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## Chapter 2

### Argumentative Textures in Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation

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A major challenge for interpretation of New Testament literature lies in the multiple ways in which argumentation occurs in the twenty-seven compositions that constitute the corpus. There is no one way in which argumentation proceeds in the NT. The thesis of this essay is that NT literature exhibits a highly creative rhetorical process at work during the first century, which creates multiple modes of argumentation. This process is characterized by centripetal (inner-directed) rhetorical movement that, at one time and another, places wisdom, miracle, prophetic, suffering-death, apocalyptic, or pre-creation discourse at the center; and centrifugal (outer-directed) rhetorical movement that, at one time and another, drives each rhetorical mode of discourse out into the other five rhetorical modes and into the literary modes of biographical history, epistle, and apocalypse.<sup>1</sup>

The major challenge is to describe not only the literary process at work in first century Christianity, but also the rhetorical process. At present, the dominance of the literary paradigm in biblical studies works against this type of rhetorical analysis and interpretation. In order to see the rhetorical process at work, it is necessary to keep in mind that literary discourse is a particular kind of rhetorical discourse, a kind that has been written according to certain literary conventions. Rhetorical discourse is much broader than written discourse, since it emerges at the moment that sound from the mouth of a human moves another person toward action, or toward a new configuration of feeling, attitude, belief, or understanding.<sup>2</sup>

In his essay entitled “Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation,” Paul Ricoeur discusses five kinds of discourse in the Hebrew Bible: prophetic, narrative, prescriptive, wisdom, and hymnic discourse.<sup>3</sup> In each instance there

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Vernon K. Robbins, “The Dialectical Nature of Early Christian Discourse,” *Scriptura* 59 (1996) 353-62. Online: <http://www.emory.edu/COLLEGE/RELIGION/faculty/robbins/dialect/dialect353.html>.

<sup>2</sup> See Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, eds., *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present* (Boston : Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 75-85. From my perspective, Ricoeur does not give substantive consideration to apocalyptic discourse when he refers to it

are two or more entire books in the HB that contain one kind of discourse. Ricoeur does not list them, but it is easy to see the literary home of prophetic discourse in the major and minor prophets; the literary home of narrative discourse in Genesis through Exodus 19, Joshua through 2 Kings, Ezra-Nehemiah through 1-2 Chronicles, and perhaps Ruth; the literary home of prescriptive discourse in Exodus 20-40, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy; the literary home of wisdom discourse in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job; and the literary home of hymnic discourse in Psalms and Songs of Solomon. It is important to see that the NT presents all of these modes of discourse in the context of three basic literary forms: five biographical histories (Gospels and Acts); twenty-one epistles; and one apocalypse. One might apply two of Ricoeur's kinds of discourse to one or more books in the NT, namely, narrative for the Gospels and Acts and wisdom for the Epistle to James. But it becomes evident quite soon in the investigation that a somewhat different discursive process obtains for the NT than for the HB. It also becomes clear that Ricoeur's view of discourse is poetic rather than rhetorical. Ricoeur does not show us the rhetorical nature of HB discourse. Rather, he is guided by a literary poetics that identifies all of religious discourse as poetry rather than history.<sup>4</sup> The perspective in this essay is that a literary approach to early Christian discourse is too limited. Early Christians used HB discourse as one major resource within Mediterranean discourse to create their new form of discourse. Through a highly creative process of rhetorical invention during the first century, early Christians interwove Mediterranean wisdom, miracle, prophetic, suffering-death, apocalyptic, and pre-creation discourse into the fabric of three basic literary forms: biographical history, epistle, and apocalypse.

Walter Brueggemann makes a substantive contribution to this discussion in his *Theology of the Old Testament*,<sup>5</sup> where he presents a rhetorical theology of the HB in terms of: (1) core testimony; (2) countertestimony; (3) unsolicited testimony; and (4) embodied testimony. The core testimony of Israel features: (a) verbal sentences (145-212); (b) adjectives (characteristic markings of Yahweh: 213-28); (c) nouns (Yahweh as constant: 229-66); and

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simply as "subsequently grafted on to the prophetic trunk" (77). His lack of attention results, of course, from his focus on the HB, where there is so much prophetic literature and the earliest images of destruction during the "last days" occur in this literature. Nevertheless, his typology of five kinds of discourses is a good place to begin in an assessment of discourses in the NT.

<sup>4</sup> Ricoeur, *Essays*, 98-102.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997).

(d) Yahweh fully uttered (267-303). The countertestimony of Israel features: (a) cross-examining Israel's core testimony (317-32); (b) the hiddenness of Yahweh (333-58); (c) ambiguity and the character of Yahweh (359-72); and (d) Yahweh and negativity (373-99). The unsolicited testimony of Israel features: (a) Israel as Yahweh's partner (413-49); (b) the human person as Yahweh's partner (450-91); (c) the nations as Yahweh's partner (492-527); and (d) creation as Yahweh's partner (528-51). The embodied testimony of Israel features: (a) the Torah as mediator (578-99); (b) the king as mediator (600-21); (c) prophet as mediator (622-79); and (d) the sage as mediator (680-94). This is a rhetorical theology of the HB that contributes directly to the project in this essay. The question for us is how first century Christians appropriated and reconfigured conventional rhetorical discourses in the Mediterranean world, which included the discourses in the HB.

