READING MARK - PART II

A SEMIOLOGICAL READING OF MARK AS MYTHOLOGY

Abstract

This article is devoted to a semiological reading of the gospel narrative of Mark. It comprises an experimental reading of Mark as myth in terms of the theory developed in the article preceding this one. The identification of the implied reader with the narrational divine chronotope of the protagonist reveals the dialogical nature of significance as far as character, event and setting are concerned. Since the implied reader is informed about the divine chronotope from the outset, s/he can supply all the information necessary for the consuming of the myth. his article is devoted to a semiological reading of the gospel narrative of Mark. This article is divided into 5 parts. In the first three parts, I provide an experimental reading of Mark as myth in terms of the theory developed in the article preceding this one. Focusing on the function of character, event and setting within the narrative, I provide examples of a naturalized reading of the gospel narrative as myth in sections one, two and three. In part four, I explain the dialogical function of Mark 1:15 as it permeates other sections of the narrative. In the final section, I provide a brief conclusion.

1.   Character

Characterization or the constitution of character in Mark is mainly brought about through indirect means. Significance/dialogism brings character in contact with the narrational divine chronotope and in the process, adorns character with mythical quality. I provide a few examples.

■   *Firstly*, I address the *I am-saying* and the use of the *Son of man title* in Mark 14:62. The dialogism in the *I am-saying* and the *Son of man* self-designation becomes evident in Jesus' answer to the high priest (14:62; cf. also 14:21,41). The *I am-saying* is not only a confirmation of the high priest's question of whether Jesus is 'the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed one?'. Dialogically, it also links up with the divine *I am-sayings* of the Old Testament Lord of Israel in the tradition of revelation. In the myth, Jesus is affirmed narrationally to be the character who represents both the divine chronotope and God himself. The implied reader understands this saying as the moment of divine revelation and confirmation of the identity of Jesus.
The Son of man self-designation is another ambiguous term which is dialogically contextualised in favour of the myth by the reader. In the context of first century Judaism, this term can either just signify '*me*', '*I*', a '*person*', or it can refer to the apocalyptic *Son of man* (cf. Daniel 7:14), who receives

'glory and kingdom'. The rule of the *Son of man* is not only everlasting. It also brings about a situation where all peoples, nations and languages 'serve him'. In the myth, the character of Jesus is identified as this apocalyptic *Son of man* in the tradition, the one with absolute and ultimate authority and power over all worldly powers - not only in terms of his place in the divine chronology but especially as the one who is endowed with divine authority. However, the high priest character does not accept/consume either of these revelations.

Although the high priest comprehends the significance of the claim, it does not correspond to his own myth and Jesus is judged as being outside his myth. An ordinary human being claiming divine attributes is a blasphemer. Jesus' overt statement of his being and his function within the mythological divine chronotope on the other hand, dialogically reveals to both implied author and reader that Jesus is in fact the divine eschatological ruler who will in turn judge the high priest. This is to be consumed by the reader.

■   *Secondly*, Peter's denial in 14:71, 'I do not know this man you are talking about', confirms the understanding of the high priest, *viz.* that Jesus is only an ordinary man (*anthropos*). In the text, 'man' (*anthropos*) is contrasted with the mythological *'Son of man'* (*ho uios tou anthropou*). Dialogism/significance is here created to reveal that Peter does not accept or perceive the true nature of Jesus as *Son of man*. The reader, however understands that by this denial, Peter denies the *Son of man*, the mythological figure and eschatological ruler. It is then especially the reader to whom the divine chronotope is revealed. Peter's weeping after the crowing of the cock, here serves as an indication of his realisation of his error and an acceptance of the divine chronotope. As such, this event functions as a moment of repentance and faith.

■   *Thirdly*, the dialogical function of irony coerces the reader to affirm the nature of the Jesus-character. The mockery of Jesus by characters who do not comprehend the myth, culminates in the statements by chief priests and scribes in 15:31f:

> He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.

