Disclosure of the messianic secret in Mk 14:62? A text critical response*

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ABSTRACT
The messianic secret is a major literary device in the Gospel of Mark. Mk 14:62 or 15:39 have been pointed out as the place where the messianic secret is disclosed. The passage of Mk 14:62 has been preserved in two readings: a shorter reading (εγώ εἰμι) and a longer one (ἔπαθεν ὄτι εγώ εἰμι). If the reading with egó eimi (a clear answer) is the original one, the messianic secret is clearly disclosed in Mk 14:62. If the reading with su eipas hoti egó eimi (a reserved answer) is the earlier one, the messianic secret remains until Mk 15:39. This study argues that egó eimi is the original version and that Mk 14:62 constitutes the formal disclosure of the messianic secret. The centurion's confession in Mk 15:39 is subordinate to the confession of Jesus in Mk 14:62.

1 INTRODUCTION
Exegetical literature about the disclosure of the messianic secret in the Gospel of Mark can be divided into two groups. Some exegetes find this disclosure in Mk 15:39, for the real identity of Jesus is revealed only after his death on the cross.¹ For others, the messianic secret is properly disclosed in 14:62 when Jesus himself reveals his identity.² Mk 14:62 has two readings. If the reading with egó eimi (a clear answer) is the original one, the messianic secret is clearly disclosed in Mk 14:62. But if the reading with su eipas hoti egó eimi (a reserved answer) is the authentic one, the messianic secret is preserved until Mk 15:39. The matter, obviously, has to be settled by a textual critical investigation.

The most important study devoted to the textual criticism of Mk 14:62 remains the one of Kempthorne (1977:208), who defends the shorter reading and concludes:

Apart from the obvious fact that the longer text better accounts for those of Matthew and Luke, and the hypothesis of accidental omission, the only factor in this

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* This text is a reworked part of my PhD/STD thesis defended at K.U.Leuven in December 1995.
² Lagrange (1942:376); Minette de Tillesse (1968:336); Radermakers (1974:377); Perrin
survey that has been found at all favourable to its originality is its awkward conjunction of second person singular and plural verbs. On balance then the general scholarly instinct (...) appears to be vindicated and the unequivocal reply 'I am' can be read with confidence.

Kempthorne presents three arguments. Firstly, the longer reading comes from Mt or Lk because of the locution su eipas. The expression occurs in Mt 26:25 (the narrative about Judas' betrayal). Secondly, legei in Mt 26:64 (instead of Mark's eipen) reflects a stylistic arrangement by Matthew to avoid an awkward repetition of eipen... eipas. Lastly, Luke's humeis legete hoti ego eimi (22:70) might have influenced a copyist who in reading su eipas in Mt 26:64 in the place of ego eimi in Mk 14:62 could have combined these two formulations with hoti as in Luke.3

However, one could argue that the awkward combination of the singular su eipas and the plural opsesthe would reflect a style of Mk (2:10-11; 9:43-50; 14:37-38). For Kempthorne this argument alone cannot ensure the originality of the longer text. Kempthorne's study has focused on the longer text, but he has not examined and criticised the arguments for and against the shorter one. I will, therefore, reexamine the two readings by paying equal attention to both. I will first give an inventory of the readings including their witnesses and will, then, proceed to an analysis of the external and internal criticism.4

2 INVENTORY

This inventory intends to present main variants, their witnesses and the preference of critical editions.


3 Kempthorne (1977:199-200, 202-207); see also Cranfield (1959:443-444); Anderson (1976: 331): "You say that I am': assimilation to the more reserved formulation of Mt 26,64'.

4 According to Vaganay & Amphoux (1986:15), textual criticism as applied to the New Testament in principle has a very precise subject. It has to choose the one which is more likely to represent the original reading from numerous readings of the manuscript tradition. Vaganay and Amphoux are conscious of how difficult it often is to make progress with textual criticism: "S'il est un sujet sévère, par excellence, même dans une Bibliothèque catholique des sciences religieuses, c'est bien celui de la critique textuelle. Les esprits les plus cultivés n'éprouvent pas toujours un goût très vif à s'initier aux arcanes de cette science. Certains exégètes de profession se contentent volontiers d'en avoir une légère teinture. C'est bon pour les rats de la bibliothèque!" (1986:9).
2.1 Variants of Mk 14:62
Shorter reading: egō eimi
Longer reading: su eipas hoti egō eimi

2.2 Evidence
The following presentation includes Greek manuscripts (Alexandrian, Cesarean and Western type), as well as early versions like Old Latin (OL), Syriac (Sy), Georgian (Geo), Armenian (Arm) and quotations from the Patristic period such as Irenaeus (Ir), Hegesippus (Heges.), Clement of Alexandria (Clem), Origen (Or).6

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6 Vaganay & Amphoux (1986:21) account three main sorts of witnesses that one has to examine in order to establish the text of the New Testament: Greek manuscripts, versions and ancient writers' quotations. With regard to the importance of Latin versions and of the patristic evidence, see Elliott (1992:199): 'As far as Biblical scholars and in particular textual critics are concerned, many manuscripts of the Latin Bible are of specific importance because they often testify to a text older than many surviving Greek manuscripts (in the case of the New Testament) or of the Massoretic or Septuagint text (for the Old Testament'). Ehrmann (1994:135): 'Scholars have begun to recognize the need for a fuller evaluation and deeper appreciation of the patristic evidence for the New Testament text'.
2.3 The critical editions

The shorter reading is preferred in all critical editions: Lachman (1842:302); Tischendorf (1869:384); von Soden (1913:105); Merk (1933:177); Legg (1935); Wettstein (1962:632); Westcott and Hort (1969:109); Scrivener (1972:127); Hodges and Farstad (1982:169); Aland et al. (1993:182); Nestle-Aland (1994:141).

