

## **Discourse Between the Markan Text and its Implied Interlocutors: Its Impact on Audience Response to the Salvific Gospel and Christian Ethics**

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### **Abstract**

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*This paper seeks to apply the hermeneutical insights on the Markan text to the extant rhetorical situation in the education sector. The theme of the conference that has called for this paper is “Ensuring Quality Education through Ethical and Value Based Principles: A Focus on Sustainable Development Goal: (SDG 4). The underlying supposition is that the Markan text is a rhetorical communication which can be used to encourage stakeholders in the education sector to uphold work ethics. The study probes the discourse between the Markan text and its implied interlocutors and its impact on audience-response to the gospel that is presumed to have within its teachings Christian ethics. This probe is helpful in identifying both the explicit and implicit interlocutor relationships within the matrix of the Markan discourse. In this study, discourse is understood as the communicative transaction between the interlocutors that are both formed and addressed by the entire Markan text. The salvific gospel was and is both a proclamation of the significance of the salvific episode and Christian ethics. The study is premised on the hypothesis that the Markan text was purposely written to eliminate audience obduracy towards the gospel that was being orally proclaimed. This obduracy is portrayed in Jesus’ controversy with the Jewish leaders and in the retold parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-12). This probe sheds light on how the text of Mark can urge people to uphold ethical standards in different spheres of human endeavour.*

**Key Words:** rhetorical-Communication, implied-interlocutors, obduracy, oral gospel, audience-response

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### **1.1 Introduction**

This paper argues that the Markan text is a paraenesis that was primarily aimed at exhorting the Markan audience to believe and practice the teachings of the oral gospel that was outside and independent of the Markan text. According to M. J. Wilkins (1993, p. 1157) “Paraenesis is the instructional model in which ethical counsel and moral education were provided in a pattern of exhortation applied to practical problems or issues of living.” I have argued elsewhere (Mwaniki 2018, p.vi) that paraenesis is both a rhetorical device and a genre that accomplishes a social function. However, against this view, which was also supported by the form critics, recent scholarship has questioned whether paraenesis should be considered as a genre. The argument

against considering paraenesis as a genre is supported by an etymological study of the word paraenesis. However, it is rather limiting to confine the word paraenesis to only stand for its referent in antiquity. The term should be allowed to grow in use to refer to newer hortatory methods that are dissimilar to the classical usage.

Aune (1987, p. 13) defines genre as “a group of texts that exhibit a coherent and recurring configuration of literary features involving form . . . content, and function.” In line with Aune’s definition, paraenesis is distinguishable as a literary form with a literary configuration that is deliberately skewed to perform the function of exhortation. In line with Aune’s definition, it is plausible to designate paraenesis as a genre. James Star ([www.oxfordbibliographies.com](http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com) last reviewed 28<sup>th</sup> April 2017) considers paraenesis a subgenre of wisdom genre.

As such, the Markan text can be applied to exhort its readers to live and practice high moral and ethical standards in their different spheres of endeavour. A major presupposition in this discussion is that, the parables of the sower (Mark 4:1-12) and the wicked tenants (Mark 12:1-11) were mirror portraits of the rhetorical situation of Mark’s audience that prompted him to write the text. According to Lloyd F. Bitzer (1968, p. 6), “Rhetorical situation is a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence, which can be completely or partially removed if discourse introduced into the situation, can constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence.” Their purpose was to provoke his audience to eliminate their obdurate and lukewarm response to the oral gospel. Gospel, in this sense, is a proclamation of the significance of the salvific episode with an exhortation to inculcate Christian ethics.

## **2. Subject of Discussion in the Markan Text**

Use of Ἀρχὴ (the beginning) in Mark 1:1 suggests that the function of the Markan text is to provide information that would help the audience reminisce on the episode or episodes in history on which the salvific gospel of Jesus Christ was premised. Over two decades separated the time between Jesus' ascension and the writing of the Markan text. As such, a written record of the nature of the salvific episode, on which the oral gospel proclamation was premised, had affirming value. Historical records have intrinsic rhetorical efficacy to validate information that is presumed to be premised on such episodes in history. As such, the Markan text catalyzes audience-response, in faith and praxis, to the oral gospel.

