

# TRANSFORMATIVE DISCOURSE IN MARK'S GOSPEL WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MARK 5:1-20<sup>1</sup>

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The study investigates Mark's Gospel as a witness to early Christian theological anthropology. It reads the text as an example of 'transformative discourse' in which the rhetoric of the Gospel works in synergy with its anthropology (the view of humanity that is assumed and promoted by it). The theological anthropology is implicit, but recoverable, and dynamic in that it is oriented toward change. Mark communicates with his audience in ways that challenge them and lead them toward transformation. The story of the man with a legion of demons (5:1-20) functions within this discourse primarily as a most dramatic example (symbolic and perhaps paradigmatic) of the kinds of transformation available to people through positive encounters with Jesus.

Chapter one argues that a strong element of Mark's purpose is the transformation of the reader. While Mark has a strong Christological focus, this is complemented by an apologetic and kerygmatic focus on the message of the 'good news' (for both Christians and others) and a paraenetic focus on his readers in order to encourage repentance and faith. In all three areas Mark works towards reader responses that will be transformative for them.

Chapter two deals with the rhetoric. Following Richard Burrige, it views the categories of classical rhetoric as blunt instruments for getting to the heart of Mark's project, but these are acknowledged and incorporated into an alternative multi-faceted rubric that identifies six means by which transformation of the reader is promoted:

1. The 'rhetoric of proclamation' is Mark's presentation of the *euangelion* as the 'good news' that calls for response.

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<sup>1</sup> Stuart T. Rochester, 'Transformative Discourse in Mark's Gospel with Special Reference to Mark 5:1-20' (PhD Dissertation, Durham University, 2009). Supervisor: Dr Stephen C. Barton.

2. A ‘rhetoric of demonstration’ is implicit in the Gospel’s narration of Jesus’ healings and exorcisms, which brought change in people’s lives. Readers are able to ‘identify’ with characters in the stories and make their own responses.

3. Elements of Jesus’ teaching constitute a ‘rhetoric of instruction’, an explicit and direct appeal to the audience to embrace new understandings that are transformative.

4. Robert Fowler’s phrase ‘rhetoric of indirection’ encompasses some literary and stylistic elements of the text: irony, metaphor, paradox, ambiguity and opacity all provoke the audience’s engagement with the text.

5. The ‘rhetoric of metaphor’ examines the extended metaphor of blindness and deafness, which refers to perceptions of Jesus and of the message of the Gospel; this rhetoric is pursued through the use of the metaphor in parables, healing stories and direct speech, and through ironic interaction of readers with characters who perceive correctly or incorrectly.

6. The ‘rhetoric of performance’ is not so much Mark’s construction as a characteristic of the original oral reading-context, which heightens the effects of the rhetorical elements, and in which their emotional impact can be maximized by the dramatic way the text is presented.

These six elements interweave to produce a composite transformative discourse that potentially impacts its audience in a rich variety of ways.

Chapter three, a detailed exegesis of the Gerasene demoniac story (Mark 5:1-20), highlights its significant contribution to this transformative discourse. Rhetorically, the story illustrates many of the ‘facets’ previously mentioned: it is ‘good news’; it is emotionally charged; it demonstrates the supreme authority of Jesus and a radical transformation of a demonized man, with whom readers can identify in a variety of ways. Anthropologically, the story visualizes an eschatological turnaround for a humanity suffering under demonic oppression, with liberation into a new future—a life of following Jesus.

Chapter four places the pericope into its larger literary context. The story echoes several themes already presented in the Gospel, and foreshadows others yet to be developed. It contributes significantly to three areas of content. In Mark’s ‘rhetoric of perception’ the demoniac stands with other minor characters in providing a contrast to the disciples and those who fail to see, hear and understand Jesus correctly.

In the ‘rhetoric of purity’ the exorcism reinforces Jesus as the victor in the cosmological conflict with Satan, and foregrounds his ‘cleansing’ activity that restores social relationships, relativizes concerns for ritual purity, and makes room for Gentiles in the kingdom of God. In the ‘rhetoric of discipleship and proclamation’ the story exemplifies the ‘rescue’ aspect of the ‘good news’, and the healed man exemplifies faithful discipleship and proclamation. Overall, the story dramatizes the eschatological perspective of the Gospel: Jesus is the agent of God’s ‘apocalyptic rectification’ of the world.

Attention to these narrative and rhetorical elements of Mark’s text makes possible a fuller account of its theological anthropology than other scholars have given. Chapter five makes use of the categories of distortion and restoration, which appear to be fundamental components of the narrative grammar of the Gospel. The Gospel presents humankind as created but essentially distorted, with distortion seen in terms of impurity, individual and communal sin, and self-centredness. But Mark also communicates an anthropology of transformation that is driven by Jesus’ eschatological perspective. The transformed eschatological person implied by the text is the ‘model’ reader who responds wholeheartedly to the text’s urging to understand, repent, believe, enter the kingdom, and follow Jesus. Several aspects of Mark’s vision of humanity are identified; all involve relatedness to God and fellow humans. The restored *anthrōpos* is a ‘child’ with a renewed God-oriented self-understanding. Communal ramifications follow from images of the eschatological community as family, flock, temple, and renewed Israel. In short, the possibility of radical personal and communal transformation that is allied to discipleship of Jesus energizes the rhetorical thrust of the Gospel. The Gerasene demoniac, it is suggested, can be seen as a paradigm of both the human predicament and of restored humanity. What happens to the demoniac typifies the dynamics of the Gospel’s theological anthropology.

Chapter six rounds off the study by observing that the transformative potential of the text is available to be realized by present-day readers who approach the text with a hermeneutic of transformation.

The thesis claims to fill a gap in Markan studies by highlighting the transformative potential of the Gospel, specifying the rhetorical means by which the transformation of readers is promoted, and showing how Mark’s rhetoric is linked to a dynamic eschatological anthropology in ways that have not previously been demonstrated.