A SUGGESTION ABOUT THE GENRE OR TEXT-TYPE[1] OF MARK

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Abstract

The aim of this essay is to reformulate the identity of the genre of the Gospel of Mark as a proper interpretive model in the light of recent developments in literary theory and hermeneutics. In order to do so, a brief reception history of the gospel genre (as history; as kerygma, as narrative) is given and basic concepts of genre theory in relation to hermeneutics are discussed. Special attention is given to Fowler and Hirsh's ideas on the process of generic formation and identification. In this light, the genre of the Gospel of Mark is identified as 'narrative' (as broad genre) by taking the middle position between 'sui generis' and parallel genre (to have similarities with the first century Graeco-Roman literature). According to Scholes and Kellogg (1966:12), narrative here means a literary form as 'an amalgamation of history, myth (kerygma) and fiction (narration)'. Especially if we apply appropriate mode concepts like history, kerygma, and drama to the broad genre of the Gospel as 'narrative' the gospel genre can be identified as 'realistic narrative' or 'historical or historiographical narrative' (history mode); 'kerygmatic or kerygmatized narrative' (kerygma mode); 'dramatic or scenic narrative' (drama mode). This generic perception exerts a dynamic influence on our reading experience by opening up many new possibilities in the interpretation of the Gospel of Mark.

1. Introduction

Currently many biblical critics are increasingly drawing attention to the importance of genre in understanding the meaning of Gospels. The identification of genre is the first step of interpretation or reading whereby the reader approaches a text with certain expectations. The way the reader perceives the genre of a text determines the way to read it, what to expect in

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1. There are a number of terms used in the discussions of genre theory and criticism: genre, form, type, kind and so on. The use of the appropriate term is very complicated for biblical scholars especially because of the wide range of the term (cf. Burridge 1992:38-39). For the sake of convenience here 'genre' or 'type' will be used, according to Hirsch's notion (1967:71): 'It will be convenient to call that type which embraces the whole meaning of an utterance by the traditional term *genre*'.

it, and what may be learned from it (Tolbert 1989:48; cf. Morgan & Barton 1988:4). The aim of this essay is to reformulate the identity of the genre of the Gospel of Mark in the light of developments in recent literary theory and hermeneutics. In order to do so, I will first give a brief reception history of the Gospel and then discuss genre theory in relation to hermeneutics. Lastly, I will present the genre of the Gospel as a proper interpretive model.

2.   A brief reception history of the gospel genre: reading 'as...'

If the history of interpretation of the Gospel of Mark is a 'history of reading' or a 'reception history' (Fowler 1991:1), it must be also a history of reading 'as'. As far as the Gospel's reception history is concerned, traditional biblical scholars paid attention mainly to its historicity or its factuality, by regarding the Gospel as a history, i.e. a history of the life of Jesus. Hence, many scholars attempted to stitch together pieces from all four Gospels in order to write a kind of modern biography of Jesus. Within this framework, the Gospel was sometimes compared to ancient memoirs, lives and biographies.

Since the rise of historical criticism, however, this idea has been strongly challenged. Form-critical studies in particular concentrated on the forms of the individual units and their *Sitz im Leben* by understanding them as a collection of individual disparate units or pericopae, and considered the Gospel as the *kerygma* of the early Church rather than as history (Vorster 1980:48-49). According to Bultmann (1952:86), the Gospel of Mark is the unique literary form which developed from the kerygma. In fact, the form critical variant, as Robinson (1971:22) states, was that 'the gospels are kerygma, not history'. The Gospel, thus, was understood as 'a unique phenomenon in the history of literature', 'an original creation of Christianity' (Bultmann 1969:89). If this is the case, the Gospel has no parallel works in its contemporary literary environment, for 'it was merely a by-product of the collecting together of the individual units within the oral tradition', i.e. kerygma. The idea of 'no parallel works' in particular has been strongly challenged by many scholars (Talbert; Shuler; Aune; Burridge; etc).

Form-critical studies, nevertheless, made an important contribution towards understanding the Gospel as a new literary genre, even if they neglected the significance of the genre of the Gospel as a whole by dealing mainly with the forms of the small individual units or pericopes. Of course, some scholars insist that form criticism turned scholarship away from genre analysis, because of the inability of form criticism to explain the phenomenon of the Gospel as a whole (cf. Robbins 1980:376, 380; Burridge 1992:11-12), while Muilenburg (1969:2) said that one of the lasting benefits of form criticism was that 'it addressed itself to the question of the literary genre represented by a pericope'. In addition, we must not deny the contribution of form criticism in emphasizing the importance of the social setting in which a literary entity may originate, develop and be maintained (cf. Knight 1974).

The rise of redaction criticism, however, led to the reintroduction of the question of the genre of the Gospel as a whole by regarding the evangelist as editor/author. Even though redaction criticism did not immediately and necessarily raise the question of genre, the revival of interest in the evangelist as author with a creative theological intention in writing the Gospel opened the door to the questions about his creative literary intention, including the matter of genre (Burridge 1992:14-17; cf. Petersen 1970:25 in Shuler 1990:463).

After the rise of redaction criticism and also as a result of the (new) literary critical studies of the Gospel, the question of genre became one of the most important issues for the interpretation of the Gospel and led to a flood of proposals in many and varied attempts to find parallels and analogies with Graeco-Roman literature and/or Jewish literature.

In this situation, there is 'a new appreciation of the inseparable relation of form and content in all texts as well as of the individual writings viewed as literary wholes or aesthetic objects in terms of their overall structure' (Wilder 1971:xxii).