According to Wallace (1996, p. 49), Ἀρχὴ in the phrase Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [υἱοῦ θεοῦ] (the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God) is a nominative absolute. He avers that, "a nominative absolute does not occur in a sentence, but only in titles, salutations, and other introductory phrases." As such, whether Ἀρχὴ is used as a title or an introductory phrase, it suggests that the subject of the Markan text is 'the beginning of the gospel'. Ἀρχὴ in relation to εὐαγγελίου, in a way, limits the discussion to a particular aspect of the gospel, that is, the premise on which it is founded. Thayer (2005, p. 76) describes it as "that from which the gospel history took its beginning".

Snodgrass (2005, p. 31) posits, "The gospel of Jesus Christ, i.e., the gospel Jesus preached, is quite different from the gospel about Jesus which the early Church preached." He supports his position by saying that "the Church's gospel is rightly summarized as the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus" (Ibid). However, it is arguable that the gospel that the early Church preached encapsulated the gospel that Jesus and his disciples were preaching, that is, the gospel of God (1:14-15; 6:7-13). It is the gospel that Jesus commissioned his disciples to preach

to the whole world (Mark 16:15-18; Acts 1:8). Therefore, Mark's topic of discussion affirms and validates an oral gospel that was a going concern by the time of writing the text.

The Markan text is composed of stories of carefully selected episodes within the Christ event and Old Testament quotations that are employed as rhetorical devices to convince and convict the readers concerning the reliability and belief value of the oral gospel. Stories about the life and times of Jesus Christ had become part of the Christian community's common tradition. This tradition inhered in the memories of the eye witnesses to the Christ event and in the community's institutional memory. It was transmitted orally and was a rich repository from which preachers and writers drew information for their kerygmatic, historical, and biographical purposes. 1Cor. 15:6 records that by the time Paul was writing this epistle, which, according to Fee (1987, pp. 4-5), to a greater degree of probability was in the "mid-fifties", most of the over five hundred witnesses of the risen Lord were still living.

The identification of anecdotes in the Markan text as rhetorical devices is founded on the supposition that rhetoric is a purposeful embellishment of oral and written communication with language formations that enhance audience-buy-in value of the propositions that are directly or indirectly fronted by the text. Since rhetorical devices under consideration are not embellished in the oral gospel but in the text, their efficacy in impacting audience response towards the oral gospel can only be affective and catalytic. Ryken (1984, p. 15) posits, "Literature, in short, is *affective* not cool and detached." Voicing a contrary view, Hengel (2008, p. 70) posits that "what is narrated is for Mark *euangelion* which wishes to convey saving faith in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God." Whereas it is plausible to posit that *euangelion* wishes to convey saving faith in Jesus as Messiah, Hengel's view, that ascribes sacramental value to the stories in the Markan

text, has not explained how the saving faith is conveyed. This paper however, argues that the stories function as rhetorical devices to catalyze audience response to the oral gospel.

In his discussion on textual analysis and the complexities of the actions that attend the formation of a text, Walhout (1999, p. 85) says that “the various actions that go into the forming of a text provide a pattern for distinguishing the kinds or levels of analysis that are relevant to interpretation.” He further avers (Ibid, 85) that “although we cannot separate these concerns, many controversies occur because interpreters conflate them.” Walhout understands and therefore warns interpreters on the problem inherent in trying to interpret a textual communication within a labyrinth of its interlocutor relationships without first delineating them into understandable discourse units. In the case of the Markan text, lack of identifying and delineating the interlocutors that are in dialogue within the matrix of the discourse has led to misjudging the genre and purpose of the text.

The main interlocutors within the matrix of the discourse initiated by the Markan text are: the Markan text, the mimetic portrait of the rhetorical situation of Jesus’ audience which is portrayed in the parable of the sower, Mark’s audience whose profile and rhetorical situation is mirrored by the portrait of Jesus’ audience’s rhetorical situation, and the oral gospel that has been adjudged as encompassing proclamation of the salvific message together with exhortations to moral and ethical probity.