After the NT period, second and third century Christian literature built upon the literary forms of biographical history (Gospels and Acts), epistle, and apocalypse in the NT.<sup>6</sup> In this context, however, a new configuration of major rhetorical discourses began to emerge. Karen Jo Torjesen displays five major discourses that emerged in second and third century Christian literature. The five modes of discourse she exhibits, which include both analytical categories and community settings, suggests the manner in which NT literature functioned as a rhetorical resource for the development of new discourses in the centuries after the NT period. Torjesen's analysis reveals five kinds of discourse: (1) Jesus as divine wisdom (sophia), exhibiting the context of worship; (2) Jesus as victor over death, exhibiting the context of martyrdom; (3) Jesus as divine teacher (didaskalos), exhibiting the contexts of catechetical instruction and Christian schools; (4) Jesus as cosmic reason (logos) exhibiting the context of the Christian scholar's study; and (5) Jesus as world ruler (pantocrator), exhibiting the context of the basilica.<sup>7</sup> From the perspective of NT discourse, Jesus as victor over death and the powers is a merger of miracle, suffering-death, and apocalyptic discourse; Jesus as divine teacher (didaskalos) is an elaboration of paraenetic wisdom discourse; Jesus as cosmic reason (logos) is an elaboration of pre-creation wisdom discourse; and

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<sup>6</sup> See J. K. Elliott, ed., *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation based on M. R. James* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha* (ed. W. Schneemelcher; trans. and ed. R. McL. Wilson; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963 and 1965).

<sup>7</sup> E.g., Karen Jo Torjesen, "You Are the Christ: Five Portraits of Jesus from the Early Church," in *Jesus at 2000* (ed. M. J. Borg; Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1997) 73-88.

Jesus as world ruler (pantocrator) is a merger of apocalyptic and pre-creation wisdom discourse.

In other words, socio-rhetorical investigation has yielded six major rhetorical modes of discourse in NT literature: wisdom, miracle, prophetic, suffering-death, apocalyptic, and pre-creation. These modes intertwine with one another in different ways in different writings in the NT. A major task for rhetorical interpretation is to describe the centripetal-centrifugal interaction of these rhetorical discourses in the five biographical histories, twenty-one epistles, and one apocalypse that constitute the NT writings. It is not acceptable to limit the investigation of argumentation simply to the NT epistles, or only to include investigation of speeches attributed to Jesus, Peter, Stephen, and Paul in the biographical historical writings. In order for rhetorical interpretation to attain its appropriate place in biblical interpretation, it must describe the centripetal-centrifugal rhetorical movement in every NT writing.

Everyone will be aware that I am describing a very large project. The question at the moment is how to begin. This essay gives a preview of some of the argumentative features in each of the six major modes of rhetorical discourse. This approach will leave many legitimate questions unanswered, but it will be a major start. It will give a glimpse of some of the results that have emerged, even though the essay will fall far short of a fully articulated statement of the results of socio-rhetorical investigation of argumentation in the NT.

As a result of limitations of space in this essay, my procedure will exhibit only three analytical steps with selected passages either in NT literature or in literature that preceded the NT:

- (1) Identification of rhetorical topics in the context of elaboration analysis;
- (2) Analysis of rhetorical topics in rationales, conditional clauses, and adversative clauses;
- (3) Enthymemic analysis.

These analytical steps lead to primary insights about the nature of Rule/Case/Result reasoning in each kind of rhetorical discourse.<sup>8</sup> These insights begin to suggest the rhetorical effect of the centripetal-centrifugal interaction of all six kinds of rhetorical discourse in the NT.

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<sup>8</sup> Vernon K. Robbins, "Enthymemic Texture in the Gospel of Thomas," *SBL Seminar Papers*, 1998 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998) 343-66. Online:

<http://www.emory.edu/COLLEGE/RELIGION/faculty/robbins/enthymeme/enthymeme343.html>.

## Argumentation in Early Christian Wisdom Discourse

Wisdom discourse during the Hellenistic period regularly has a triple focus: (1) the relation of the created world to God; (2) the relation of humans to God; and (3) the relation of humans to one another as a result of the relation of God to the created world and to humans.<sup>9</sup> Reasoning about God occurs by means of analogy from human relationships to God. Thus, the primary Rule underlying wisdom discourse is that God is Father and Mother of all created things – which means that God is beneficent and just. Human social relationships and well-being set the stage for the primary topics of wisdom discourse: parent/child, patron/client, host/guest, friendship, limited goods, honor/shame, life/death. Therefore, specific enthymemes and syllogisms regularly presuppose general wisdom about one of these topics as its Rule or Major Premise, like: “Hosts must provide food and hospitality for their guests.” Cases and Results emerge from the specific situations envisioned in the discourse. Since a well-ordered, beneficent, and just world (both divine and human) is the overall context for wisdom discourse, argument from analogy works interactively among all spheres of the universe (God, the heavens, the cosmos, plants, animals, and humans).

The special argumentative power of wisdom discourse is its ability to generalize on the basis of one or more situations. In other words, it thrives on inductive-deductive reasoning. On the basis of one or more specific situations, it offers one or more generalized principles. But on the basis of one or more generalized principles, it may offer any number of specific examples or analogies. These examples and analogies may be brief *meshalim*, or they may be expanded into a short story like a narrative parable, or even a very long story – which we might call a didactic or wisdom narrative.