Among these attempts there is also a growing awareness that the Gospel is narrative, in which 'theology and proclamation, history and interpretation form part of the functions of the text as a process of communication' (Vorster 1983:91). While the generic preoccupation with the Gospel has so far focused mainly on their content, this literary-critical view is more concerned with their form (though it also deals with the content), the *retelling* of a traditional story - whether history or kerygma.

Thus, the genre of the Gospel has been variously interpreted in its reception history according to the reader's perception of the nature and function of the text. In this case, a proper consideration of genre theory in relation to hermeneutics or literary theory sheds light on our discussion of the identification of the gospel genre (cf. Burridge 1992:24, 53).

3.   Genre theory and (biblical) hermeneutics.[2]

Most literary or biblical critics agree that genre considerations are intrinsic to text interpretation. Genre is considered as a principle of meaning and understanding, as Hirsch (1967:76) claims:

> All understanding of verbal meaning is necessarily genre-bound.

Barton (1984:16) concurs:

> It is not too much to say that it is impossible to understand any text without at least an implicit recognition of the genre to which it belongs. All texts must be texts of some kind or type: no one can, or ever could, sit down to write simply 'a text'.

Therefore, we need to explore genre theory in relation to hermeneutics.

3.1   The nature of genre

Genre has a dual nature: one is text-bound; the other is history-bound. Genre is not only taken to reside within the text as a specific realization of a certain mode which is supposed to be universal for writing and reading, but is also taken as being determined by historical situations (Hauptmeier 1987:400). Thus, genre is affected by the interrelation of text and context. Because of this dual nature of genre, genre theory is complex and varied (cf. Hauptmeier 1987).

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2.   For a detailed discussion see Hirsch 1967:68-126; Firmat 1979; Gerhart 1977, 1982, 1988, 1989; Osborne 1983; Aichele 1985:77-102.

3.2   The origin of genre

The origin of genre, like the nature of genre, is also bipartite: it is theoretical and at the same time historical; or deductive and inductive. In tracing the origin of genre, therefore, it is impossible to divorce deduction and induction or theory and history. We cannot arrive at a genre description from history without knowing beforehand what a genre is like and we also cannot recognize a genre without its history, without a knowledge of its particular instances (Wellek 1970:252). This is like a kind of hermeneutic circle.

3.3   The notion and function of genre.

The notion and function of genre have changed according to the theoretical developments of literary theory or hermeneutics.[3] By and large, this can be described in four categories: genre as imitation (universe); genre as taxonomy (text); genre as convention (author); genre as production (reader).

■   *Genre as imitation*

Classical and neoclassical genre theory called prescriptivism (from Plato and Aristotle until almost the nineteenth century) considered genres as fixed forms with their own rules and proprieties. By reflecting the Platonic concept of the 'Ideal Forms' governing all things.[4]. this theory divides poetry into three fundamental kinds according to their mode of imitation or representation: drama; epic; lyric.

■   *Genre as taxonomy*

From classical prescriptivism genre theory moved to nominal descriptivism, i.e. the literary critical method of 'classification' of literature. According to Frye (1957), literature can be classified properly because of a self-regulating system in its essence. His generic classification, despite the potential usefulness and positive influence of this idea, has been criticized as involving arbitrariness and reductionism (Scholes 1974:118-27; Todorov 1973:8-23). Such a concept of genre as merely a taxonomy is not sufficient to understand a text.

■   *Genre as a set of conventions*

According to structuralist critics[5] genre is a 'conventional function of language' (Culler 1975:136). For them genre is like a system of shared

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3.   In this respect, Ricoeur (1973) states that concepts of genre hermeneutics have developed in three stages: (1) a classificatory system (the classical period); (2) an epistemological approach, characterized by a diachronic interest in history (Schleiermacher and Dilthey); (3) an ontological approach, centering on the synchronic problem of being (from Heidegger through Gadamer to the present). On this issue see Osborne 1983:1-27.

4.   For a critique on this concept see Perry 1967:18-25.

5.   Structuralist critics seek mostly an exact parallel between literary and linguistic competence from an analogy between language and literature by adopting Saussure's distinction between *langue* (language as system) and *parole* (language as speech) and Wittgenstein's idea of the 'rules of a game'.

grammatical rules in a *langue* that we must master in order to master a *parole*. Hirsch (1967:93) calls this [an intrinsic genre] a 'set of conventions'. For him genre means not only 'the entire system of usage traits, rules, customs, formal necessities and proprieties which constitute a type of verbal meaning' (92), but also a conventional set of expectations for both the speaker and the receiver (80).

This conventional concept of genre occupies 'the middle ground between descriptivism and prescriptivism' (Burridge 1992:35). It is more than a nominal description of the work, for it not only influences the author's actual writing, but also forms the reader's expectations in advance. In this regard, both writing and reading are always genre-bound. This generic conception serves 'both a heuristic and a constitutive function' in the whole process of interpretation, i.e. in meaning and understanding (Hirsch 1967:78). However, the problem here is how we can find or construct the intrinsic genre. In fact, Hirsch is rather vague in dealing with this.