In the context of the narrative text, this is a mockery by the characters who are outside the myth. In the context of the myth, this description of Jesus is ironically true. He did save others by restoring them to full health - whether bodily, socially, or psychologically; he cannot save himself because he has to comply with the exigencies of the divine chronology; as the one who represents the divine chronotope, he *is* the Messiah, the King of Israel in the sense that he is establishing a sphere in which people exist who live in obedience to God (*vide* point 3 below). Nevertheless, he is not coming down from the cross because he has to die as he has prophesied (8:31; 9:31; 10:32f) - he obeys the divine chronology. Moreover, he is not just a miracle worker who expects people to see and believe in him for the sake of the signs either (cf. also 8:11f). The irony here reveals that he is both the Messianic King as well as the one who fully complies with the purpose of the divine chronotope.

■   *Fourthly*, the ambiguous rhetorical questions in the text which are not answered in the text but left open, may be provided with representations either in the (hi)story level or in the discourse level (cf. 8:36f). The reader who is conversant with the divine chronotope can fill it with the correct mythological

information. In the question of the opponents where the human and divine origin of the Baptist's baptism are contrasted (11:32), Jesus' evasive answer - 'neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things' (11:33) - can be answered by the reader. On the basis of the information that the reader has - not only of the narrational divine chronotope of the protagonist but also of the mythological world -, s/he can answer the initial question as well as comprehend the reason for the evasive answer of Jesus. The divine authority of both John and Jesus which has been revealed to the reader from the outset, facilitates characterization. Both John and Jesus are characters who act in obedience to divine exigency. As strategy, the evasive answer confirms this knowledge for the reader.

■   *Fifthly*, the interaction of character and divine chronotope becomes also evident in what Auerbach calls the 'figura'. Auerbach (1984:53) defines figura as follows:

> Figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons, the first of which signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second encompasses or fulfils the first. The two poles of the figure are separate in time, but both, being real events or figures, are within time, within the stream of historical life.

We find that certain motifs associated with the death of John the Baptist are associated with motifs which are present in the betrayal and suffering of both Jesus and the believing community. I mention one such motif. All three 'characters', are 'handed over/betrayed' (*paradidomi*) (1:14; 3:19; 9:31; 13:9,11f; 14:10f,18,21,41ff; 15:1,10,15) to the authorities. The *paradidomi* - motif and other motifs of suffering link up with related motifs of suffering at the hands of authorities in the Prophets and the Psalms. These motifs form what may be called 'the figura of the suffering righteous person'. Since the protagonist - who also represents the narrational divine chronotope in the myth - is vindicated in the resurrection, the figura is also vindicated. It is ultimately the resurrection of the protagonist that encompasses, fulfils and vindicates all expectations of John the Baptist and the community of believers (13:1ff) who suffers on account of their allegiance to the divine chronotope.

Dialogically, the Markan myth constitutes not only the figura of the suffering righteous, but also the figura of the traitor (cf. Marin 1980:91ff). Judas, to some extent Peter (who denies Jesus) and the religious officials who act as Jesus' (and the community's) opponents, represent the figura of the traitor of the myth. Since I do not concentrate on the alibi-aspect of the myth in this article, I do not develop the argument further.

It has become evident that characterization or the constitution of character in Mark is mainly brought about indirectly through techniques and textual strategies in which the presence of the narrational divine chronotope of the protagonist about which the reader is informed, dialogically reveals the identity of character. I now turn to the dialogism in events. Within the gravitational sphere of the narrational divine chronotope, events are imbued with mythical quality.

2.   Event

Together with characters and references to setting, events constitute the fundamental existents of the (hi)story of a narrative. In the discourse, an event

is primarily defined as a change of the condition of a system or the change of a set of elements characterised by a number of properties and relations at a given time or place (cf. Prince 1987:28,90). In Mark, the system of the myth is portrayed to remain constant. Events which alter the fate of characters in the narrative, occur to clarify and illuminate the nature of the myth even more. In this section I provide examples related to the unity created between events by the myth. This unity is created despite the presence of disparate stories incorporated into the narrative and despite the function of events that aim at the frustrating of the myth.