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<sup>9</sup> James L. Crenshaw, “Prolegomenon,” in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom* (ed. J. L. Crenshaw; New York: KTAV, 1976) 1-45; idem, “Wisdom and Authority: Sapiential Rhetoric and Its Warrants,” in *Congress Volume: Vienna, 1980* (ed. J. A. Emerton; VTSup 32; Leiden: Brill, 1981) 10-29; idem, *Old Testament Wisdom* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981); idem, *Urgent Advice and Probing Questions: Collected Writings on Old Testament Wisdom* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1995); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her. A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1984); idem, *Miriam’s Child, Sophia’s Prophet* (New York: Continuum, 1994); Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992); E. Elizabeth Johnson, *The Function of Apocalyptic and Wisdom Traditions in Romans 9-11* (SBLDS 109; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is. The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992); John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and the *Progymnasmata* have taught us that the major forms of argument in wisdom discourse are: thesis, rationale, contrary, opposite, analogy, example, and authoritative judgment.<sup>10</sup> These forms of argument are so inherent to wisdom discourse that one finds them already in Ancient Near Eastern literature, many centuries before the Hellenistic period. In the terminology of socio-rhetorical interpretation, the presence of many assertions supported by rationales in wisdom discourse gives it a rich enthymemic texture. Enthymemes occur repetitively in wisdom discourse in the context of arguments from the contrary, opposite, analogy, example, and authoritative judgment.

An excellent place to see wisdom argumentation in the context of early Christian biographical history is Luke 11:1-13.<sup>11</sup> When Jesus recites the Lord's Prayer to his disciples in response to their request in 11:1, he introduces the topics of father, holiness, kingdom of God, food, forgiveness, and temptation or testing (11:2-4). After the prayer, Jesus presents an argumentative elaboration of the prayer that builds on Mediterranean social and cultural reasoning. The elaboration begins with an argument based on host/guest, friendship, and family relations. The argument works by analogy to God the Father from a father who gets up at midnight and gives bread to his friend for an unexpected guest (11:5-7). After the analogy, Jesus moves the argument further by introducing honor and shame as the issue, rather than simply friendship (11:8).<sup>12</sup> Then Jesus presents a thesis and rationale based on asking, searching, and knocking on a door (11:9-10), followed by an argument from example based on the relation of parents to their children (11:11-12). The elaboration concludes with an argument from lesser to greater that correlates the knowledge of appropriate social action between parents and their children and the beneficence of God the Father when a human petitions God (11:13).

Jesus' recitation of the Lord's Prayer and his rhetorical elaboration of it give this wisdom discourse a rich enthymemic texture. The prayer and its elaboration contain four

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<sup>10</sup> Ronald F. Hock and Edward N. O'Neil, eds., *The Chreia in Ancient Rhetoric* (vol. 1 of *The Progymnasmata*; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986); Burton L. Mack and Vernon K. Robbins, *Patterns of Persuasion in the Gospels* (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge, 1989); Vernon K. Robbins, "Progymnastic Rhetorical Composition and Pre-Gospel Traditions: A New Approach," in *The Synoptic Gospels: Source Criticism and the New Literary Criticism* (ed. Camille Focant; BETL 110; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993) 111-47.

<sup>11</sup> Vernon K. Robbins, "From Enthymeme to Theology in Luke 11:1-13," in *Literary Studies in Luke-Acts: A Collection of Essays in Honor of Joseph B. Tyson* (ed. R. P. Thompson and T. E. Phillips; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1998) 191-214. Online: <http://www.emory.edu/COLLEGE/RELIGION/faculty/robbins/Theology/theology191.html>.

<sup>12</sup> RSV and NRSV incorrectly translate the verse as though the issue were persistence rather than shamelessness.

rationales and one conditional construction. All of the rationales concern social relationships among people:

- (1) 11:4: for we ourselves forgive every one who is indebted to us;
- (2) 11:6: for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him;
- (3) 11:8: I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of the shamelessness [of the petitioner] the father will rise and give him whatever he needs;
- (4) 11:10: For every one who asks receives, and one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

The first three rationales concern forgiving indebtedness, hosting a friend, and giving bread to a friend because of his shamelessness at asking in the middle of the night. The fourth rationale begins and ends with social actions: asking and receiving, and knocking on someone's door to have it opened. The topic in the middle concerns individual personal action: seeking and finding. The conditional construction at the end of the elaboration moves from social action among parents and their children in the protasis to God the Father in the apodosis:

11:13: If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

A key to the progression of the enthymemes appears when one sees both parts of the five enthymemes in which the rationales and the conditional construction play a role.

- (1) **Result:** [Father,] forgive us our sins,  
**Case:** for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us (11:4).
- (2) **Result:** Friend, lend me three loaves of bread;  
**Case:** for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him (11:6).
- (3) **Result:** I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, he will get up and give him whatever he needs,  
**Case:** because of the shamelessness [of the friend who petitions at midnight] (11:8).<sup>13</sup>
- (4) **Result:** And I tell you, Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.  
**Rule:** For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened (11:9-10).
- (5) **Case:** If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children,  
**Abductive Rule:** how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him (11:13).