■   *Genre as production*

Genre is said to produce as well as to identify meanings. Especially since the rise of post-structuralism or reader-response criticism, the concept of genre as production of meaning[6]. has become an important approach. In this case, the reader plays a very active role. Therefore, 'generic analysis at its best is always in the service of an hypothesis; that is, genre reveals itself to be under the guidance of explicit presuppositions and assumptions which struggle against one another and which change history even as history changes them' (Gerhart 1988:34. For a fuller argumentation see Gerhart 1989). Hence, the generic identification of a text is very complex and also gives rise to different interpretations. Even in the process of identifying the intrinsic genre, in fact, the interpreter's hypothetical reconstruction is inevitable. The interpreter's recognition of modes and rhetorical stance towards a text especially have an effect on the recognition of the genre. Through the process of reading the text as well as through the study of various extrinsic genres in the light of the context out of which it emerged, we can nevertheless avoid to some extent inadequate generic expectations or identifications. In conclusion, the interpreter must properly consider these four notions[7] in genre interpretation rather than focusing on one particular notion; otherwise his/her reading could be reductive.

3.4   Generic formation and development

In literary history, no literary form emerges in a special act of creation *ex nihilo*. In fact, all work is dependent on what precedes it; anything completely new would be incommunicable. In order to identify the genre it is therefore necessary to examine the genre's origins, i.e. the social and cultural setting

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6.   For the discussion of genre as a principle of production see Gerhart 1988:34-40.

7.   Hernadi (1972, 1976) understands these four generic notions in terms of two intersecting axes: the 'mimetic axis of representation' to focus on the structure of the work and its representation of a world; the 'rhetorical axis of communication' to center upon the author and reader. In a similar way, Aichele (1985:77-102) understands these generic notions in relation to the two hermeneutical circles: the circle of semantics and the circle of pragmatics.

within which it arises and the literary setting within which it is placed (Doty 1972:422-28; Osborne 1983:27; Guelich 1983:218). As Fowler (1974:77-78) points out, even *parole* (a unique contingent communication) may also modify previously shared conventions to initiate new conventions, though it depends on the former. It then in turn becomes *langue* for subsequent *paroles*. Genre has been developed through history. Every work depends for intelligibility on a prior extrinsic type and by means of such an imitation, a new genre emerges (Fowler 1974:83-88; 1982:164-7). According to Fowler (1974:90-91; 1982:160-64), a new genre is produced through the three stages: the *primary* stage to assemble the various features into a recognizable group until a formal type emerges; the *secondary* stage to produce literature based consciously on the primary model(s); the *tertiary* stage to import new features through their reinterpretation in a different direction. Such generic formation and development, as Scholes & Kellogg (1966:11) argue, is like a kind of cross between a biological and dialectical process:

> Individual literary works do not always die off, though their forms may cease to be viable. Nor is their reproduction a matter of natural selection. Literary evolution is in some ways more complex than biological evolution. It is a kind of cross between a biological and dialectical process, in which different species sometimes combine to produce new hybrids, which can in turn combine with other old or new forms; and in which one type will beget its antitype, which in turn may combine with other forms or synthesize with its antitypical originator.

Understanding the process of this generic formulation and development is very important in identifying the gospel genre.

3.5   The procedure of generic identification

In the light of genre formation and development discussed above, three points must be considered in the process of the generic identification of a text:

▪   The interpreter examines first the social and cultural setting out of which the genre emerged, for 'genre participates in the culture within which it originated and is clarified by that historical context' (Osborne 1983:27). In this case, the issues of the authorial audience and orality play an important role in identifying the gospel genre.

▪   In the light of such a historical context, then, the interpreter examines the potential extrinsic genres.

▪   Finally the interpreter examines the internal cohesion of the text which encompasses the whole through the reading process (the study of structure) and identifies the genre (or the intrinsic, originally intended genre). In many cases, of course, the work may be identified as a mixed genre.

According to Hirsch (1967:77, 88-89), the interpreter begins with a vague and broad idea of the genre, at a broad and heuristic level, open to correction (broad genre as a preliminary genre), and then defines the intrinsic idea of the utterance for textual meaning more exactly through the reading process, at the intrinsic level where reading confirms or corrects his or her initial expectations (intrinsic genre). We may represent this process[8] as follows:

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8.   But, as Burridge (1992:41) points out, it is naturally not a simple and linear process.

Broad genre -(through the reading) → Intrinsic genre → Textual meaning

Fowler's account of the three levels at which genre conceptions operate - mode, genre and subgenre - is also helpful in understanding the procedure of generic identification. According to him, the concept of mode[9] is considered as the one operating at the higher or broader level discussed above (cf. Burridge 1992:41). In this case, mode is more wide-ranging, vague and permanent; it never has a particular overall external form or structure and includes only a selection of the genre's features (Fowler 1982:106ff). The mode was abstracted from an existing concrete historical genre (closely linked to specific social forms) and may then generate a compensating multitude of new generic forms[10]. There is also the lower or narrower level of subtypes or subgenres. Most genres may be divided into subgenres, usually according to specific details such as subject-matter or motifs and occasion (Fowler 1982:111-12). In this case, subgenre is mostly determined by a particular subject or content, while genre is a mix of many features of both form and content. At the central level, there is (fixed) genre: this is also described as 'historical genre' (56). These three levels in understanding the development of the genre may show 'movement outwards, with genre in the center' (Burridge 1992:42). The study of modes and subgenres, especially, should be dealt with as preliminary considerations to understand the procedure of generic identification.

3.6   Hermeneutic circle: whole and part

Generally the genre of a text as a whole can be determined by looking at its individual parts. But the proper interpretation of each part of the text cannot occur without a proper notion of the whole. This is called 'the hermeneutic circle': 'the whole can be understood only through its parts, but the parts can be understood only through the whole' (Hirsch 1967:76). According to this concept, our idea of the whole text (generic idea) and our understanding of the individual parts interact with each other. That is, 'we can only know what the whole text says by considering each bit of it. Yet, the proper interpretation of each part of the text depends on having a proper appreciation of the whole' (Tuckett 1987:70). The concept of genre as a whole helps the interpreter to avoid the danger of thinking of genre as defined by one or more particular features or themes of the text. To identify the genre of a text, therefore, the interpreter should consider many features including both content and form (cf. Burridge 1992:42-43).