One of the characteristic features of Biblical narrative (cf. Alter 1981:3ff) and of the ancient novel is that apparently disparate events which find their way into brief narratives outside the myth[1] (each with its own range of diverse intentionalities) are included in the narrative and brought under control and ordered by mythical discourse in the communicative endeavour[2]. It is because the myth in Mark is perfectly manifest, that there is a link between these disparate stories. The myth ensures that they are interpreted in terms of the mythical discourse and the unified knowledge created by the mythological time-space. This function of the myth comes to the fore especially in Mark 6:17-29.

In the case of Mark 6:17-29, where we have one seemingly out-of-place-event which is inserted into the logical flow of the narrative, the divine chronotope is carried by John the Baptist who has been identified right at the outset of the narrative as the one who represents the divine chronotope. In order to ensure continuance with the linear development of the narrative, certain motifs drawn into the divine chronotope provide links with the story enveloping the seemingly out-of-place-event[3].

Mark 6:14-29 is an analeptic reference to the fate of John close to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry (cf. 1:14). However, the significance of the events portrayed in 6:14-29 is not to be reduced to a mere chronological reference in the (hi)story of the myth. The story of John's fate is couched in between Jesus' sending out of the disciples on a missionary journey (6:7-13)

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1. Many of the stories taken up by the Markan narrative existed prior to the writing of the narrative. The most notable, obviously, is the story about Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. As is clear from the so-called apostolic preaching (cf. Ricoeur 1990:240f on 1 Cor 15), this story (and other related motifs - cf. Dodd 1963:17) already existed prior to the writing of the Markan gospel narrative. What is equally notable, is that here too, the mythical signification, the influence of discourse, is the determining factor in the stories, e.g. the ideas and strategies related to divine intention in the brief passion narratives in the tradition which dialogically unify the narrative. This fact has brought Martin Kähler to regard the (Markan) gospel as a 'passion narrative with an extended introduction' - in terms of the present argument, a mythical passion discourse which has been furnished with a (hi)story (cf. Kee 1977:30,78ff & Ricoeur 1990:240ff).

2. The presence of the divine time-space (cf. point 5 above) in Jesus in Mark - which is determined by the 'signifying consciousness' - brings the variety of stories which must have existed in the oral tradition under control and orders them in the myth in such a way that all of them become 'shot through' with divine presence by virtue of the presence and activities of Jesus, the locus of the divine time-space.

3. As Alter (1981:3-22) has shown in his close reading of the insertion of the Judah-Tamar episode within the Joseph narrative in Genesis, this story which seems as if it is inserted into the larger narrative with seemingly no associative links with the larger narrative, is in fact closely related to it.

and their return (6:30f). This provides an indication of similarity between the fate of the disciples in their missionary endeavour and that of John. As I have shown already, the fate of John the Baptist (together with the fate of Jesus and the believing community) forms part of the figura of the suffering righteous person within the chronological and spatial spheres of the divine chronology. Apart from this figural link with the larger narrative whole in 6:7-33 we find more links that undergird this view.

In 6:11, just before Jesus sends out the disciples, he says to them:

> If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear (*akouo*) you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.

This statement links up closely with the fact that Herod Antipas heard (*akouo*) John gladly. Despite the fact that he feared John - because he knew that 'he was a righteous and holy man' - and although he was very perplexed when he listened (*akouo*) to him, he enjoyed listening to John. Nevertheless, he kept John in prison 'on account of Herodias' (6:17). Not only is the paradoxical position in which John finds himself (in view of the myth) clear to the reader - although Antipas enjoys listening to him, he still keeps him in prison. The link with the disciples' missionary journey is clear too. Antipas listens but he does not really hear (on discourse level) - where hear (*akouo*) on discourse level acquires the mythical quality of a readerly consumption of the myth and an obedience to the values espoused by the myth. In the context created on discourse level by 6:11, Herod's interaction with John constitutes an event where Herod in fact refuses to accept the mythical significance of John's proclamation.