### **3.0 Interlocutors within the Matrix of the Markan Discourse**

This section discusses the nature and significance of the interlocutors within the matrix of the Markan discourse namely; the Markan text which contains two distinct interlocutors, the audience and the oral gospel. It identifies each interlocutor and then describes how they dialogue with each other. In this way, the purpose and genre of the text can be accurately ascertained.

### 3.1 The Markan Text

Arguably, the Markan text is a rhetorical communication. It is made up of two basic elements which are aimed at awakening the audience to the exigence in the prevailing rhetorical situation and to provoke a desire to eliminate it. According to Lloyd F. Bitzer (1968, p. 6), “Any exigence is an imperfection marked by urgency, it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing that is other than it should be.” The first element is comprised of rhetorical devices of Old Testament quotations, miracle stories, and passion narrative. This essay has argued that Mark used these devices to draw attention to the elevated ethos, person and salvific work of Jesus so as to consequently enhance the belief value in the gospel that is premised on his work on the cross. The second component is a description of the rhetorical situation of Jesus’ audience using narratives of the controversy between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders. The exigence in the rhetorical situation that occasioned the Markan text is graphically portrayed by retelling the parables of the sower (Mark 4:1-12) and of the wicked tenants (Mark 12:1-11). In particular, the parable of the sower depicts the entire spectrum of the rhetorical situation of Jesus’ audience which ranges from obduracy to optimal response to the gospel.

Jesus employed the parable of the sower as a rhetorical communication to eliminate the exigence in his audience’s rhetorical situation. However, Mark is retelling the parable to his audience. It is arguable that he used the parable to mirror the rhetorical situation of his audience as well as the expected faith shift from their obduracy to optimal responsiveness to the oral gospel. Furthermore, it accentuates the grim picture of obstinacy thereby evoking abhorrence for their obduracy and, correspondingly, aspiration to shift to faith and a hundred-fold obedience to the oral gospel. Funk (1988, p. 134) describes this type of narrative as “a scene in which events

are enacted, much as they are in the performance of a stage drama.” As such, the reader becomes a participant in the ensuing drama.

### **3.2 Rhetorical Devices in the Markan Text**

The rhetorical devices of Old Testament quotations, miracle stories and passion narratives are particularly aimed at showing that the Jesus of history and faith is the Christ of Old Testament prophecy and promises. His mighty works which are highlighted in the miracle stories show that he was approved by God (John 3:1-2). His death on the cross, which was foreboded in Jesus’ sayings during the Last Supper, was narrated to show that Jesus had offered his life as a propitiatory sacrifice for the redemption of humankind. Cumulatively, these rhetorical devices were used to catalyze audience-response to the oral gospel.

By delineating the interlocutors in the Markan discourse, it becomes clear that the Markan text is a well thought out literary construction. It employs select anecdotes that amplify and anchor the oral gospel on the belief matrix of the community with the purpose of enhancing its truth and belief value. Such anchoring acquires its rhetorical efficacy in the fact that it is based on “what, presumably, author and audience agree to be the criterion for authentication of such claims, Israel’s Scripture” (Hanson 1997, p. 108), which had, by then, been adopted as the Church’s Scripture. Mark can be judged to have had a very well thought out *inventio*. Heath (1997, p. 89) defines *inventio* as “the discovery of the resources for discursive persuasion latent in any given rhetorical problem.” A text, such as the Markan text, that is replete with anecdotal rhetorical devices for persuasive purposes, demonstrates the writer’s literary acumen.