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<sup>13</sup> See Robbins, "From Enthymeme," 203-6 for interpretation of the "shamelessness."

The beginning and ending enthymemes (1 and 5) present reasoning that sets actions between humans in a dynamic relation to actions between God and humans. Enthymemes (2) and (3) ground the argumentation in the social dynamics of host/guest relations, friendship, and honor and shame. Enthymeme (4) functions as a bridge from human social relations to relations between God and humans, since “asking” can be performed both with other humans and with God. This unit of text gives excellent insight into the manner in which argumentation in wisdom discourse regularly works, setting up an interplay between social relations among humans and the relation of humans to God.

An excellent place to see wisdom argumentation in the context of an early Christian epistle is James 2:1-13. Wesley H. Wachob has investigated this passage with a full form of socio-rhetorical analysis and interpretation.<sup>14</sup> The topics in this passage concern partiality, faith, rich/poor, judging, evil thoughts, kingdom, promise, loving God, honor and shame, law, and mercy.

As Wachob has demonstrated, James 2:1-13 contains the following pattern of rhetorical elaboration:

**Introduction 2:1-4**

1. Theme 2:1
2. Reason 2:2-4

**Probatio 2:5-11**

3. Argument from example 2:5
  - a. with opposite 2:6a
  - b. and social example 2:6b-7
4. Argument with judgment, based on the written law, in four parts: 2:8-11
  - a. Proposition based on the written law 2:8
  - b. Argument from the contrary 2:9
  - c. Rationale for judgment based on law 2:10
  - d. Confirmation of the rationale with written testimony 2:11
5. Conclusion 2:12-13

There are four rationales in this unit of text:

(1) 2: For if there should enter into your synagogue a gold-fingered man in bright clothes and a poor man in shabby clothes also enters, 3: and you look favorably upon the man wearing the bright clothes and say: “You sit here honorably”; and to the

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<sup>14</sup> Wesley H. Wachob, *The Voice of Jesus in the Social Rhetoric of James* (SNTSMS 106; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

poor man you say: “You stand there or sit by my feet”; 4: have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil calculations?

(2) 10: For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.

(3) 11: For the one who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not commit murder.”

(4) 13: For judgment is without mercy to the one who has not shown mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

The first rationale is a conditional construction that concerns the social arrangement of rich and poor people in the formal context of a synagogue. The second rationale concerns the relation of humans to the Torah, which had become a specific manifestation of wisdom by the first century BCE (Sirach), and it contains an adversative clause: “but fails in one point.” The third rationale features a recitation of two statements in the Torah. The fourth rationale addresses the relation of mercy to judgment, which became a major topic in prophetic discourse. Thus, in this epistolary context, topics concerning the relation of humans to one another and to God are being taken specifically into the context of discussion of the Torah and the relation of the Torah to the prophets.

In addition to the conditional construction in the rationale in 2:2-4 and the adversative clause in the rationale in 2:10, there are four additional constructions that are either adversative or conditional, or they contain a combination of the two:

(1) 6: But you have dishonored the poor.

(2) 8: If you really fulfil the royal law according to the scripture: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do honorably.

(3) 9: But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

(4) 11: Now if you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

All of these constructions concern actions among humans, and they refer to God through the medium of scripture or law. The topics are honor, the poor, law, scripture, love, neighbor, partiality, sin, adultery, and murder.

The passage has such a rich argumentative texture that every portion of it works together to form four successive enthymemes or syllogisms. James 2:1-4 presents a Result/Case enthymeme:

**Result:** 1: My brethren, show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

**Case:** 2: For if a man with gold rings and in fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in,

3: and you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "Have a seat here, please," while you say to the poor man, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet,"

4: have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

Wachob has reconstructed the underlying syllogistic reasoning of the first four verses accordingly:

**Rule (unstated):** Unjust judgments are incompatible with the faith of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

**Case:** Acts of partiality are unjust judgments (2:4).

**Result:** Acts of partiality are incompatible with the faith of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ (2:1).<sup>15</sup>

James 2:5-9 present a complex Rule/Case/Result syllogism filled with contrary, adversative, and conditional constructions:

5: **Rule:** Listen, my beloved brothers [and sisters]. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him?

6: **Case:** But you have dishonored the poor. Do not the rich oppress you, and do they not drag you into courts?

7: Do they not blaspheme the honorable name that was pronounced over you?

8: **Result:** If you really fulfil the royal law, according to the scripture: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do honorably.

9: But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

In the midst of this syllogism, Wachob has shown, James 2:8 evokes positive syllogistic reasoning in and of itself:

**Rule [unstated]:** People who fulfil the royal law are people who do honorably.

**Case [unstated]:** People who love their neighbors as themselves are people who fulfil the royal law.

**Result:** 8: People who love their neighbors as themselves are people who do honorably.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Wachob, *Voice*, 77.

<sup>16</sup> Wachob, *Voice*, 94.

James 2:10-11 present a Rule/Case/Result syllogism that fulfills the expectations of an epicheireme:

**Rule:** 10: For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it (the whole law).

**Case:** 11: For the one [who gave the whole law] who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not commit murder.”

**Result:** Now if you do not commit adultery but you do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law (= you have become guilty of the whole law).<sup>17</sup>

The final two verses, James 2:12-13, present a Result/Rule/Case syllogism that also fulfills the expectations of an epicheireme:

12: **Result:** Thus you should speak and thus you should do as those who are to be judged under the law of freedom.