Moreover, to be in prison for the sake of the myth, then itself becomes part of the motif on the discourse level. To be in prison - just like the believing community (13:9) - realizes the motif of the handed-overness (*paradidomi*) on behalf of the signification of the divine chronotope. Being in prison and even death itself, function as a witness or a proclamation of the divine chronotope. As part of the figura of the traitor, Antipas does not only hand John over (*paradidomi*). He also exhibits the traitor's double-bind: to listen to the content of John's proclamation but not to repent - as stated in 6:14 - from his sin for marrying Herodias (in terms of Jewish Law). In addition to this motif, even to listen 'gladly' to John but not to renounce his oath (to Salome in front of his courtiers, officers and leaders of Galilee) and to loose honour in the process, reveals a rejection of the myth. Antipas does not value the life of John as part of the divine signification. Antipas remains true to signifieds outside the myth: his commitment to Herodias and his own honour (by not reversing his oath in front of the officials). To hear - even gladly - but not to repent, leaves one outside the myth. This is only one example from Mark. Nevertheless, it has become clear that at least this one event is thoroughly dialogized in favour of the myth. The main event, the death of John, occurs to clarify and illuminate the nature of the myth even more.

3.   Setting

It has become evident in the explications concerning characterization and the function of events that the reader is continuously manoeuvred into a situation where she is informed about the divine chronotope, coerced to confirm and

accept the presence of the divine chronotope and invited to evaluate all characterization strategies and events on the basis of the revealed information concerning the divine chronotope. This strategy has the effect of continuously placing the reader in a sphere where s/he shares information about the chronotope. This strategy seduces the reader to inhabit the space created by the mythological chronotope. This strategy becomes even more obvious in the dialogical function of setting.

Setting is usually defined as 'the spatio-temporal circumstances in which the events in a narrative occur' (Prince 1987:86). In Mark, this includes a wide variety of locations[4]. Apart from the function of Galilee, the Mount of Olives and Golgotha which are dialogized in favour of the myth, many other settings are dialogically portrayed as being excluded from the myth (e.g. synagogue, temple, Jerusalem, etc). The spatio-temporal sphere created by the myth is a sphere or 'setting' which stands over and against these settings. This is a space which is continuously affirmed by the myth. It constitutes a spatio-temporal sphere which John and Jesus inhabit as well as the spatio-temporal sphere from which the reader is continuously coerced to make judgments and evaluations about the characters and events in the narrative as explained above.

For the myth, the specification of the divine chronotope is a setting, a space which the protagonist(s), the marginalized and ultimately the reader can inhabit, i.e. the space of the myth as a naturalized setting. In the narrative, this space is identified as 'the kingdom of God' (1:15, etc.). It is in this spatio-temporal sphere in the myth that a space is progressively mapped and to which the reader is invited. This space is naturalized as the setting of the myth. The naturalization of this setting reveals it to have a certain degree of historical, social and political significance. I provide three very brief examples.