#### **3.2.1 Rhetorical Situation of Jesus’ Audience**

By retelling the parable of the sower, Mark converted it into a mimetic portrait of the exigence in the rhetorical situation of Jesus’ audience. Mark employed this mimetic portrait to

mirror the rhetorical situation and the exigence of his own audience. Arguably, he retold the parable of the sower to evoke disdain towards his audience's obduracy and paradoxically, to also provoke them to aspire to optimally respond to the oral gospel. Tate (2008, p. 335) describes the interaction between the mimetic world and the real world by saying, "While the text may be formal in design and does not replicate reality, it does mirror it in the complexity of the design. Mimetic critics also claim that characterization, setting, plot, and action in literature invite a comparison with life as we experience it outside the text." Therefore, it acts as a stimulus to the reader's senses. As such, Jesus' audience are stimulated to believe and live according to the dictates of the oral gospel in the real world.

### **3.2.1.1 Rhetorical Situation of Jesus' Audience as a Mirror Medium**

The concept of *Sitz im Leben Jesu* (situation in Jesus' life) that was conceived by German form critics is an important starting point in discussing the rhetorical situation of Jesus' audience. The form critics conceived the concept of *Sitz im Leben* to help them match the different forms in the text to their original usage in the oral *kerygma*. Because of an understandable interest in Mark's theology in the early twentieth century, most scholars led by W. Wrede (1856-1906) and Albert Schweitzer together with the form critics, K. L. Schmidt (1891-1956), Martin Dibelius (1891-1947), and R. Bultmann (1884-1976), were interested in the *Sitz im Leben* of the different forms of the text to illumine the purpose of the different forms such as, miracle stories, controversy stories, parables, passion story and the sayings of Jesus (Kealy, 1982, pp. 97-197). This study identifies *Sitz im Leben Jesu* that is portrayed in the Markan text as the rhetorical situation that prompted Jesus to tell the parable of the sower.

Analysis of the narratives about the controversy between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders as well as the programmatic parable of the sower (4:1-12) shows that the *Sitz im Leben*

within which Jesus was ministering was a broad spectrum of obdurate and lukewarm audience on one hand and an optimally responsive audience on the other hand. Since the Markan text is audience centred, it is plausible to argue that Mark intended to use the narrative of the response of Jesus' audience to the gospel as a mimetic portrait. In a way, by retelling the parable of the sower, Mark was pouring scorn on obduracy towards response to the oral gospel and at the same time commending optimal response. This portrayal is effectual in rebuking the unresponsive reader and at the same time affirming the optimally responsive believer as part of the fruitful Christian community thereby urging greater adherence to the oral gospel and its moral and ethical demands.

### **3.2.2 Rhetorical Situation of Mark's Audience: An Interlocutor in the Markan Discourse**

This study has argued that the rhetorical situation of Mark's audience is an interlocutor within the matrix of the Markan discourse. Arguably too, the portrait of the rhetorical situation of Jesus' audience is an indirect interlocutor in the discourse.

The dialogue between the interlocutors within the matrix of the larger Markan discourse shows that Mark's concern in writing the text was to catalyze an existing but moribund engagement between his primary audience and the oral gospel. Thiselton (1999, p. 152) avers that "without such prompting into action, the text remains a closed book." Through retelling the parable of the sower, Mark appealed to human abhorrence for the unsatisfactory and aspiration for absolute good to urge the audience to shun the former and pursue the latter. Instead of addressing his audience using direct speech, Mark chose rather to tell various anecdotes that are rich in rhetorical efficacy to validate, urge belief and obedience to the demands of the oral gospel.

### 3.2.3 The Markan Text: A Catalyst of Audience Response to Oral Gospel

As has been supposed, the major function of the Markan text as an interlocutor in the Markan discourse is to catalyze audience response to the oral gospel. This communicative transaction is mainly accomplished by highlighting the exalted persona of Jesus through foils, parabolic satire, enhancing belief in Jesus by narrating miracle stories, aesthetic structuring of the text, Old Testament quotations, and by foreboding Jesus' death in the Lord's Supper sayings.