In summary:

> Genre is a crucial tool for the proper interpretation of a text in that it provides a form of communication between author and reader, giving a conventional set of expectations for both composition and interpretation.

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9.   The concept of mode, in fact, is very elusive. Baird (1972:386-87) distinguishes genre, form and mode as follows: form is a literary device to analyze the small units representing the materials out of which the literary work is composed; genre is a category for classifying literary works as a whole; and mode is even more elusive, noting characteristics which - sometimes artificially - unite various forms or genres under a single rubric.

10.   According to Fowler (1982:108; 1974:92), any genre or kind can be extended as a mode and also generate a compensating multitude of new generic forms. For further distinction between mode and genre see Fowler 1974:92.

As we have seen in its nature and origin, generic recognition is context-bound as well as text-bound. In order to identify the genre of the text, therefore, we must consider both the potential extrinsic genres in the light of the historical context out of which it emerged and the internal cohesion of the text, or both external factors and internal factors. Our understanding of the process of genre formation and development in particular sheds a special light on the generic identification of the Gospel. By understanding the genre as a whole, furthermore, we must consider many features as signalling the genre in order to avoid the danger of thinking of the genre as defined by one or more particular features or themes. From this perspective, we will turn to the question of the gospel genre.

4.   The Genre of the Gospel of Mark

Studies of the genre of the Gospel are very complex for various reasons: firstly, as we have already seen, this is due to various philosophical and hermeneutical views on genre theory. Secondly, it is because there is no extant ancient literature that exactly parallels the Gospel (Tolbert 1989:55-56). Thirdly, it is because there are various subgenres in the Gospel like miracle stories; parables; sayings; apocalypse; passion narrative. Lastly, it is due to the interpreter's various generic views or conceptions of a text according to his or her modal recognition and rhetorical stance.

The last point especially plays a crucial role in identifying the genre of a text. In many cases, the generic concept or identification depends on an interpreter's modal recognition of and rhetorical stance on the nature and function of the Gospel. A single narrative can be identified as consisting of several genres. According to Todorov (1977:239), any narrative contains a number of 'points of focalization', and by selecting from among these points, the reader determines the meaning of the work - its identity, its genre.

Therefore, any story can be read in different ways, according to different generic identifications. 'The variety of genres attributed to Mark arises from the different hermeneutical choices which scholars make, probably the result of different theological or methodological commitments' (Aichele 1989:53). Of course, this does not mean that there is no intrinsic genre in the text. What matters here is 'to understand it correctly,' or at least adequately, rather than 'to understand the text more deeply and more creatively ' (Thiselton 1977:323). Since the intrinsic genre is also a kind of heuristic product reconstructed through the dynamic interaction between text and reader, however, we never totally exclude recognition of the multiple nature of the gospel genre.

4.1   The opening line of Mark (1:1) as a descriptive title

According to Smith (1990:5), the *incipit* ('a brief phrase to introduce a document') in the Hellenistic period has been identified and utilized as a form of ancient title. Such *incipits* would be intended to introduce and define or describe the document as a whole. The current title of the Gospel of Mark *(The Gospel According to Mark)* was clearly attached later, so the opening line of the Gospel of Mark (1:1) might well have been intended to function as a title to the whole Gospel (Smith 1990:6; Boring 1990:47-53). Generally the

opening line of a book or document provides a clue to its genre: e.g., the phrases 'Once upon a time' and 'Good evening, here is the news' (Burridge 1992:43, n 68).

Recently MacQueen (1990:146) pointed out the importance of 'the role of opening words in establishing content and genre' in ancient iiterature like the Homeric epics: 'Indeed, the role of opening words in establishing content and genre is apparent as early as the Homeric epics, each of which begins with a single word of great thematic resonance'. In this regard, Mk 1:1 is not an exception. The word 'gospel' in the title, especially, refers to 'the contents and subject matter of Mark's narrative as a whole, the story of Jesus, the saving act of God in his Son Jesus the Christ, his words, deeds, death, and resurrection, as these are expressed in the following document and as they continue to be preached in Mark's own time' (Boring 1990:51). That is, it refers to 'the whole story that is about to be narrated, not just to the introduction' (Ibid). In this case, the opening line of Mk 1:1 can hint at text genre by reference to particular content (Jeanrond 1988:87, 98).

4.2   The modal recognition of the Gospel

Generic identification is determined mostly on the basis of the recognition of the specific mode of a text. This modal recognition is not understood as a fixed form; rather it changes historically not only on the basis of the philosophical premises on the nature or mode of a text, but also in terms of the rhetorical stance of the interpreter. This fact has been proven through the brief reception history of the Gospel. Because each mode concept has been changed by the interpreter's philosophical premise of his time, the gospel genre can be identified differently in terms of its mode concept. The modal recognition of the Gospel can be divided into three categories: history; kerygma; narrative.

4.2.1   History: If history, what kind of history?

'History' is quite an ambiguous term. In gospel studies, it is an ambiguous term which may mean both *Historie and Geschichte* (Robinson 1971:22-23). According to Lategan (1985:9-10) 'the biblical text is historical in a twofold sense: it is historical phenomenon in its own right, but it also refers to specific historical events in the past to which it claims to be a witness of some kind'. Here he distinguishes 'history of events' (*Ereignisgeschichte*) from 'history of structure' (*Strukturgeschichte*) and then insists on the *interrelatedness* of the two types of history in biblical texts. In biblical texts, 'history can never be merely the *bruta facta*, but in the narration of events a certain measure of interpretation is already implied' (9). (For a discussion on the nature of history as narrative see Ricoeur 1978; Vorster 1984:114-17.)