The longer reading, though it does not occur in the texts of critical editions, is defended by a good number of exegetes: Streeter (1930:322); Lohmeyer (1937:328); Robinson (1957:48); Cranfield (1959:444); Feuillet (1962:155-156); Taylor (1966:568); Hooker (1967:164); O'Neil (1969:158); Martin (1970:179); Dunn (1983:127).

As this inventory displays, the shorter reading as well as the longer are attested by some witnesses. The shorter reading is favoured in critical editions, whereas the longer one is preferred by some exegetes. Although exegetes are not necessarily textual critics, their positions might be taken into consideration especially when they are supported by some evidence. It, thus, becomes more interesting to re-examine these two readings in the light of the external and internal criticism.

3 EXTERNAL CONSIDERATIONS

An analysis of external evidence relies on three main criteria: age, geographical distribution and the quality of the witnesses. The two readings of Mk 14:62 will be considered from these three perspectives.

2.1 Shorter reading

The shorter reading:
- is attested by early witnesses: OL, Ir, Heges (2nd century); Clem (3rd century).

7 The argumentation of all these authors is well represented by Taylor (1966:568): 'There is good reason to think that in xiv.62 Mark wrote οὐ εἶπεν γῇ ἔγει ἐμτ, for not only is this reading well attested (Θ fam.13 472 543 565 700 1071 geo arm Or), but it would also account for the text of Mt and Lk, and it illustrates the note of reserve regarding Messiahsip so frequently found in Mk'.

8 Delobel (1994:98–117) suggests the image of 'Siamese twins' for the understanding of the relationship between textual criticism and exegesis: 'It appears that both methods are indeed related to one another in many vital ways, and that in view of a sound historical-literary approach to the New Testament, they can hardly be separated. On the other hands, the two methods are different in their goal, their object and their procedure' (:116–117).
- is geographically well represented: Alexandria, Caesarea, Western.
- is attested by the witnesses of a very special quality: Ν, B, L, Ψ (witnesses of the first category according to the Alands).

3.2 Longer reading
The longer reading:
- is attested by an ancient witness: Or (3rd century).
- has a very limited geographical distribution: Caesarean type of text
- is represented by a witness of a special quality: Θ (witness of the second category according to the Alands).

3.3. Result
The shorter reading meets all three criteria (date, geographical distribution and quality of witnesses). It is obviously attested by the oldest witnesses (OL and Ir: 2nd century), visibly spread all over the regions where the primitive texts circulated (Alexandria, Caesarea, Western distribution, Syria) and was transmitted by manuscripts of the best quality (Ν B). The longer reading has no evidence which can challenge all the witnesses supporting the shorter reading. External criticism clearly favours the shorter reading.

4 INTERNAL CONSIDERATIONS
The criticism of internal indications proceeds by the study of the transcriptional probability which takes into consideration the textual alterations caused by the scribal activities in the text transmission and the intrinsic probability based on literary indices which can justify the adjustment of the text to reflect the words of the original author (author's style and intention, immediate or global context of the reading). I share Delobel's point of view about internal criticism (1995:105):

When one turns to internal criticism, one enters into the field of exegesis. Indeed, transcriptional probability takes into account the possibility of an intentional change as a result of the scribe's own "exegesis". Intrinsic probability asks about the author's intention and this can only be discovered by an exegesis of the whole passage.

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9 Guillemette & Brisebois (1987:189) affirm that readings supported by the manuscripts of largest geographical distribution are to be considered as the most primitive ones.
10 See Greenlee (1964:116-117); Metzger (1968:47); Guillemette & Brisebois (1987:185) regard the Alexandrian text as the best one in terms of quality. We should also notice that the Alexandrian text-type is not only of the best quality but also the oldest—it originates from the 2nd century (Wallace 1995:311).
4.1 Transcriptional probability

4.1.2 In favour of the shorter reading
- 'Lectio brevior potior'.
- Assimilation or harmonization.

4.1.3 In favour of the longer reading:
- Accidental omission.

4.2 Intrinsic probability

4.2.1 In favour of the shorter reading:
- The shorter reading fits better as an answer to the simple question in the preceding verse (14:61) which is not an οὐ or an οὕτω οὐκ οὖν question.
- The construction ή οὗ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν... σὺ εἶπα which appears in the longer reading is not typical to Mark.
- The shorter reading gets Jesus himself to disclose his messianic secret in Mk 14:62.

