EVALUATION OF THE RESULTS

THE SITUATION OF THE MARKAN CHRISTIANS

In the preceding chapters it was argued that the community for which Mark wrote his Gospel was situated in Galilee, that he wrote it some time after the end of the Jewish revolt in that region, and that he considered the Markan Christians to be oppressed by the Jewish as well as the Roman authorities in the area. A comparison with Josephan material has made it plausible that these Christians were persecuted by Jewish authorities and occasionally handed over to the Romans. It has also become clear that such persecutions were normal practice in first-century Palestine whenever the behaviour of groups or individuals was considered a threat to public order. The latter observation leaves us with the question of whether the Markan Christians were also persecuted because their behaviour or ideas laid them open to the charge of subversion.

With regard to this question, it is important to note, first of all, that the Markan Christians are likely to have formed a community independent of the Jewish synagogue, since a number of Jewish religious rules were no longer observed by them. This is evident from the disputes Mark's Jesus has with Jewish representatives about Jewish rules on purity, fasting, and Sabbath rest in Mk 2:13-3:6 and 7:1-23. The fact that in these passages Mark seems to justify the Christian neglect of these Jewish religious regulations is an indication that within his community these regulations were no longer practised, or at least no longer strictly. Therefore, it seems right to assume that the Markan Christian community was independent of the Jewish synagogue and had its own rules, meetings, initiation rite, and community meal.1 In the eyes of leading Jews the Christian community must, therefore, have looked like a socially deviant group breaking away from Judaism.

1 Mark's use of πορεία in Mk 10:38-39 and 14:36 is evidence that the Markan community was acquainted with the custom of a periodical community meal, the Lord's supper. Mk 10:38-39 may indicate that they practised baptism as an initiation rite.
In leading Jewish circles, however, the Christians must have been viewed not only as a group which had seceded from Judaism; they must also have appeared to belong to that minority of the population that was inclined to social insurrection. The impression that the Christian community was a subversive movement could easily have arisen, given that the teaching of the Christians was understood to include certain elements that seemed to characterize them as the followers of an anti-Roman rebel. The Christians professed, after all, to be the followers of Jesus called the Christ, who around 30 AD had preached the imminence of God’s kingdom. He had been arrested and crucified, but, according to his followers, had been raised from the dead and vindicated by God, and would come again to gather his adherents at the final breakthrough of God’s kingdom. The Christian profession that Jesus was the Christ, as well as the fact that he had been crucified, might lead the Jewish leaders to expect the Romans to consider the Christian community a subversive movement.

The profession of the Christians that Jesus was the Christ could be taken as an indication of their subversiveness because of the connotations the title ‘Christ’ (‘anointed one’) had in contemporary Judaism. In the Jewish Scriptures and Jewish literature of the first centuries BC and AD, the phrase ‘his [i.e., God’s] anointed one’ is used mainly to designate royal persons. In the Jewish Scriptures, Saul and David, for instance, as future Israelite kings are called ‘anointed of God,’ that is, designated by God to become king over Israel. When in Judaism the expectation arose that a future king sent by God would restore the sovereignty of the Jewish people and reign over a free and independent Israel, the title ‘Christ’ could be applied to this future king. In Jewish literature from the Roman period this future king might be referred to as God’s Christ. In other words, in Hellenistic Judaism the title ‘Christ’ had political connotations, implying Jewish nationalist ideas and aspirations towards an independent

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2 For Saul, see, e.g., 1 Sam 12:3, 5; 24:7, 11; 26:9, 11, 16, 23; 2 Sam 1:14, 16. For David, see, e.g., 1 Sam 16:6; 19:21(22); 22:51; 23:1; Ps 17:50 (18:51); 19:6 (20:7); 27:8 (28:8). The word ‘anointed’ is used also, but less often, of a priest; see, e.g., Lev 4:5, 16; 6:22(15); 2 Macc 1:10. Only in very rare cases is anointment mentioned in connection with a prophet; see, e.g., Isa 61:1.