The Gospel is 'history-like' rather than history itself, even if it does preserve and is composed from historical traditions about Jesus of Nazareth (Frein 1992:16). According to R M Frye (1979:76-77; 1971:206ff), the Gospels are considered under the generic category of *'dramatic history*[11] [my italics] in

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11.   According to Frye's definition, 'a dramatic history is a literary work which presents a basically historical story with economy and narrative effectiveness, which remains essentially faithful to the historical tradition but which may alter elements of that tradition as appears necessary in order to represent *multum in parvo*, and which is designed to convey important

which there is an essential but not a photographic or univocal fidelity to history' and not as biographies, annals or chronicles. Most probably the history that the evangelist dealt with was too familiar to his (intended) audience for him to be able to distort or falsify it, even had he wished to do so. In order to present a particular message convincingly to his audience in a particular situation, he chose to write dramatic history rather than simply traditional history. Hence, he might rearrange chronology, select incidents diversely, shift emphases, and present episodes in distinctive lights (cf. Frye 1971:209). In this case, events and episodes may to some extent be rearranged thematically. As Aune (1990:18) points out, 'most Hellenistic historians were *dramatic historians* [my italics], trained in rhetoric rather than historical research; they blended fact with fiction in a way that modern historians often find mystifying and certainly unacceptable'. Renaissance views of history were also far removed from modern views, and were probably designed for moral instruction. This is also true 'even in modern views of history writing as a factual record of what really happened' (Tolbert 1989:32). If the Gospel of Mark is understood as originating from such a concept of history, the Gospel may be considered under the generic category of 'dramatic history' (Frye) or 'an apocalyptic historical monograph' (Collins).

4.2.2 Kerygma: What kind of kerygma?

Form-critical studies - especially in the case of Bultmann - understand the Gospel(s) as kerygma, not as history. Here kerygma means merely the myth or made-up story of early Christianity. In fact, however, as Robinson (1971:22) points out, 'kerygma [in the Gospels] refers both to the *content of preaching*, in which sense Dodd primarily used it, and to the act of *proclamation* [my italics], in which sense Rudolf Bultmann primarily used it'. (Dodd, of course, never separates the act of proclamation from the content of preaching.) Hence, both Jesus' message and the apostolic preaching must be called kerygma, 'both are known to scholarship only in terms of historical research, as the historical Jesus and as the historical reconstruction of the primitive church's kerygma' (23-24). In a strict sense, therefore, the history with which the Gospels as kerygma had directly to do was not the exact historical Jesus but rather the history of the transmission of the apostolic traditions about Jesus. According to this kerygmatic mode, the Gospel can be called a 'kerygmatic history' (Robinson 1982:63) or a 'kerygmatic story' (Kingsbury 1979).

4.2.3 Gospel as Narrative

Brewer's comparative study of the Gospels and folktale sheds an important light on understanding the Gospels as narrative:

> The relationship of the narrative is primarily to the message about the hero, only secondarily to the actual events. What happens is that such events as there were generated the message, but the message then shapes the telling of the events (1979:45).

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insights and understanding (both factual and interpretative) to a wide audience' (Frye 1971:219, n 28).

In the process of the production of the Gospel the actual events generated the kerygma or oral tradition by the faith of the early Christian communities and in turn the kerygma shaped the (re)telling of the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection (cf. Culpepper 1984:471). From this point of view, the Gospel should rather be considered as narrative, an amalgam of history, kerygma and fiction (or narration). According to Scholes and Kellogg (1966:12), early written narrative like epic as an amalgam of history, myth and fiction means the (re)telling of a traditional story. Thus, the Gospel as the (re)telling of the traditional gospel story of the early church has a narrative form.

This narrative character of the Gospel calls into question both kerygma and history as the only distinctive characteristics of the gospel genre, by dealing with the narrative world of the Gospel and its narrative techniques (Vorster 1980:58-61, 1983:91-93). Reading the Gospel as narrative requires from us more than a knowledge of history and/or kerygma. It requires us to involve ourselves 'in a narrative world, created by the author, which is related in various ways to historical facts or realities' and to allow this narrative world to transform our real world[12] (Culpepper 1984:472). By reading the Gospel as narrative, the readers are led to view Jesus in new and challenging ways, to evaluate various responses of the characters to him and his teachings, to make certain judgements and commitments. The power which the Gospel has through (re)telling can be demonstrated by its rhetorical effect. Through (re)telling, the Gospel leads us to involve ourselves in the narrative world, to experience Jesus, to see a new vision of reality, and to make commitments about who we are and how we live (Culpepper 1984:473). Therefore, reading the Gospel simply as history and/or kerygma can involve a reduction, while reading it as narrative leads us to enter the narrative world and have a more dynamic and abundant reading experience in connection with our real world. Thus, understanding the Gospel as narrative opens 'new possibilities in the interpretation of different aspects of the Gospel', by putting the emphasis on both the integrity or coherence of the text and its rhetorical effect on the readers (Vorster 1993:388).