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11 The argument of lectio brevior potior is no longer sure, it has recently been put into question; see Royse (1979:139-161; 1995:246): 'the general tendency during the early period of textual transmission was to omit'; see also Head (1990:247).
12 The shorter reading cannot be regarded as an assimilation with the Matthean parallel as it is the case with the longer reading. According to Guillemette & Brisebois (1987:190): "Les leçons qui ne sont pas assimilées ou harmonisées aux passages parallèles ou au texte de l'AT sont sans doute les leçons les plus primitives". But, the argumentation based on a synoptic comparison has to be taken with much reserve and prudence; cf. Wheeler (1985:226): 'Source assumptions are intended for the purpose of testing relationship among texts, not establishing those same texts'.
13 Streeter (1951:322): 'the obscurity of the expression σὺ εἶπα itself, or the apparent hesitancy it might seem to imply in our Lord's acceptance of the title Christ, would favour its omission'. But in Lagrange's view, there is no place in Jesus' answer to the high priest for obscure expression nor for apparent hesitancy: "interrogé solennellement par le grand prêtre, il (Jésus) a cru devoir répondre nettement" (1942:402). Accidental omission might always be possible, but which accident is to be assumed to have taken place in this particular case?
14 Kempthorne (1977:204): '... the question is quite simply σὺ εἶ...; which must be taken as a completely open question. Since the question is probably seen by Mark as taking a new line rather than arising from the existing situation, οὐν or οὐκ οὖν would be inappropriate, and in any case uncharacteristic of Mark'.
15 Kempthorne (1977:200): 'this kind of repetition is not typical of Mark'. But, 'not typical' is not synonymous with impossible.
16 See Lagrange (1942:402); Lamarche (1966:157); Radermakers (1974:377); Minette de Tillesse (1968:336–337): "Là se trouve pour Marc l'aboutissement et le terme de tout son évangile... le secret est définitivement dénoué"; Perrin (1976:81.95): "It marks the formal
- The shorter reading with its clear answer justifies the answer of the high priest in the next verse: *ho de archiereus diarrexs tous chitonas autou legei, ti eti chreian echomen marturôn* (14:63).

4.2.2. In favour of the longer reading:
- The abrupt combination of the second person singular *su eipas* and the second person plural *opsesthe* accounts for an aspect of Mark's style (see Mk 2:10; 9:43-50; 14:37-38).17
- The longer reading illustrates Jesus' reserved attitude regarding the confession of his messiahship.18

4.3. Result
Turning to internal criticism, intrinsic probability again favours the shorter reading. On the level of transcriptional probability, none of the two readings deserves confidence. Regarding the shorter reading, *lectio brevior* is not a decisive argument since we know it to be more likely for the scribes to have been tempted to shorten a longer reading or to omit some words. The argument of harmonisation is not convincing either, for it is based on the synoptic problem which is of secondary value in textual criticism (a synoptic analysis cannot establish an original reading). Concerning the longer reading, its only argument—the accidental omission—has no fit justification based on transcriptional probability. On the level of intrinsic probability, arguments which appeal to Markan christology should be left out because they can be used by both sides. In the shorter reading the messianic secret is disclosed by Jesus himself in Mk 14:62, whereas in the longer reading that revelation is preserved and will only occur after the death of Jesus in Mk 15:39. Some critics are right when they think that Markan christology does not provide a clear answer to the textual problem (Kempthorne 1977:205; Wheeler 1985:228).

Two important arguments in favour of the shorter reading remain. Both are based on the immediate context. Mk 14:62 provides a simple and clear ans-
wer to the straightforward question of Mk 14:61; and Jesus' confession 'I am' raises a direct and clear reaction in Mk 14:63. The longer reading, however, is still supported by an argument based on the Markan style of awkward conjunction between second person singular and plural verbs.

5 CONCLUSION

The variant ego eimi is to be considered as the original reading. On the level of external criticism, it should be preferred because of its age (2nd century), geographical distribution (Alexandria, Caesaria, Western) and the quality of its witnesses (1st category). On the level of internal criticism, it is favoured by intrinsic probability because of the immediate context (14:61.63) which requires a simple and clear answer. The critical editions are right in siding with the shorter reading.\(^{19}\) The longer reading can be explained as an assimilation of the shorter reading with the parallel texts (Mt 26:64; Lk 22:70). Textual criticism supports an interpretation in which the formal disclosure of the messianic secret occurs at Mk 14:62. The confession of the centurion in Mk 15:39 depends on Jesus' confession in Mk 14:62: from the reader's point of view, the centurion repeats what Jesus has already confessed.

WORKS CONSULTED


\(^{19}\) One might notice that the shorter reading has resisted almost all criteria for establishing the original text as recently reviewed by Ehrman (1997:418-419) in terms of the number of witnesses that support the reading, the age of the witnesses, the quality of the manuscripts, the geographical spread of the manuscripts, the difficulty of the reading, conformity with the author's own language, style and theology. It is also interesting to point out that the shorter reading was not listed by Ehrman (1993) among the text of 'orthodox corruption' in the New Testament. This author demonstrates that the adoptionist, separatist, docetist or patripassianist heresies have led to many textual transformations during the early church period.


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