Satire is noticeable in Jesus' concluding remarks of the parable of the sower (Mark 4:12). By this satire, Jesus rebukes his obdurate audience as people with ears but who do not hear and as people having eyes but who do not see. Paradoxically, the satire is also used to entreat the audience to respond favourably towards the oral gospel. Highlighting the authoritative proclamation and doctrine of Jesus in contrast to that of the Jewish religious leaders (1:27) was used as a foil to magnify the persona of Jesus Christ. Again, contrasting Jesus' benevolence, love and compassion with the cold legalism of the religious leaders in the controversy stories (2:1-12; 3:1-6) was also used as a foil to bring to the fore the lofty Christian ethics that were propagated in the oral gospel. Finally, the interpolation of opposition and popularity of Jesus in Mark 2:1-12 which highlights Jesus' compassion when compared to the callous religion of the Jewish leaders was also used as a foil to highlight the exalted *ethos* of Jesus thereby enhancing the belief value in the oral gospel that was premised on his person and work on the cross. Shiner (2003, p. 65) posits, "When the speaker creates a courteous and agreeable persona in his speech, he is able to secure the goodwill of his listeners." Usage of foils highlights Jesus' courteous and agreeable persona thereby securing the goodwill of his audience and hence an enhanced faith in the oral gospel.

The text also catalyzes audience response by enhancing Jesus' persona through structuring the miracle stories in a form that highlights the power, excellence and appreciation of Jesus as a man sent of God, and who had numinous power over demonic powers, diseases, nature and even death (1:21-26, 40-42; 4:35-39; 5:40-43). Specifically, the problem that calls for the miracle is stressed through mention of the long time the infirmed had lived with the infirmity, the inability of conventional methods to solve the infirmity, and any other issue that would act as a foil to highlight the ethos of the miracle worker. Scripture citation was also used as a powerful rhetorical device in anchoring Jesus and the oral gospel on the community's inherited faith thereby affirming Jesus as the Christ.

Finally, by narrating the Lord's Supper episode, Mark showed that the death of Jesus was not just an ordinary death but a propitiatory, sacrificial, and vicarious death. Placing the Lord's Supper in the context of the Passover by use of the participial phrase "and as they were eating" (Mar 14:22 NA28) shows that Mark was interpreting the Last Supper in light of the Passover feast. Paul, a contemporary of Mark, also interpreted the Lord's Supper as a type of Passover (1 Cor. 5:7). Without connecting the passion with the Old Testament Passover, the death of Jesus Christ would have been interpreted as a normal human death with no salvific value. As such, the passion story was set and narrated in a context that highlighted the soteriological significance of the passion episode by premising it on God's sanctioned salvific episode, by showing that it was anticipated in Scripture, and by showing that it was part of the promises that had been fulfilled in the Christ event (Mark 8:31; 9:9; 9:31; 10:33; 14:27).

In summary, by reading the rhetorical narratives in the text, observing the portrait of their rhetorical situation and its exigence through the mirror of the portrait of Jesus' audience, and being made aware of the enhanced belief value of the gospel through use of foils and satire,

Mark's audience are convicted about their poor response to the oral gospel, and are thereby aroused to respond to its demands.

### **3.3 The Audience**

The Markan text has not explicitly identified its audience. However, it is possible to identify the profile of the implied audience by scanning the rhetorical situation and exigence that occasioned the writing of the text. This study has argued that the rhetorical situation of Mark's audience is described in the controversy narratives as opposition to Jesus and his teachings. It is also described in the parable of the sower as audience-response to the word of God that ranged from sheer obduracy on one extreme to optimal response on the other extreme.

The rhetorical situation of Mark's audience aptly identifies the profile of Mark's audience in terms of their response to the gospel of Jesus Christ. They can be described as mainly obdurate and lukewarm in their response to the oral gospel. However, as the parable of the sower shows, some were receptive to a level described as thirtyfold, sixtyfold and a hundredfold.

### **3.4 The Oral Gospel**

Though the oral gospel is largely a latent theme in the Markan text, it is a key interlocutor in the Markan discourse. Actually, proclamation of the oral gospel is the only motif that runs from the prologue through the episodic anecdotes to the disputed endings (Mark 1:14, 38; 6:2, 12, 34; 7:6-23; 10:1; 11:17; 16:15). As the opening phrase shows, Mark's text is not about Jesus, it is about the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God. Though important and prominent in both the oral gospel and the text, Jesus is not the main subject of discussion in the Markan text. In the opening phrase, the genitive Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ (of Jesus Christ) is used to identify which gospel's founding episodes are being discussed. However, the person of Jesus and the significance of his salvific death are the subjects of the oral gospel—the salvific message

about the nearness of the kingdom of God and the resultant benefits of salvation through repentance and forgiveness of sins. The oral gospel also incorporated teachings on ethical and moral standards for Christians.