Many traditional biblical scholars have so far fought energetically to defend the historicity of the Gospels by considering them as history itself according to the value judgements of positivistic historiography. This defence comes from the vexing fear that if the Gospels are not historically accurate accounts of the events of Jesus' life, then they cannot be true. But, in fact, in the ancient world there was no clear-cut distinction between history and fiction (cf. Scholes & Kellogg 1966:12ff). Culpepper notes: 'History understood in the modern sense as that which survives the scrutiny of sources and emerges as the most probable reconstruction of cause and effect sequences of events, is both foreign to the mindset of the biblical writers [in the ancient world] and too limited a genre for the communication of religious truth. Truth and history are neither synonymous nor antithetical' (1984:475). In this case, of course, it does not mean that the Gospel can never be history. Rather, the Gospel means the story of faith which is based on the historical events. Even if the Gospel of

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12.   In this act of reading or imagination, of course, the active role of the reader or the reader's world cannot be totally excluded. These two worlds (the narrative world and the reader's real world) very dynamically interpenetrate in the process of reading: 'Grasping the biblical stories' significance may enable us to see how to tell our story; bringing our story to the biblical stories may also fill out our grasp of their own +significance' (Goldingway 1993:5-6).

Mark followed tradition and 'historical events' closely, it is however not the history itself, i.e. the *bruta facta*. This idea, in fact, never could be a problem to the intended empirical audience who were already familiar with tradition and the historical events. Through (re)telling the traditional story of Jesus, they understood the gospel story - in relation to their particular situation - more vividly and dynamically.

4.3   Three possible proposals about the gospel genre

Generally there are three possible proposals about the generic category of the Gospel of Mark:

- a new genre, i.e. *sui generis*;

- a similar genre to other works having parallels and analogies with first-century Graeco-Roman literature and/or Jewish literature;

- a new genre which utilizes earlier genres. (I will discuss what kind of genre most closely fits the hermeneutical model for the Gospel of Mark.)

4.3.1   A new genre, i.e. *sui generis*

The form critics' understanding of the Gospel as *sui generis* has been maintained and modified by many scholars: the early church's myth (Bultmann); an expanded kerygma (Dadd; Guelich; Stuhlmacher); a passion narrative with expanded introduction (Kahler); an early Christian rhetoric (Wilder; Kennedy; Olbricht); apocalyptic drama[13]. (Perrin). In terms of these views, the kerygma of the early church created the 'gospel' genre. This 'gospel' genre is the unique literary creation of early Christianity or the evangelist with no parallel works - in content or form - in its contemporary literary environment, depending only on the traditions about Jesus (Achtemeier 1978:340). The idea of 'no parallel works' in particular has been severely rejected by many scholars. Burridge (1992:12) criticizes this as follows:

> From a literary point of view, it is nonsense. It is hard to imagine how anyone could invent something which is a literary novelty or unique kind of writing. Even supposing it were possible, no one else would be able to make sense of the work, with no analogy to guide their interpretation: 'One cannot imagine a writer successfully inventing a genre for him or herself; for a genre to exist some form of reader recognition, of social acceptance, is necessary'.

There is no purely new genre in literary history. In this regard, to be sure, the Gospels are not *sui generis* of *ex nihilo*. When we speak of a new genre in literature, it generally means a re-creation rather than a totally new creation. As Malbon (1986:16) states, a genre 'could only be relatively *new* since *genre* suggests conventional expectations in regard to form, content, and context'. If we consider the intelligibility or communicability of genre (Wellek & Warren;

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13.   Although this name looks like a similar genre to others of its time, Perrin (1970:4, cf. 1982:233) understands the Gospel as 'the unique literary creation of early Christianity'.

Hirsch), the assumption of the generic precedents of the Gospel is very natural and reasonable.

4.3.2 A similar genre

Against the idea of genre as *sui generis,* many scholars have made various attempts to find the Gospels' generic roots in contemporaneous literature by investigating the Graeco-Roman and Jewish milieu of the Gospels. These various attempts can be listed under two categories:

  ■ *Graeco-Roman literature:* memoirs of the Apostles (Justin); aretalogy (M Smith; J Z Smith); Graeco-Roman biography (Votaw; Talbert; Shuler; Aune; Chance; Burridge); biographical aretalogy (J M Robinson); Greek tragedy (D L Barr; Bilezikian; Stone; Puskas); ancient drama (Standaert; Stock; Beavis); Hellenistic popular literature (Tolbert); Xenophon's Memorabilia (Robbins).

  ■ *Jewish literature:* biography of prophet (Baltzer; Lührmann); Jonah story (Schweizer); Elijah-Elisha cycle/narrative (Martin; Roth); Elisha story (Brown); Exodus account (Hobbs; Kline); Passover haggada (Bowman); Jewish midrash (Gundry); Midrashic lectionary (Carrington; Goulder).

These various proposals to some extent make positive contributions towards a generic understanding of the Gospel of Mark. However, it has been noted that they mostly involve reductionism in omitting or devaluing other aspects or parts of the gospel story by emphasizing so strongly one aspect or part - thematically or materially - of the Gospel (Tolbert 1989:59). To the Markan readers familiar with Scripture or Jewish literature and Graeco-Roman literature, the Gospel would to some extent have partial parallels with them. However, the Gospel does not correspond easily and naturally to any one particular model. Evans (1983:155) points out this problem clearly:

> The problem that besets all of these proposals is that Mark simply does not parallel any one particular paradigm completely enough. Indeed, some of the paradigms seem to be composites modelled after Mark by the modern interpreter. Either some elements are not to be found in Mark or the proposed paradigm fails to account for important elements. The lack of scholarly consensus, as revealed by the diversity of proposed paradigms, is indicative of the problem.

