

Preface

Stories — with a repertoire coherently integrated into a plotline, with characters who act out the roles of protagonist, 'helpers', and antagonists in specific episodes that include settings of place and time — are narrative worlds which to one degree or another mirror the contextual world in which they were constructed. Accordingly, they may represent the various levels of the social, economic, cultural, political and religious structures of their contextual world as the environment which their characters inhabit and in which they carry on their activities. Codes and maps which constitute the boundary lines of kinship and community, rituals which move people from one status to another, institutions which order and control the symbolic universe — these are some of the aspects of a social construction of reality which may also be incorporated into the composition of narrative worlds.

At the same time, however, artistically created narrative worlds may also distort their contextual world and its symbolic universe deliberately and systematically by authorial intention in order to critique and even subvert the status quo and at the same time to disclose a new moral order that is superior to the old and should therefore supersede it. The four gospels of the New Testament are such narrative worlds; and many different critical theories, methods and models are required to understand their complexity: to determine to what extent they reflect their contextual world and to what extent they subvert it and consequently to achieve a full and comprehensive interpretation of the many dimensions of meaning which they convey.

This is the scope of dr Ernest van Eck's study of the narrative world of the gospel according to Mark. Entitled *Galilee and Jerusalem in Mark's story of Jesus: A narratological and social scientific interpretation*, it is for more than an investigation of the role which the two central geographical identifications play in Mark's narrative world. Van Eck begins with Marcan geography but quickly moves into an analysis of other aspects of space which are directly or indirectly related to the spheres of Galilee and Jerusalem: the space constructed by the Jewish purity code and its guardianship by the Jerusalem temple, as well as the space of meals and the household in Galilee, the Decapolis and the regions of Tyre and Sidon. 'Space in Mark as symbol(s)', to appropriate Van Eck's quotation of the words of Paul Ricoeur, is utilized to 'orientate in order to disorientate with the aim to reorientate'.

A review of earlier interpretations of Mark focuses on the Marcan opposition between Galilee and Jerusalem and the meanings which historical-critical and redaction-critical studies ascribed to it. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of this geographical opposition and all the facets that are related to it, Van Eck pursues an

investigation that correlates narrative criticism with the social sciences. More recent interpretations have applied this combination of narrative criticism and the social sciences to Mark's gospel, but Van Eck is critical of their lapses into ethnocentrism, anachronism and reductionism and therefore appropriates a more exhaustive collection of methods and models in order to move beyond them by taking 'the full social context of the text into consideration'.

That 'full social context' includes the sociology of agrarian society which is used to elucidate the similarities and differences between the narrative/referential world of the gospel and its contextual world. Point of view and the textual structures of the implied author are drawn into the discussion so that the correlation of sociology and narrative criticism can serve the illumination of both the strategy of the narrative and the text's narrative world simultaneously. The realities of space emerge as symbolic of the evangelist's ideological perspective and narrative point of view. Emics and ethics are carefully differentiated and pursued to acknowledge the cultural distinctiveness of the horizon of the ancient text and that of the contemporary exegete. The emic data include: the identification of the protagonist as Jesus, his helpers as his disciples, his target as the crowds, and the antagonists as his opponents above all in Jerusalem. The opposition between Galilee and Jerusalem is intensified by the antithesis between house and temple as well as cities and the rural countryside. The cross-cultural models that are used ethically serve well to actualize the fullest possible comprehension of the space symbolism of Galilee and Jerusalem and all their related configurations in the narrative world, such as maps of time, place, people and food. The cross-cultural models include: honor/shame culture; the structures of patronage, brokerage and clientism; the anthropology of dyadic personality and the kinship system, the psychology of labelling and deviance theory, the dualism of the pollution system constituted by a purity code and ceremonies and rituals, sickness and healing and, as already indicated, the social stratification of agrarian society. At the present there is no study of the gospel according to Mark that encompasses virtually all of the ethic approaches to a narrative text that are currently in vogue.

Interpreting Jesus' baptism as a ritual of status transformation leads Van Eck to the conclusion that God as Patron appoints Jesus to serve as the broker of the 'kingdom of God'. Jesus' subsequent references to God as 'father' identifies God in terms of kinship terminology. As the broker of the kingdom Jesus will create a new household among the crowds along new lines of understanding God as Patron and, as a consequence, new lines of understanding society as well. Galilee is the place where the Patron is available, not Jerusalem; and there is no temple in Galilee, only the house. 'Jesus brokered the kingdom and therefore also the new household, to his clients especially through his healings, the way he ate (i e what, with whom, when, how and where Jesus ate), and through his interpretation of the purity rules of his day.'

But Jesus is not only a broker; he is also the ritual elder appointed by the Patron 'to assist others to undergo the same status reversal, namely to become part of the new household of God'. As a result of this identification Van Eck is able to avoid the establishment of a new hierarchy in the community of the household. The kingdom is kinship, but a new kinship that involves 'reciprocal relations, solidarity, hospitality, humility and service'. Van Eck follows Ohnuki-Tierny and Malina in regarding kinship as the dominant institution in first-century Mediterranean society, which determined religion, politics and economics; and in his judgment this reality is reflected in Mark's narrative world and is viewed by the narrator as 'the all overarching societal force in the activities of Jesus'. Consequently, the opposition between Galilee and Jerusalem is an antithesis between a politics of commensality and a politics of holiness, or between an ideology of union and an ideology of separation. Jesus' activities of healing, exorcism, meal-sharing and his negation of the pollution system not only subvert the status quo but more significantly constitute a new family, indeed, the family of the household of God.

As for the identification of the addressees of the gospel and their geographical location, which may be reflected in Mark's narrative world, Van Eck is inclined to posit a community that was resident in Palestine very soon after the destruction of Jerusalem and the demise of the temple institution. All those who claim this radically new ideology of kinship today and therefore continue the familyhood of God's household, like those whom Jesus called in the narrative world of Mark's gospel, bear the responsibility Jesus himself exercised as a ritual elder: to assist others to undergo a status transformation and to enter into the household of God in order to begin to participate in the health and vitality of open commensality. This is the message the gospel according to Mark conveys to the world of today.

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