The naturalization of the spatio-temporal sphere in the myth takes place through the time-historical advance of divinely driven history. The cause for the existence of the myth is explicitly naturalized as the historical result of the divine chronology (cf. the semantic equivalence created through syntactic parallelism between 'time' and 'kingdom of God' in 1:15). Furthermore, divinely driven history is not always observable to human eyes - it grows secretly. Since it is divinely driven, it grows (secretly) by divine decree and reaches proportions far greater than ordinarily expected (4:26ff,30ff). The final culmination point of the kingdom is when people realize or 'see that the kingdom of God has come with power' (9:1). This statement can either refer to the resurrection of Jesus towards the end of the narrative or to his eschatological parousia. In the context of the myth, the time-historical thrust of the divine chronotope (as it realizes itself in the fate of the protagonist) is vindicated in the resurrection of Jesus. As ultimate point of revelation in the myth, the parousia of the mythological figure of the *Son of man* might also be regarded as the culmination point of (divine) history. Be it as it may, the dialogical tension between these two views does not have to exclude one another. Both resurrection and parousia function in the myth as (divinely driven) historical points of revelation. The spatio-temporal sphere in which the protagonist(s) as well as the reader exist is a space which has a dynamic character. This space expands by virtue of divine exigency and is

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4. Cf. Malbon's (1986) very detailed study of the function of a selection of these spaces in Mark. Malbon distinguishes between geopolitical, topographical and architectural space.

teleologically aimed at the final revelation of this sphere in its full presence with the parousia of Jesus.

The naturalization of the spatio-temporal sphere in the myth takes place through the constitution and development of a social group. The nature of the social group who realizes the kingdom of God is such that it is not divided against itself (4:24). On the basis of the fact that certain people would understand it and others not, it constitutes a social group of insiders and outsiders (4:11). Dialogically, it stands over and against the mythical kingdom of Beelzebul (3:23ff), the geo-political kingdom of Antipas (6:23) and religious society as represented by the temple (2:16,18,23; 7:3f; etc). The entering of the kingdom (which is based on repentance and faith in the gospel of God - 1:15) or the loosening of ties with the 'adulterous and sinful generation' (8:38) is easier when one does not have ties which bind one to 'real world' practices, e.g. economic interests (10:23-25). As is evident in the hyperbolic statements in 9:42-49, all hindrances which could prevent entrance and existence in the social group, have to be removed. The way of entering and the nature of existence in the society living under the rule of God are the same - like a child (10:14f). The ethical requirements ordering this society are sprinkled throughout the narrative, e.g. obedience to the 'commandments of God' (7:8f, 10:1ff), the upholding of the value of human life (2:27f) and ultimately service. The summary of the activities of Jesus in 10:45 as the giving of his life as ransom describes the service required in this society. As such, the 'giving' of one's life according to the exigencies of the myth, posits the answer to the rhetorical question in 8:37 - *life* is given or committed to the exigencies espoused by the myth in order to gain the life that the myth promises. This unconditional service (giving of life) is grounded in the service of the protagonist as determined by the narrational divine chronotope. We see that the spatio-temporal sphere which functions as a space to be inhabited by the reader, has the character of a social group which is not only different from other social groups of the time. It is also brought about and affirmed through divinely sanctioned activities creating social ties between members in the group.

The naturalization of the spatio-temporal sphere in the myth is such that it's existence brings it into conflict with religio-cultural and -political practices which represent a space of existence which tend to thwart the space represented by practices advanced by the myth. By establishing contingency in the universal idea of creation (1:1,10,13; 4:35fff; 10:6), the myth establishes a sphere of existence under the rule of the Creator-God of Israelite and Old Testament history and theology. Since the Markan myth does not posit socio-political structures through which the social group can be controlled by political powers of the time, but instead constitutes a group where all power is relativized in favour of the rule of the Creator-God, such a myth comes into confrontation with any religio-political, social or cultural system which violates its basic tenets (cf. Smit 1993:19ff). The various conflicts in Mark reveal activities and practices which contradict political or religio-political systems of the time. Although the alibi plot-trajectory[5] also plays a role in

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5. In terms of the identification of the characters explicated above and the dialogical function of events, the major plot of the narrative of Mark is constituted by the presence of the divine chronotope. One can, however also identify two minor plot trajectories, *viz*. that of the opponents and of the disciples. It is especially these plot trajectories with their own story-level persons, actions and locations undergirding them which function simultaneously with the plot

Mark, the divine chronotope-trajectory is the dominant. These conflicts are not only foregrounded with the purpose to expose and disclaim religio-political and -cultural practices with which the mythical space is in conflict. The conflicts also indicate an alternative sphere - the sphere represented and brought about by the protagonist. It is to this sphere that the reader is invited to, i.e to inhabit it. Such a non-conformist sphere of existence would have been regarded as political in nature by political authorities of the time. The spatio-temporal sphere in the myth thus also has a political character.

