

John J. R. Lee
***Christological Rereading of the
Shema (Deut 6:4) in Mark's Gospel***

(Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020, in *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*, 2, no. 533), xiv + 320 pages

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The main thesis of John J. R. Lee's revised Ph.D. dissertation is that Mark's Gospel by the use of monotheistic god-language makes a sustained argument that Jesus Christ is on par with God. The author is quite consistent in his avoidance of source criticism and bases his discussion on the final version of Mark, which he thinks would have been "Mark's intention" (246). This holds true for his approach to the Old Testament as well.

In the second chapter Lee gives a candid and valuable overview of monotheism in Second Temple Judaism as the background to Mark. He shows how Mark uses "one God language" (2) in the descriptions of God as "sovereign," "sole creator," and the "only object of cultic worship" (42). The author then argues that Mark reads the Shema (Deut 6:4) "with an interest in Jesus' unique status" (81), something that is unparalleled in Jewish sources, probably excluding earlier Christian texts like Paul's letters. He persuasively argues against claims that monotheism precludes other heavenly beings like angels, but this comes at the cost of a clear distinction between monism, henotheism, monolatry, and monotheism.

He discusses in chapter three the Christological use of the Shema in Mark 12:27-37. He links the conversation between Jesus and the scribe about the "one God" of the Shema with Jesus' reflections on the two Lords of Ps 110. He points to Mark's almost exclusive application of the term "Lord" to Jesus and to God. However, he fails to discuss the different vocabulary used for "the Lord" and "my Lord" in the Hebrew text of Ps 110 (see 142fn). This is part of a pattern of the author's minimal interaction with the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. Nonetheless, his argument for seeing Mark's Jesus being elevated above David is relevant here.

In chapter four he discusses the reformulation of Shema in Mark 2:7 and 10:18. His interpretation of the first of these is the most convincing argument in the book. In both texts he notes Mark's use of two parallel "one God" statements, which he directly links to Jesus' ability to forgive sins (2:7) and his ability to be good, as

only One is good (10:18). Both these characteristics are traditionally ascribed to the one God only, but are here extended to Jesus.

Lee describes Mark's claims for both Jesus' parity with God and his subordination to God in chapter five. These two claims are described as "paradoxical statements that are probable apart from each other but inconsistent together" (249). This chapter has a nuanced discussion of two tendencies in Mark's Gospel, the elevated Christology displayed in God language and the suffering and obedient Son of God who is crucified. Mark, Lee argues, manages to retain both paradoxical claims.

Lee's concluding claim is that Mark has "striking Christological use of monotheistic language" (255). This conclusion has its merits, and the dissertation is clearly formulated as a sustained argument for this main point. Lee's focus is on Mark's story, and his discussion of synoptic traditions is limited, as is interaction with Paul's letters. The author's argument may have been more plausible if he included these texts, and especially if he further developed the idea that Paul influenced Mark.

Methodologically, the author places his work in the category of composition and narrative criticism. The former theory is discussed at some length, but narrative theory is presented and used in a rather limited manner. The author very clearly presents his argument, sometimes to such a degree that the book becomes repetitive. However, this pedagogical approach makes the book accessible for those who are not Bible scholars, and it is readable for pastors and those with theological training. He regularly translates Greek texts, so that an educated layperson might also be able to read the book.