the “Christology of Mark’s Gospel is in the story it tells” (1999, 24) and that Mark would define Messiahship in terms of Jesus and not Jesus in terms of Messiahship (see also Kingsbury 1983).

Narrative criticism has also broadened the interpretation of the Gospels (Powell, 1990), and the different titles associated with Jesus acquire their content from the narrative as a whole. “Nur wenn er [der Leser HJBC] den ‘Plot’ der im Evangelium erzählten Gesamthandlung verfolgt, erschließt sich ihm das Persongeheimnis Jesu, damit—als dessen Konsequenz—das Kreuz und so am ende sein eigenes ‘Heil’” (Backhaus 1995, 93). The various Christological titles of Jesus are not inherently Christological, and also not unambiguous. They obtain their meaning in and through the narrative as such. It must be kept in mind that the role of the titles must first and foremost be seen in the context of characterisation in the narrative. This means that we do not have a systematic Christology in the Gospel, but a narrative presentation (Broadhead 1999, 26.29).

According to Schildgen, the Gospel of Mark can be seen as a “popular and contemporary form of a ‘sacred’ narrative using the resources of Hebraic history, fiction, apocalypse and biography. Mark aligns his genre choice with his ideological intentions. In his version of Jesus, he presents a wonderworking, wandering teacher, who violates contemporary social, religious, and political habits and behaviour, until his death when order is restored” (1998, 57). While letters are appropriate to correct and persuade readers on many issues, narratives are ill-suited to such purposes, and one has to infer the correct position from the actions and reactions of various characters. Narratives further invite readers to identify with the hero and to develop empathy with his or her position and fate (cf. Tolbert 1999, 53).

It must also be acknowledged that the issue of salvation can be communicated through metaphors (cf. Van Deventer 1986). In the case of Paul, for example, a large number of metaphors are used, drawn from four different spheres: social interaction, biological and physiological interaction, the cultic and ritual realm, as well as from the technical sphere of life. When attention is given to motifs and soteriological *topoi*, it is also important to keep in mind that, according to some, our interest in terms and metaphors rests basically in their effect or end result (Marrow 1990, 278f).