13: **Rule:** For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy;

**Case:** but [for one who has shown mercy], mercy triumphs over judgment.<sup>18</sup>

All twelve verses, then, present detailed, syllogistic reasoning that correlates the relation of humans to one another with the relation of humans to God. As is characteristic of Hellenistic wisdom discourse, Torah is perceived to be God’s wisdom in written form. The final verse (2:12) reaches beyond the Torah into a major topic in prophetic literature, especially in the LXX, where “*eleos* [mercy] is demanded by God of those to whom God shows love (Micah 6:8; Zech. 7:9-10; LXX Jer. 9:23; Hos. 12:7...).<sup>19</sup> In this unit of text, then, we see wisdom discourse playing a centripetal role in the literary mode of epistle and moving centrifugally out into prophetic discourse. In the NT, wisdom discourse plays a centripetal role in Matthew and Luke (biographical history); Romans; 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, and 1-3 John (epistle); and Revelation, especially in the context of the seven letters in Revelation 2-3 (apocalypse).

## Argumentation in Early Christian Miracle Discourse

Miracle discourse places human personal afflictions, ailments, and crises in the position of major topics, rather than human social relationships.<sup>20</sup> A major

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<sup>17</sup> Wachob, *Voice*, 102-3.

<sup>18</sup> Wachob, *Voice*, 108.

<sup>19</sup> Wachob, *Voice*, 134.

<sup>20</sup> Emma J. and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius* (2 vols.; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1945); Gerd Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); idem, *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); Wendy Cotter, *Miracles in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1999).

Rule underlying miracle discourse is: “All things are possible with God.” A primary form of miracle discourse is the presentation of a Case. In these instances, the rhetorical force of the discourse as argument lies in the stasis of fact presupposed for the Cases it narrates. The Cases concern individual or group affliction, ailment, or crisis. Generalized miracle discourse regularly presents a “summary” of one or more Cases – e.g., Mark 1:32-34:

32: **Case:** That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.

33: And the whole city was gathered together about the door.

34: **Result:** And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons.

[**Rule:** Jesus was able to heal people with various diseases or possessed with demons.]

The Results are the restoration of a person or a group to well-being. The unexpressed Rule is that it was possible for Jesus to heal people who were sick with various diseases or possessed with demons. The Cases, naturally, are the individual people who came to Jesus or were brought to him.

While miracle discourse is closely allied with prophetic discourse in the HB, during the Hellenistic period it becomes a close ally of wisdom discourse.<sup>21</sup> By this time, people who engage in miracle discourse regularly reason that if God brought order, well-being, and justice into existence at the beginning of time, then God can restore order in the human and cosmic realm when some kind of disorder emerges as a malfunction in those realms. The shift of major topics from human relationships (wisdom discourse) to human afflictions, ailments, and crises (miracle discourse) shifts the emphasis from the nature of God simply as beneficent and just to the nature of God as “powerful” enough to be beneficent and just in unusual circumstances. Thus, power, rather than beneficence and justice, lies at the center of miracle discourse. The issue, then, becomes the “fact” of God’s power. The circumstances of many people living in the human realm of the created order suggest that God is not powerful enough to activate beneficence and justice everywhere. A common topic in miracle discourse becomes “belief.” Does a person believe that God miraculously removes illness and crisis, and, if so, what are

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<sup>21</sup> E.g., Sirach 45:3, 19; 48:4-5; 48:12-13.

the conditions in which God does this? This inner reasoning within miracle discourse makes it both conditional and analogical: if certain incredible things happened in the past to correct circumstances of crisis, then a similar thing could happen to a person hearing the story, if the right conditions were present. The right conditions may be the presence of a healer or miracle worker, the appropriate articulation of a prayer, or the right manifestation of faith or hope within the petitioner. Where unusual affliction, oppression, and crisis exists within the human realm, God “may” exercise God’s power to restore order and well-being. Thus, miracle discourse works both conditionally and inductively by analogy to other situations that are perceived to be in some way similar.

The interwoven stories of the Woman who Touched Jesus’ Garment and Jesus’ Raising of Jairus’ Daughter are a good place to see both the conditional and analogical dynamics of miracle discourse. The Markan account will serve well in this regard. The overall sequence of Mark 5:21-34 presents the following topics: death, touching to restore, being saved (made well), receiving life, faith (or belief), fear, rising up, and coming to life.<sup>22</sup>

In contrast to the wisdom discourse we analyzed in the previous section, where rationales were frequent, there are only two rationales in Mark 5:21-34. One of the rationales concerns a condition in which the woman might be healed of her disease: 28: For she said, “If I touch even his garments, I shall be made well.”

A key to the formulation is that the woman does not show doubt in her conditional statement. She asserts in her mind that “if” she is able to touch even his garments, she will be healed. The second rationale concerns the condition for not making a tumult and weeping over the twelve year old daughter of Jairus:

39: The child is not dead but sleeping.

This second rationale contains an adversative formulation, which is one of six adversative formulations beginning with “but” or “yet” in this span of narrative:

(1) 25: And there was a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years,

26: and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better *but* rather grew worse.

