

# The *Huios Theou* in Mark 15:39 by Tae Hun Kim (1999)

This study is focused on the anarthrous *υἱος θεου* in Mark 15:39, the so-called "centurion's confession." The traditional interpretation, which also seems to be the majority opinion, reads the title as definite "the Son of God" despite the fact that it does not have the article. This interpretation hinges on the grammatical rule formulated by E. C. Colwell, that definite nominative nouns precede the verb usually lack the article. However, some have raised questions to the traditional interpretation of the anarthrous title, among them E. S. Johnson, that, 1) Colwell's rule still has enough exceptions to keep the question open, and 2) since the grammatical basis for a definite meaning seems less solid, the anarthrous title has to be viewed through the historical and cultural background of Roman centurions, and in this sense it seems implausible to ascribe a definite sense to the title.

I argue in the present study that there is another point in Colwell's rule that supports the traditional interpretation, i.e. proper names usually lack the article. This point has largely been ignored because it is valid only with proper names, and the title "Son of God" has not been understood as a personal name. I propose that the anarthrous *υἱος θεου* in Mark 15:39 is a title thoroughly consistent with the personal name of the Roman emperor Augustus, which was at the core of imperial cult, and thus its significance is also attested to from Roman historical and cultural background. Augustus was known as Caesar Divi F(ilius), which means "Caesar Son of God," from early on in his political career, and this phrase Divi F "Son of God" is not a mere title but a personal name with which no other emperor could be associated. Therefore, the two points of Colwell's rule together seem to provide a sufficiently plausible ground for interpreting the anarthrous title as definite.

A study into the background of the centurion in Mark 15:39 also seems to suggest that he was not as unlikely a vehicle for such a significant message as previously been suggested. He was an officer of auxiliary cohort in Judea and in this vein he was closer with other centurions in the New Testament who were described as receptive to the Gospel: Cornelius (Acts 10) and the centurion in Capernaum (Luke 7; Matt 8). Not only the grammatical justification based on Colwell's rule seems more solid than Johnson's criticism, therefore, but also the background information of the title seems to substantiate its usage and claim to authenticity.