#### **4.0 Interlocutor Relationships in the Markan Discourse**

This section seeks to explain the flow of the Markan discourse. As such, it pairs the interlocutors that are in dialogue within the matrix of the discourse. The aim is to shed light on the nature and impact of the text on audience-response towards the oral gospel.

##### **4.1 Dialogue between the Audience and the Oral Gospel**

The dialogue between Mark's audience and the oral gospel existed long before the introduction of the textual catalyst. However, the rhetorical situation and exigence that is portrayed by the mimetic narratives about the controversy between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders and by the retold parable of the sower is that the audience was not responding optimally to the oral gospel.

The dialogue between the audience and the oral gospel is enhanced and catalyzed by a confluence of two dialogues that are formed within the matrix of the Markan discourse. The first is the dialogue between the audience and the text's mimetic world that is portrayed by both the parable of the sower and controversy stories. The second dialogue is between the audience and the rhetorical devices of miracle stories, Old Testament quotations and the passion story. By extolling the deeds of Jesus, affirming his approval by God, and giving salvific significance to his death, this dialogue enhances the persona of Jesus thereby urging the audience to believe in the gospel that was premised on his person and work on the cross.

#### 4.2 Dialogue between the Markan Text and the Audience

The prologue of the Markan text introduces its topic of discussion as “Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [υἱοῦ θεοῦ]” (The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ the Son of God). It therefore draws the attention of the audience to the subject that Mark intends to discuss; that is, the person and episodes on which the oral gospel was premised. The text seeks to support the supposition in the introductory phrase that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (Mark 1:1). As such, the text narrates rhetorical anecdotes that highlight Jesus’ persona with a view of impressing upon the implied audience that Jesus, on whose person and work the oral gospel was premised, was indeed the Messiah the Son of God. Secondly, by narrating stories of the miracles that God had performed through Jesus, Mark seeks to show that the oral gospel was sanctioned by God. According to John 3:2, no one can perform miracles unless God was with him. Thirdly, the text highlights the propitiatory nature and salvific significance of the death of Jesus by placing the Last Supper within the context of the Jewish Passover. Thus, using these rhetorical devices, the Markan text aims at convincing the audience, who were simultaneously hearing the oral gospel, that it was reliable and worthy of their faith.

Moreover, the text communicates with Mark’s audience mimetically by painting a mirror portrait of the rhetorical situation of Mark’s audience by retelling the parable of the sower. This communicative dialogue can be described as ‘mirroring’ or ‘portrayal’. Basically the text portrays the rhetorical situation of Jesus’ audience as a mirror of the rhetorical situation of Mark’s audience at two levels. One, Mark narrated Jesus’ relationship with his disciples, the Jewish religious leaders and the demonic powers. He used these relationships to mimetically exemplify discipleship and at the same time highlight Jesus’ exalted ethos by a contrasting foil of his gracious demeanour with the failings of both the disciples and the religious leaders.

Secondly, Mark retold the parable of the sower to paint a portrait of the response of Jesus' audience to the gospel of God (Mark 1:14). The parable's concluding satire (Mark 4:12) reproves the audience's obduracy and lukewarm response to the gospel and paradoxically entreats them to work towards achieving optimal responsiveness.

#### **4.2.1 Relationship between Rhetorical Situation of the Audience of Jesus and the Rhetorical Situation of the Audience of Mark**

The rhetorical situation of Jesus' audience is located in the past of the text. As such, it is a passive interlocutor in the matrix of the Markan discourse. However, it is revived when it is used as a mimetic portrait. Similarly, both the Galilean and Jerusalem parables are immortalized when they are used to portray and highlight the exigence that prevailed in the rhetorical situation of Mark's audience. The potential affective efficacy upon audience reflection on their rhetorical situation is the factor that spurs the text's perlocutionary effects of urging faith and performance of the oral gospel.