(2) 31: And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing around you, and *yet* you say, ‘Who touched me?’”

(3) 33: *But* the woman, knowing what had been done to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him, and told him the whole truth.

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<sup>22</sup> Vernon K. Robbins, “Interpreting Miracle Culture and Parable Culture in Mark 4-11,” *SEA* 59 (1994) 67-8.

(4) 36: *But* ignoring what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.”

(5) 39: And when he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a tumult and weep? The child is not dead *but* sleeping.”

(6) 40: And they laughed at him. *But* he put them all outside, and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was.

One of the major characteristics of miracle discourse is its inner oppositional nature, which gives it the dynamics of epideictic rhetoric. An underlying rhetorical dynamic of NT miracle stories is opposition between disorder and order, unhealed and healed, false healers and true healers, and unbelief and belief. The overall dynamics of a miracle story present praise of the miracle worker, which often includes ridicule or blame of people who will not believe or who could not themselves correct the situation. One of the places in miracle discourse where these dynamics appear is in adversative constructions. In (1), physicians receive ridicule and blame for not being able to heal the woman, but for wasting all her resources and making her even more ill. This sets the physicians in opposition to Jesus, whom the story praises for healing her. No. (2) reveals that there is opposition even between Jesus and his disciples over the access of Jesus’ power to people who throng around him. No. (3) exhibits the contest between the woman and Jesus. Jesus has the power to heal within him; the woman needs the power to come into her. She fears to confront Jesus directly, so she comes up from behind and touches his garment. In this adversative formulation, she is forced to reveal the manner in which she activated his power for her healing. In (4), Jesus stands in opposition to people who ridicule Jairus for bothering Jesus, because his daughter had died. In (5) Jesus counters “death” with “sleeping,” and in (6) he opposes people who ridicule him for thinking he can restore the child to life.

The presence of the two rationales in the context of the six adversatives creates a syllogism followed by an enthymeme. The syllogism is as follows:

27: **Case:** She came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment.

28: **Rule:** For she said, “If I touch even his garments, I shall be made well.”

29: **Result:** And immediately the hemorrhage ceased; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Vernon K. Robbins, “The Woman who Touched Jesus’ Garment: Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of the Synoptic Accounts” *NTS* 33 (1987) 502-15 = idem, *New Boundaries in Old Territory: Form and Social Rhetoric in Mark* (Emory Studies in Early Christianity 3; ed. David B. Gowler; New York: Peter Lang, 1994) 185-200.

The narrative sequence creates a context in which Jesus' comment to the woman creates an enthymeme:

34: And he said to her,

**Case:** "Daughter, your faith has made you well;

**Result:** go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

[**Rule:** Faith that makes a person well brings peace and healing of disease.]

It is common for miracle discourse to accumulate its implications to a point where a healer, a healed person, or a person who has been delivered safely from a crisis will present enthymemic argumentation about the working of God's power. An unexpressed Rule functions in Jesus' speech in Mark 5:34 whereby faith is considered to be a special condition in which God's power works to heal. In Mark 9:23 Jesus asserts that "all things are possible with the one who believes." This creates the context for another syllogism in miracle discourse in Mark:

23: And Jesus said to him, "If you can!

**Rule:** All things are possible to him who believes."

24: **Case:** Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

25: **Result:** And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You dumb and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again."

26: And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse; so that most of them said, "He is dead."

27: But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

After this syllogistic reasoning, in 9:29 Jesus tells the disciples that "this kind is not possible for anyone to cast out except by prayer." Jesus completes the argument about prayer and miracle in Mark 11:22-25. His argument contains the following topics: faith, doubt, prayer, and forgiveness. The argument contains no rationales. Rather, it has one adversative clause and one conditional construction. The adversative clause is:

23: but believes that what he says will come to pass.

The conditional construction is:

25: forgive, if you have anything against any one.

The adversative clause makes belief a primary condition in which God exercises power in unusual circumstances, and the conditional clause invites wisdom discourse that concerns social relations (forgiving people when you have something against them) centripetally into the miracle discourse.

The overall unit produces a Rule/Case/Result syllogism:

**Rule:** 22: And Jesus answered them, “Have faith in God.

**Case:** 23: Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’

(**Condition:** and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass,) it will be done for him.

**Result:** 24: Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer,

(**Condition:** believe that you have received it,) and it will be yours.

25: And whenever you stand praying,

forgive, (**Condition:** if you have anything against any one;)

so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”<sup>24</sup>

Traditional topics of miracle discourse fill the content of the Rule and Case, and the Result centripetally invites topics of prayer and forgiveness, which are characteristic of early Christian wisdom discourse.

Miracle discourse in the context of epistle may take the form of instructions concerning how to pray for healing. James 5:14-17 is an instance. The unit contains a focus on the following topics: sickness, prayer, anointing with oil, name of the Lord, faith, being saved (healed), being raised up, sin, forgiveness, righteousness, power, rain, fruit. Again there are no rationales in this discourse. Also, in this instance there are no adversative clauses. Rather, there are two conditional constructions:

(1) 14: Is any among you sick?

Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 15: and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up;

(2) 15: if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

The rhetorical effect of 2:14-15 is: “If anyone is sick, then let him ....” This conditional construction exhibits the manner in which miracle discourse moves centrifugally from other environments in Mediterranean discourse into Christian wisdom discourse, which is centripetal in James. The protasis, “Is any among you sick?”, concerns miracle discourse. The apodosis shows the centripetal force of wisdom discourse in James as instructions emerge that include not only “anointing with oil in the name of the Lord,” “saving the sick man,” and “the Lord raising him” (miracle discourse) but also calling the

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Sharyn E. Dowd, *Prayer, Power, and The Problem of Suffering* (SBLDS 105; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

sages of the church together and prayer (wisdom discourse). Then the conditional construction embedded in the apodosis moves entirely into wisdom discourse as it talks about committing sins and being forgiven.

As in the instance of James 2:1-13 discussed in the previous section, so in James 5:14-17, every verse in the unit produces enthymemic reasoning:

14: **Case:** Is any among you sick?

**Rule:** Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;

15: **Result:** and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

16: **Rule:** Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

**Argument from Example in Ancient Testimony:**

**Rule:** The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects.

17: **Case:** Elijah was a man of like nature with ourselves and he prayed fervently that it might not rain,

**Result:** and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.

**Case:** Then he prayed again and the heaven gave rain,

**Result:** and the earth brought forth its fruit.

In a context where the Rules are wisdom instructions concerning what to do to attain healing, argument from examples in ancient testimony become Cases governed by the Rule that the prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects. When miracle discourse moves centrifugally into wisdom discourse, individual healers may evoke general premises on the basis of their attributes and actions.

Miracle discourse, then, has a close affiliation with wisdom discourse during the Hellenistic period. One can see this in Sirach 45:3 (Moses); 45:19; 48:4-5 (Elijah); 48:12-13 (Elisha). The emphasis is that God either grants certain individuals the ability to perform miracles “by their word” (Sirach 45:3) or God’s word performs the miracles (48:5). One sees this emphasis especially in three healing stories in the NT (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10; John 4:46-54). Yet the social, cultural, and ideological texture of these stories differs significantly. In Matthew and Luke (Q), the Centurion exhibits multiple aspects of the honorable Mediterranean man whom Jesus describes as having “faith” that “he has not found in Israel” (Matt 8:10/Luke 7:9). In John, Jesus emphasizes that the official will not believe unless he has seen “signs and wonders” (4:48). The ideology of the Johannine story exhibits the intertwining of miracle discourse with pre-creation discourse, which will be

discussed below. Harold W. Attridge has shown in an excellent manner in a paper for this conference how to begin a socio-rhetorical analysis of the miracle story and its elaboration in John 5.<sup>25</sup> Again, in John a major issue is the intertwining of miracle discourse with pre-creation discourse.

Willi Braun has shown how miracle discourse can be used to establish a setting for wisdom discourse about eating at banquets.<sup>26</sup> Eating at banquets is a major topic for wisdom discourse, as can be seen in Sirach 31:12-32:13.<sup>27</sup> In Luke 14, Jesus heals a man with dropsy on the sabbath in the house of a leader of the Pharisees as a way of beginning an argumentative discourse about distribution of wealthy benefits to the poor. Miracle discourse plays a centripetal role in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts (biographical history). Only miracle discourse is limited to a centripetal role in one literary mode in the NT, and in this instance it is biographical history.

### **Argumentation in Early Christian Prophetic Discourse**

Prophetic discourse is a close ally of both wisdom and miracle discourse, since it presupposes that God's word has the power to create and destroy. Prophetic discourse moves beyond either creation or miracle discourse by focusing on special people or groups God has chosen to take leadership in the production of righteousness within the human realm on earth.<sup>28</sup> In other words, prophetic discourse combines the emphasis on the relation of the created world to God, humans to God, and humans to one another as a result of the relation of God to the created world and to humans (wisdom discourse) with the emphasis on the power of God's word to confront malfunction in the human and cosmic realms (miracle discourse). The special emphasis in prophetic discourse lies in God's active role of choosing certain people and groups for special tasks and blessings.

The presupposition within most prophetic discourse is that people whom God previously selected to produce righteousness in the human realm have

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<sup>25</sup> Harold W. Attridge, "Argumentative Logic of a Johannine Discourse: Rhetorical Analysis of John 5:19-47," in this volume.

<sup>26</sup> Willi Braun, *Feasting and Social Rhetoric in Luke 14* (SNTSMS 85; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>27</sup> John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997) 32-3.

<sup>28</sup> Yehoshua Gitay, *Prophecy and Persuasion* (Bonn: Linguistica Biblica, 1981); idem, "Rhetorical Criticism and the Prophetic Discourse," in *Persuasive Artistry* (ed. D. F. Watson; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991) 13-24; idem, "The Realm of Prophetic Rhetoric," in *Rhetoric, Scripture & Theology: Essays from the 1994 Pretoria Conference* (ed. S. E. Porter & T. H. Olbricht; JSNTSS 131; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) 218-29.

followed a path of unrighteousness. Therefore, God is choosing someone else (either an individual person or a group) to receive God's blessings and calls new leaders to accept the responsibility for righteousness in the human realm.