Hence, many scholars have recently tried to find a unified or synthesizing genre or model (Tolbert 1989)[14] or to define the Gospel as a new genre (Williams 1985)[15] or to develop and modify their previous proposals -

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14.   Tolbert's proposal (1989:59) is quite interesting: "In fact, if one could combine an aretalogy's focus on miracle-working, a biography's focus on the character of Jesus, and a memorabilia's focus on the teaching cycle between Jesus and the disciples, one would have almost created an adequate generic formulation for the Gospel of Mark." She then suggests the popular Greek ancient novel as a 'remarkably synthesizing genre' to encompass such various characteristics by examining stylistic similarities between it and the Gospel (65ff). As Black (1992:383) points out, however, her justified assessment about such a synthesizing character of Mark does not fit 'her ascription of the Gospel to a particular genre of which we possess few extant specimens and with which Mark's plot exhibits practically no similarity'.

15.   Williams insists that Mark is a new literary form as the conjunction of Hellenistic biography and biblical parable. Even if to describe the whole Gospel as parable is 'not a

especially as ancient biography - to express Mark's story as a whole with a unified theme (Aune 1990; Shuler 1990; Burridge 1992). But, despite their sophisticated explanations and many positive features, the adoption of one particular model as the genre of the Gospel still does not fit completely enough the generic concept as an overall hermeneutical code to interpret its parts as well as to understand the Gospel as a whole. Nevertheless, we need to consider the precedents of the gospel genre.

4.3.3   A new but synthesized genre

There is no totally unique and new genre without any generic precedents in the history of literature. Even if this were possible, no one else would be able to understand the work, with no analogy to guide their interpretation. Perry (1967:18-27), however, argues that every piece of literature is *sui generis* with a distinct literary form of its own, in the sense that each literary work is the product of unique and conscious authorial creativity as well as the product of the outlook and interests of a particular society. Especially if we consider the particular community or social pattern[16] as well as the unique nature and content of the Gospel, the need for the creation of a new genre or rhetoric is inevitable (Wilder 1971:18-39;[17]. Kennedy 1984:7f, 104; Olbricht 1990:224-26). Nevertheless if we consider also the author's desire to communicate with the readers, we cannot imagine that a genre would emerge from a literary vacuum without any generic precedent.

The concept of a new genre, as Wellek and Warren (1970:226) suggest, can be compounded of the sense of *novelty* and the sense of *recognition*: 'The totally familiar and repetitive pattern is boring; the totally novel form will be unintelligible - is indeed unthinkable. The genre represents, so to speak, a sum of aesthetic devices at hand, available to the writer and already intelligible to the reader'. Every new genre, as Hirsch (1967:105) insists, goes through the 'process of assimilation' in the sense of that two (or more) old types can be *amalgamated* or an existing type can be *extended*.

This is also true in the case of the Gospel. The emergence and maintenance of a new community as well as the Gospel's unique nature or subject matter explicitly demand the emergence of new genre or rhetoric. Nevertheless if we accept the concept of genre as something intelligible or communicable, an acknowledgement of its generic precedents is inescapable. These two aspects are by no means mutually exclusive in the generic identification of the Gospel.

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recognizable historical use of the term'(Tolbert 1989:57), this gives some theological insight into understanding the Gospel by emphasizing the metaphorical meaning of the Gospel: how Jesus in the Gospel becomes the subject of his own parable (cf. Donahue 1978; Kelber 1983:211-20).

16.   In this case, Jamieson's idea (1973:165) that the establishment and maintenance of the definable institutional forms of rhetoric - institutional genres - serve to maintain the institution's identity is very helpful.

17.   By emphasizing the particularity of language and language events evidenced in the N T, Wilder (18) insists on the novelty of early Christian discourse and language forms: 'the coming of the Christian Gospel was in one aspect a renewal and liberation of language. It was a "speech event", the occasion for a new utterance and new forms of utterance, and eventually new kinds of writing.' According to him (21), the basic character of the Gospel is 'revelation, not persuasion'. This idea is adopted by Kennedy.

Against Kennedy's definition of the Gospels as (radical) early Christian rhetoric, hence, Levison (1991) recently suggested New Testament texts - especially the Gospel of Mark - as early Christian rhetoric that utilizes classical rhetorical persuasion, by taking the middle position[18] between two extreme categories: classical rhetoric (persuasion) and radical Christian rhetoric (revelation). Thus we can expect the possibility of 'a third something' in identifying the genre of the Gospel, as Aune (1987:12) suggests:

> In fact, every book of the New Testament reflects to varying degrees an accommodation between Jewish religious and ethical values and traditions and Hellenistic forms of linguistic, literary, rhetorical, and conceptual expression. The Christianity of the New Testament is a creative combination of Jewish and Hellenistic traditions transformed into a tertium quid ('a third something'): that is, a reality related to two known things but transcending them both.

This means that the genre of the Gospel is a new genre which adopts and utilizes literary or rhetorical conventions from some earlier generic models, instead of following one particular generic model. This, of course, does not mean a new genre as merely a mixture of earlier genres (Aune 1981:46). It takes the middle position between being *sui generis* and a similar parallel genre. In this case, the narrative mode as a broad genre to include both content (story) and form (narration) is a most appropriate one in identifying the gospel genre. For, as we have already seen, the early written narrative like epic is the (re)telling of a traditional story as an amalgam of history, myth (in the case of the Gospel, kerygma) and fiction (or narration).