In the last three sections I demonstrated the dialogical interaction between the (hi)story existents, character, event, setting and the narrational divine chronotope as it is brought about by the significance in the myth. My aim was to show that it is this interaction which facilitates processes which reveal the mythical quality of characterization, the mythical value of events as well as mythical space to the reader. It is primarily the significance/dialogism in the myth that brings about revelation of the mythical to the reader who is invited to consume the myth. Against the background of the argument so far, one last point has to be addressed - the function of 1:15 in the gospel narrative.

4.   Believing the myth

It has become clear in the discussion that it is due to the presence and function of dialogism in the myth, that the mythical discourse is repeatedly revealed to the reader. The purpose of this strategy throughout the narrative, is to make the reader an 'insider' to the revealed knowledge. The purpose of the gospel - if we view it from the angle provided by the theory used in this article - is then to bring the reader to a loosening of ties with the variety of views espoused by the secondary plot-trajectories and a strengthening of ties with the mythical. One can also regard this two-fold effect on the reader as an effect which brings about repentance from these views and belief in the mythical discourse. If this explication of the narrative is accepted, then the function of 1:15 becomes clear. Here, the implied author gives the floor to the protagonist to address the implied reader! It is then an overt statement by Jesus to the reader of what the purpose of the narrative is. The reader should repent and believe. Mark 1:15 states:

> The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news (of God).

The reaction to the presence of fulfilled time and the nearness of the kingdom of God should be 'repentance' and 'faith in the good news (of God)'. Since this statement is found in the mouth of Jesus - who has already been introduced as the agent who represents the divine chronotope (1:10) -, it represents divine intent or desire. The obvious expectation of the consuming reader is to find characters within the narrative who respond accordingly. However, this expectation is frustrated. The reader does not encounter one single instance where a character overtly responds according to this purpose/expectation. Neither is the nature of 'repentance' and 'faith in the gospel (of God)' clearly explained. It is only by reading through the narrative,

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of the divine chronotope. Sternberg (1990:87 and esp. 96ff) has pointed out that the simultaneity of other activities which are in conflict with that of the divine chronology, create parallel plots in Biblical narrative. These other plot trajectories can also be identified and described - but then as part of the alibi for the Markan gospel narrative.

and it is only by virtue of the continuous exposure to the mythical information that it dawns on a reader that 1:15 was addressed to the reader. Retrospectively, a reader realises that 1:15 indicates the expected response of the reader in every scene. It then becomes clear that this statement dialogically permeates the whole narrative. I provide a few examples.

I have already referred to the fact that Mark comprises a large number of brief narratives about Jesus, following one another with no obvious coherence. Furthermore, these brief narratives are fraught with gaps, unexplained conflicts, ironies, misunderstandings, and what Fowler (1983:53 & 1991:155ff) calls a 'rhetoric of indirection'[6]. This has lead Fowler (- 1991:209ff) to call Mark an 'opaque narrative' (cf. also Ricoeur 1990:242f). An opaque narrative creates a certain opaqueness, i.e. a veil with those who see/understand on the one side and those who do not see/understand on the other. In Mark, characters within the narrative - especially the disciples and Jesus' opponents - are on the side that does not comprehend the real nature and character of Jesus (as the one who represents divine time and space). The reader, however, is informed - if not about all detail, then primarily about the divine presence of God in and through Jesus. The result of this incongruity is that whereas the comprehension of the divine presence is continuously deferred for the characters within the narrative, it is revealed to the reader! This partiality in favour of the reader and prejudice against the characters in the narrative have a powerful effect on the reader. As a strategy which permeates the whole narrative, the reader is repeatedly coaxed to accept and inhabit the divine chronotope[6]. 'Repentance' may then be explained as the reader's turning away from the activities, attitudes and views that the uninformed and misunderstanding characters - who do not comprehend the presence of the divine chronotope - represent. The expression, 'believe the Gospel (of God)' may then be explained as an acceptance of, a commitment to or an inhabiting of the divine chronotope. Practically, this faith entails a commitment to all the various naturalized historical, social and political points of revelation not taken up by characters in the narrative (cf. point 3 above). This reading of 1:15 holds as far as the disciples and the opponents are concerned. I now turn to those incidents where Jesus interacts with other characters.