Vorster (1993, p. 393) illuminates the working of this transaction in his statement:

“In retold form, these stories were used not only for different purposes but also for different messages, depending on new situations. Retelling involves creativity, whether in oral or in written form. It is impossible to tell the ‘same’ story twice. Each telling has its particular context and its unique message. The truth of this statement is confirmed by the retelling of the stories of the Old Testament within the Old Testament, as well as in later Jewish literature. Each time a story or event is retold; it is done for a specific purpose and from a specific point of view. In other words, each account involves creativity. The same applies to oral transmission of history.

Much as Mark's audience were at liberty to interpret Jesus' parable and the teachings embedded therein as portraits of the kingdom of God, Vorster's postulation suggests that retold parables were intentioned to mirror both the exigence and rhetorical situation of Mark's audience.

The rhetorical situation that is portrayed by the parable of the sower suggests that Mark is addressing a mixed audience who are responding to the gospel differently. One group is described as seeds that fall on the paths which are eaten by the birds of the air and as such are unfruitful. The other group is described as seeds that fall on rocks with shallow soils which germinate but because of lack of deep soils the roots are scotched by the sun. The third group is described as seeds that fall on fertile soils but among thorns and though they germinate, they are choked by the thorns. The last group is described as seeds that fall on fertile soils which germinate and give forth varying amounts of fruit, some thirty, sixty and others a hundred-fold. The exigence that is highlighted is the audience's lack of placing a high preferential premium on the oral gospel and its demands. This is due to pressure from other competing issues of life chiefly sheer obstinacy, persecution, cares of this world and desire for riches (Mark 4:13-20).

#### **4.3 Relationship Between the Markan Text and the Oral Gospel**

The Markan text describes the oral gospel as about Jesus Christ the Son of God in Mark 1:1. This description suggests that the oral gospel's belief value is enhanced by ascertaining that the man Jesus, on whose person and work it was premised, was indeed the Christ the Son of God. Indeed, the Old Testament quotations, the miracle stories, and the passion narratives in the Markan text are used to ascertain that the Jesus of faith was indeed the Christ of the Hebrew Scripture and their eschatological hope. Though the oral gospel is rather latent in the text and that it finds explicit mention only in the beginning of the text as its subject of discussion (Mark 1:1), in the local commissioning of the disciples (Mark 6:7-12), and in their international commissioning (Mark 16:14-18), it is not a passive interlocutor in the matrix of the Markan discourse. Rather, it was actively and progressively dialoguing with the Markan audience. The

structure, form and rhetorical posture of the text suggest that its purpose was to stimulate an unreceptive audience to actively respond in faith to the oral gospel's progressive proclamation.

The text also describes the oral gospel as a portent seed that is planted in the audience. The description of the audience and the oral gospel using contrasting metaphors of barren versus fertile soils and unproductive versus optimally productive seeds is aimed at provoking the reader to despise barrenness and to aspire for the loftily described norm of fertility and optimal fruitfulness in response to the oral gospel.

#### **4.4 Dialogue between the Markan Text, Audience, and Oral Gospel**

This paper has argued that the stories narrated in the text are used as rhetorical devices to highlight and magnify Jesus' persona to consequently enhance the belief value in the oral gospel which is premised on his person and work on the cross. As such, the text acts as a catalyst to audience-response to the oral gospel message. In his discussion on Mark as Episodical narratives, Breytenbach (1989) has described this kind of communication as where "a character is cited directly in her or his speech to another character in the narrative, but where the speech is also directed to the implied reader." This description aptly mirrors the relationship between the Markan text, the audience, and the oral gospel. However, because of the understandable quest to know more about the historical Jesus, most scholars have been more inclined to probing the world of the text. The discriminatory selection of the episodes narrated in the text suggests that the Markan text was purposive and that it aimed at eliminating his primary audience's exigence.

