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**THE MESSIANIC SECRET: A NON-MESSIANIC
TRADITION OR MESSIANIC SELF-REVELATION?**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THEOLOGY
(BIBLICAL STUDIES) IN CANDIDANCY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF THEOLOGY**

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ABSTRACT

The hypothesis upon which this research is built on is that messianic secret motif in Mark's Gospel does not, in any way, imply a non-messianic consciousness on the side of Jesus. Rather, it is a messianic self-revelation which involves Jesus' re-education of his disciples to a new understanding of the messianic mission as it is actually embodied in his person. This hypothesis is geared towards and against William Wrede's messianic secret theory, which was propounded in 1901. Jesus, according to Wrede, was not conscious of his messiahship during his earthly ministry (this was a sensitive issue in gospel research at that time). Consequently, the diversified messianic secret texts in Mark's Gospel (the theory claims) are not historical but are literary, unified, and theological construction of Mark and the early church that explicate Jesus earthly non-messianic consciousness. Furthermore, the non-messianic tradition theory also explains the early church's contradictory belief in Jesus as the messiah (a belief in Jesus who never claimed to be Messiah and was never recognized as Messiah in his earthly ministry and the early church's belief in Jesus as Messiah after Easter).

The messianic secret theory is a clever hypothesis but ever lacking in evidence. For example, the so-called unified texts are historical and not unified but diversified with different purposes. Moreover, within the exorcism narratives which provided the basis for Wrede's theory, it is fascinating to discover that Jesus, instead of prohibiting the beneficiary of God's grace from proclaiming his messiahship, was told to go about proclaiming God's grace upon him. This irony, the writer of the

thesis posits, is the last stroke that broke Wrede's non-messianic tradition theory into pieces.

Subsequently, the exegetical study of Mark 8:27-33 reveals that the secrecy commands emanated from Jesus. The reasons for the command are in order to avoid the false public acclamation as a political Messiah and as a means of Christ's self revelation which involves Jesus' re-education of his disciples to a new understanding of the messianic mission as it was actually embodied in his person.

A critical evaluation of Wrede's messianic secret theory vis-à-vis messianic secret motif in Mark's Gospel suggests the following implications:

1. The so-called diversification of the secrecy motif (secret and public) is not the early church's and Mark's unifies theological construction aimed at explaining Jesus' non-messianic consciousness before the Easter event.
2. Jesus was conscious of his messiahship and he expressed his transcendent self-understanding with metaphorical language, symbolic gestures, and actions that, in the light of the Old Testament, had messianic overtones.
3. Jesus fulfilled the messianic role through his suffering on the cross, death, and resurrection. Subsequently, God exalted Christ to the highest position from whence he will come as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

In conclusion, if messianic secret theory is Jesus non-messianic consciousness as claimed by Wrede, then the writer of the thesis posits that there is nothing like that tradition in the Gospel of Mark. Mark's Gospel is about Jesus, the Son of God who was conscious of his identity and mission as the Messiah but cautiously kept his messiahship secret until the time for its revelation by God.

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Recommendation for Further Research

A thorough investigation of the messianic secret motif in Mark's Gospel and the exegesis of Mark 8:27-33, disclose that the motif is a larger stream with many tributaries. Some of these tributaries are the secrecy motif, the Christology motif, the revelation motif, the parable motif, the open-secret motif, and the discipleship motif. The thesis has discussed so much on the Marcan messianic secret motif, a device that explains the reason Jesus, before Easter, said so little and commanded silence about his messiahship as well as the reason the Jews did not acclaim Jesus as the Messiah. A pericope (Mark 8:27-33) was chosen as the basis and foundation upon which the writer disproves Wrede's non-messianic tradition theory.

This study is not exhaustive in itself. There are still areas to cover. The pericope actually starts from Mark 8:27 and ends at 9:1. However, for the sake of clarity and limitation of this thesis, the writer narrowed the study to Christology (Mark 8:27-33). The writer strongly recommends that a thorough and in-depth study be done on the rest of the pericope that is centered on discipleship (Mark 8:34-9:1). The whole pericope reveals that right perception of messiahship leads to the right perception of discipleship. Those who are disciples are those who are ready to risk their lives for the Master's sake and those who are faithfully following Jesus who gave himself for others. The writer of this thesis hopes to delve into this discipleship section as the dissertation for his doctoral programme.

In conclusion, if the messianic secret theory is Jesus non-messianic consciousness as claimed by Wrede, then, the writer of the thesis posits that there is

nothing like such a tradition in the Gospel of Mark. Mark's Gospel is about Jesus, the Son of God who was conscious of his identity and mission as the Messiah but cautiously kept his messiahship secret until the time for its revelation by God Himself.