One important question raised here, however, is what kind of generic precedents this new genre (i.e., 'gospel' narrative) utilizes. In this regard, we once again need to pay attention to Aune's insightful remarks on the mixed character of the gospel genre (1990:14, 16, 37):

> In short, while the *content* of the Gospels is couched in distinctively Jewish and Christian categories, both *form* and *function* are typically Hellenistic.

Or

> the message is Christian; the background of the message, the soil in which it grew, is Jewish; but the form is Hellenistic.

Moreover, the consideration of the authorial audience of the Gospel provides an important clue in exploring the generic precedents of the Gospel: Mark's authorial audience as non-Jewish or Hellenistic readers who lived in oral society and had some knowledge of Christian tradition and Scripture. In genre identification, moreover, we cannot separate content and form, internal factors and external factors; we must consider both of these. Fowler's idea on the generic development and formation in particular is very helpful in understanding the generic precedents of the Gospel.

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18.   Wuellner (1991:99) also suggests that we 'find and establish some new middle ground that will help us in resolving the current impasse in our genre debates'.

- Kerygma as the framework of the gospel narrative: within the tradition

In the process of assembling the various independent oral traditions into a recognizable literary whole, the evangelist most probably followed a basic kerygmatic framework for the gospel narrative as shown in Acts 10:34-43[19] (cf. Dibelius 1935:15-22; Dodd 1936:46ff; Guelich 1983:209ff; Stuhlmacher 1990:491ff). As Guelich (1983:203) states:

> In this manner, Mark's Gospel emerges as a written expression of the Christian message about what God was doing in history through Jesus Christ - the kerygma which Mark calls the *gospel* in 1:1'.

In this case, of course, the shape and content of the Gospel do not reflect in a strict sense the literary creativity of the evangelist, for these were basically formulated by the traditional outline of the kerygma and the traditional material of the early church's preaching (the *primary* stage). Nevertheless, the final form and content of the Gospel, as Aune (1981:45) insists, reveal the process of the 'literaturization' (the *secondary* and *tertiary* stages; in this case, a genre transcends its source). The genre itself, that is, is modified when it is moved from the oral to the written level (Knight 1974:115). According to such a developmental process, the Gospel of Mark must be 'literaturized' from an expanded kerygma as shown in the apostolic narrative preaching on Jesus.

- Generic precedents of the Gospel: outside the tradition

In the external process of the 'literaturization' of the Gospel - from kerygma to narrative or from oral to written - the evangelist most probably produced the gospel genre by adopting the thematic, structural and rhetorical features from certain generic models familiar to the authorial audience rather than as an analogical genre based on and extended from one particular model. In this case, the Gospel conformed recognizably to the conventions of contemporary literature, i.e. biblical, Jewish and Graeco-Roman (cf. Robbins 1980:390). The study of the contemporary literatures in connection with orality and rhetoric sheds light on understanding the structural and rhetorical features of the Gospel. Therefore, it is natural and reasonable to consider its generic precedents in contemporary literature.

- Biblical Judaic influence

Judaism is the 'mother-tradition of (early) Christianity' (Gerhardsson 1990:505). The message of early Christianity presented Good News shown in and through Jesus Christ from Israel's God in a new time. Thus the Gospel emerged as a new genre or rhetoric in the bosom of the Jewish mother-tradition (cf. Gerhardsson 1990:509). Particularly the fact that the Gospel echoes the Old testament is clear from the quotations and the many allusions to Old Testament writings (Vorster 1993:387).

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19.   Some argue that this kerygmatic outline is Lukan composition dependent on the framework of the gospel story as it is presented by Mark (Koester 1989:367).

■   Hellenistic influence

When we consider the educational and cultural background of the authorial audience of Mark, Hellenistic influence in the formation of the Gospel is undeniable. The Gospel follows structural and rhetorical conventions of Graeco-Roman literature. Therefore, exploring the Graeco-Roman literature contemporary with the Gospel of Mark helps to discover some of the structural or rhetorical conventions and patterns that might have existed in the generic repertoire of the authorial audience. For example, the examination of the structural and rhetorical features in ancient drama (Standaerdt; Stock; Beavis) and the popular ancient novel (Tolbert) and also to some extent ancient biographical literature (Talbert; Schuler; Aune; Burridge) sheds important light on the interpretation of the Gospel.

5.   Conclusion

Instead of identifying the gospel genre as *sui generis* or one particular genre of contemporary literature, taking the middle position that it is a new genre which utilizes literary/rhetorical conventions familiar with the authorial audience provides the appropriate model for interpreting the Gospel as well as resolving the current impasse in our generic debates on the Gospel. Especially when we consider the uniqueness of its content and community, the emergence of a new genre is inevitable. Yet, it did not arise in a literary vacuum, but most probably utilized literary/rhetorical conventions from contemporary literature for its effective communication. As we have seen, furthermore, identifying narrative as the broad genre of the Gospel is more reasonable and natural in understanding the Gospel. If we apply each modal recognition to this broad genre, the gospel genre can be identified as 'realistic narrative' or 'historical or historiographical narrative' (history mode); 'kerygmatic narrative' (kerygma mode); 'dramatic narrative' or 'climactic narrative' or 'scenic narrative' (drama mode).

These genre recognitions, in fact, are not mutually exclusive; rather they should be understood as interdependent and complementary. As we have pointed out, this narrative mode of the Gospel requires from us more than a knowledge of history and/or kerygma. It demands the transformation of our values and actions, i.e. our symbolic world. By thus reading Mark as narrative, we involve ourselves in the narrative world and allow this narrative world to transform our real world. This generic perception exerts a dynamic influence on our reading experience by opening up many new possibilities in the interpretation of the Gospel of Mark.

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