It may be argued that the purpose of the Markan text was to inform Mark's audience on the nature of the person of the historical Jesus or even to record history for posterity. However, the rhetorical and aretalogical leaning of these stories towards amplifying the person of Jesus, who is the subject of the oral gospel, suggests that they were used to spur the audience's faith and

response to the oral gospel. The Markan text may have been written between 50 and 55 C.E. Gundry (2003, p. 128) suggests an earlier date in the “fifties or late forties”. Thus, Mark’s audience were living at a time when a sizeable number of eyewitnesses to the Christ event were still alive and a record of written proof of the Christ event could not have been an urgent need.

It is highly probable that Mark sought to make the gospel more believable and to urge faith and obedience to its demands by embellishing the text with the rhetorical device of Old Testament quotations. Similarly, by clustering the miracle anecdotes in one section of the text, he aimed to overwhelm his readers with Jesus’ awesome deeds thereby intensifying the awe-inspiring persona of Jesus on whom the oral gospel was premised. In so doing, he urged a faith response towards the oral gospel.

In summary, the Markan text creates a discourse matrix comprising of interlocutor relationships between the mirror portrait of the rhetorical situation of the audience, the rhetorical devices of Old Testament quotations, miracle stories, and the passion narrative, which dialogue with the audience to catalyze a faith response towards the oral gospel. Consequently, this ends up urging the Markan audience to believe and obey the oral gospel’s demands. This purpose is the determinant of the choice of the Markan genre, syntax, structure, and rhetorical devices.

### **5. Application of the Markan Text in the Cotemporary World**

Though the Markan text was written to a primary audience in mind, it was also meant to be read by the secondary audience in different geographical and historical milieus. The oral gospel which was being proclaimed in Mark’s milieu by word of mouth and through administration of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper was an ongoing enterprise. The rhetorical devices of the Old Testament quotations, miracle stories, the passion narratives and the mimetic exemplifiers in the text and the parable of the sower are rhetorically efficacious in catalyzing

response to the oral gospel by the secondary audience as much as they did to the primary audience.

Furthermore, as Bitzer (1968, p. 13) has postulated, “Some situations, on the other hand, persist; this is why it is possible to have a body of truly *rhetorical* literature . . . From day to day, year to year, comparable situations occur, prompting comparable responses.” Rhetorical situations that are a result of obduracy and lukewarm response to the moral and ethical teachings in the gospel have a tendency of recurring. As such, they invite the same rhetorical communication as was applicable to the primary audience to eliminate their exigence.

Though Jesus’ salvific deeds are not meant to be simulated, his amiable character and grace deeds that are portrayed in the Markan text are mimetic exemplifiers of Christ-like virtues to believers of all ages. Moreover, Jesus’ kingdom proclamation (Mark 1:14-15) and the soteriological message contained in the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are perpetual proclamations that the text of Mark continues to urge and catalyze its readers to respond to.

To quote R. Alan Cole (1989, p. 47) “In a world where thousands of millions perish for want of Christians to preach the love of God that alone can bring eternal life, and yet where, as well, millions still starve and suffer for want of Christians to show the same love of God in action,” the Markan text’s exemplifiers of Jesus Christ’s amiable character and grace deeds are an exhortation to Christians of all ages to emulate him. Equally, Mark’s mimetic portrait of the rhetorical situation of his audience exhorts Christians of all ages to abhor obduracy and lukewarm response to the gospel and aspire for optimal responsiveness.

Quality education is one of the sustainable development goals in Kenya. However, achievement of this important milestone can be thwarted by unethical practices. Money that would otherwise be channeled to foster education is lost to corruption and tribalism that are endemic in the country. The exhortation in the Markan text to abhor obduracy and to aspire to optimal response to the gospel can be applied to the situation in the education sector and indeed other sectors in service provision where there is serious abuse of ethical standards. This study shows that the exhortations in the Markan text would go a long way to foster, urge and ensure that quality education is achieved within the time frames that were envisaged in the SDG 4.

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