I have already pointed out that no character in the narrative complies with the expected response created by 1:15. However, even though in an unexpected way, suffering and marginalized people in the narrative do enter the divine chronotope. Those with demons/unclean spirits (1:21ff; 5:1ff); a leper (1:40ff); a paralytic (2:1ff); tax-collectors and sinners (2:13ff); a man with a withered hand (3:1ff); a woman suffering from haemorrhages (5:25ff); a Syrophoenician woman (7:24ff); blind men (8:22ff; 10:46) are cleaned, healed or restored to society. The significance or dialogism in the activities of these characters in the context of the myth is three-fold.

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6. Just as in the case of the book of Tobit (in A/DBNRSV or REBWA), we find two different levels of information and knowledge in Mark: the knowledge of characters in the narrative are confined to the level of ordinary human existence. On this level, characters in the narrative do not perceive that all the events in the narrative are driven by divine intention. On the level of the implied reader, the reader shares the knowledge with the implied author that all events are motivated by divine intention from the outset (cf. Tob 3:16f & 5:4f where the same strategy is employed). It is this disjunction between character and reader knowledge that coaxes the reader into complicity and faith in the gospel which Jesus represents.

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■   *Firstly*, they are not portrayed as people who seek Jesus because they have knowledge of the myth or divine chronotope which he inhabits and represents. Similar to the function of chance meetings in the ancient novel (cf. Bakhtin 1981:94ff), the protagonist meets some of them 'by chance' (cf. 1:21ff; 3:1ff). Others desire healing as from a miracle worker (cf. 2:1ff). The chance meetings and the expectations to be healed by a miracle worker bring the incongruity to the surface. The character(s) does (do) not know with whom they are dealing. The reader - who is informed about Jesus - knows and is coaxed to respond in the same manner.

■   *Secondly*, some characters approach Jesus and ignore religious purity laws (1:40ff; 5:25ff) or religiously defined ethnic codes (7:24ff), in the process[8]. It is not only the severity of their distress which is emphasized (cf. 5:26), but also their persistent effort to be healed and restored. They do not do this on the basis of a knowledge of the divine chronotope, but because of their existential predicament. It is especially evident in 2:1ff where people open the roof of a house in order to reach Jesus (cf. also 5:25ff; 7:24ff). In the process of their coming to Jesus and their violation of socio-religious, religio-cultural and purity codes, the desire of the marginalized and those who suffer, is foregrounded. The reader realizes that these characters are in fact 'forcing' their way into the divine chronotope without them realising it. The protagonist interprets this persistent and forceful action as an entering of the divine chronotope and as an indication of faith (2:5; 5:34; 9:23f; 10:52). The impact on the reader is to follow suit - i.e. to violate these codes and to become part of a new society within the sphere of the divine presence.

■   *Thirdly*, the various characters represent various spheres of existence which are drawn into the divine chronotope and 'cleansed' or restored in the process. The myth communicates a certain cleansing and restoration of society as represented in its multiple diversity on the level of the first order signs through the experience of these characters. The fact that these characters do not want to become part of the divine chronotope in the first place, but instead to be restored to health, (dialogically) signifies the fervent desire of this sector of society on the first level signification to be restored. The rhetoric of the narrative communicates restoration in the process of entry and as the mode of existence in the myth[9]. It becomes evident to the reader that health and social restoration are only possible in the myth. An example of social restoration is present in the scene where Jesus dines with tax collectors. Here, tax collectors are as rich exploiters or slaves exploiting their authority, restored to

8. Jesus as the one who exists in the narrational, divine chronotope also violates these codes - cf. 1:21ff; 1:40ff; 1:29ff; 2:1ff; 2:13ff; 2:15ff; 2:23ff; 3:1ff; 5:1ff; 5:25ff; 5:35ff; 7:1ff; 7:17ff; 7:24ff; 7:31ff; 8:22ff; 8:1ff.

9. Cf. too the allegorical significance of the (gradual) restoration of sight as the restoration of a perceiving of the myth in the envelope structure of 8:22-26 and 10:46-52 which obviously influences the text.

community life in the myth. According to Josephus (cf. Ant. XVII.xi.2; XX.viii.8; XX.ix.2), taxes and tithes were often collected by slaves employed by local (geo-political and religio-political) authorities. When Jesus as the representative of the divine chronotope dines with them, the event does not only signify their restoration to community life in the myth, but also the authority and power of the divine chronotope to transcend such influential practices as that of slavery and/or the tax system. Although it is doubtlessly true that tax collectors were rich - slaves in these positions enjoyed both a measure of freedom and a certain (misuse) of the authority which their masters conferred on them -, in the Markan myth, they are primarily not an example of rich exploiters who are redeemed. In coherence with the marginalized nature of all the other characters whom Jesus encounters and who are restored, the tax collectors as slaves (and not as rich exploiters as such) represent a sphere of existence which is cleansed and incorporated into the divine narrational sphere of the divine rule.

With these additional examples, I hope it has become clear that if we understand Mark 1:15 as an utterance made by the protagonist (Jesus) to the reader, and also that it is an utterance which dialogically permeates the whole narrative, then the command in this verse has an important function with regard to the reading of the whole narrative. As such, this verse states the desired effect that the intentional consciousness in the narrative hopes to evoke from the reader. Its primary function, therefore, is twofold. It does not only overtly communicate to the reader what the purpose of the gospel narrative is. It is also an indication of the basic rhetorical strategy which impregnates the text in virtually every utterance.

5.   Conclusion

In this article, I have demonstrated the dialogical interaction between the (hi)story existents, character, event, setting and the narrational divine chronotope. My aim was to show that it is this interaction which reveals to the reader the mythical quality of character, the mythical value of events and the mythical space which is to be inhabited by the reader. It has also become clear that it is primarily the function of the divine chronotope, especially as it is dialogically realized in character, event and space, that draws the line where characters on the one hand fail to comprehend the divine chronotope represented by the protagonist. On the other hand, all the information necessary for the consuming of the myth is revealed to the reader. This strategy in the discourse is then in principle dialogical in nature. As such, the strategy facilitates a realization of the overtly stated purpose stated in Mark 1:15.

Moreover, if the various conflicts in which the protagonist are involved are only read as events that provide symbols and examples or an alibi for the myth, the critic renounces and discounts the myth as both possibility and reality. Much more is at stake in the consuming of the myth. If Mark is treated as an interpretive narrative, harbouring its own myth dialogically, the myth is consumed and inhabited by the reader as intended. The consuming reader 'lives the myth' (Barthes 1973:139). As such, the reader's living of the myth entails a response where his/her 'answering' or 'authoring' (cf. Holquist 1986) creatively inscribes the divine chronotope in life.

These analyses are merely experiments with a particular semiological theory. And as we know, theories are not ends in themselves. They are just utensils and tools which may assist us in our quest to understand an ancient canonical writing like the Gospel of Mark better. I hope that this article makes such a contribution.

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