A major Rule that underlies prophetic discourse moves beyond an assertion that God is beneficent and just (wisdom discourse), or that God has the power to do all things (miracle discourse), to a twofold assertion that (1) God has chosen certain people to be especially responsible for righteousness in the world, and (2) if they fulfill their responsibility they will be specially blessed, but if they fail to fulfill it they will experience negative consequences. The Cases are the individual people and groups that are chosen by God or who do not participate in righteousness. The Results are blessings on those who are chosen and fulfill their responsibility, and woes to those who do not fulfill a responsibility of righteousness.

Like both wisdom and miracle discourse, prophetic discourse often features epideictic rhetoric. The polarities in prophetic discourse are a combination of the good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness of wisdom discourse, and of the ailments and distresses versus healing and restoration in miracle discourse. Thus, prophetic discourse naturally moves centrifugally out into wisdom and miracle discourse, wisdom and miracle discourse naturally move centrifugally into prophetic discourse, and prophetic discourse may work in close alliance with one or both of them.

Two basic categories of topics regularly are the focus of prophetic discourse: (1) God's action of blessing correlated with the opposite result of woe if people do not participate in God's system of righteousness; and (2) people's righteousness or unrighteousness based on a combination of their state of being and the acts they perform.

A good place to see prophetic discourse is in the beatitudes at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:3-12 and in the woes to the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23. In Matthew 5:3-12, the topics that emphasize God's action of blessing are: blessed, receiving the kingdom of heaven, being comforted, inheriting the earth, being satisfied, obtaining mercy, seeing God, being called a child of God, and receiving a heavenly reward. The topics that emphasize people's state of being and the acts they perform are: poor in spirit, mourning, being meek, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, being merciful, being pure in heart, being a peacemaker, being persecuted for righteousness' sake, and being persecuted like the prophets. These topics contain a mixture of personal attributes of righteousness, righteous action toward other humans, right actions and attitudes toward God, and rewards in the future for being righteous.

In Matthew 5:3-12, there are ten rationales in a context of no adversative or conditional statements:

- (1) 3: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- (2) 4: for they shall be comforted.
- (3) 5: for they shall inherit the earth.
- (4) 6: for they shall be satisfied.
- (5) 7: for they shall obtain mercy.
- (6) 8: for they shall see God.
- (7) 9: for they shall be called sons of God.
- (8) 10: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- (9) 12: for your reward is great in heaven,
- (10) 12: for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The topics in the first nine rationales concern states and acts of righteousness, and the nature of blessing that will come as a result of them. The tenth rationale compares those who are righteous now with the prophets in ancient Israel. The difference in topic concerns the different rhetorical function for the tenth rationale. Displaying them in terms of Result/Case/Rule reveals the difference:

- (1) 3: **Result:** “Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
**Case:** for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- (2) 4: **Result:** “Blessed are those who mourn,  
**Case:** for they shall be comforted.
- (3) 5: **Result:** “Blessed are the meek,  
**Case:** for they shall inherit the earth.
- (4) 6: **Result:** “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
**Case:** for they shall be satisfied.
- (5) 7: **Result:** “Blessed are the merciful,  
**Case:** for they shall obtain mercy.
- (6) 8: **Result:** “Blessed are the pure in heart,  
**Case:** for they shall see God.
- (7) 9: **Result:** “Blessed are the peacemakers,  
**Case:** for they shall be called sons of God.

(8) 10: **Result:** “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,

**Case:** for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

(9) 11: **Result:** “Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

12: Rejoice and be glad,

**Case:** for your reward is great in heaven,

**Rule:** for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The rationales in the first eight enthymemes present the Case, which describes the state or action of people that determines the kind of reward they receive. Prior to each Case is a Result, which describes the kind of blessing they will receive. What is left unexpressed for each Case is the Rule that “God has chosen people in various states of righteousness and people who perform certain acts of righteousness to receive special blessing.” The ninth instance is a Result/Case/Rule syllogism, and it reveals an important shift in the Rule that we also observed when miracle discourse moved centrifugally into wisdom discourse.

In prophetic discourse, “the story of God’s chosen people” may supply the “Rules” in addition to “God’s specific choosing of certain people and groups.” To put it another way, not only “God’s word that chooses and directs” but also “the story of God’s people” begins to become “God’s word” (Rule) in prophetic discourse. For comparison, in wisdom discourse God’s word (Rule) can be found in contexts of order in the created human realm (father and son, host with guest, friend with friend), the created natural realm (birds, flowers, trees), and in the nature of God (beneficence, justice). In miracle discourse, God’s word (Rule) can be found in the conditions (belief, prayer) God establishes for enacting his power in unusual circumstances. When people become “examples,” either in wisdom or miracle discourse, they may evoke a Rule that governs how a person must imitate their action. Prophetic discourse focuses especially on God’s acts of choosing in the Rule. However, these “acts” by God extend naturally to “all of God’s acts of choosing individuals and groups in the past.” This movement increases the uses of “God’s acts” as Rules.

While blessing is one side of prophetic discourse, “woes” are the other side. Matthew 23 is an excellent example of this other side. To make the analysis manageable in the context of this paper, we will only analyze Matthew 23:1-15, rather than the entire chapter. The topics in this unit of text are: practice, observe, preach, burdens, deeds seen by men, phylacteries, fringes, love, honor, feasts, seats, salutations, market places, rabbi, brethren, father, heaven, masters, Christ, greatest, servant, exalting oneself, humbling oneself, kingdom of heaven, proselyte, child of hell.

There are eight rationales in Matthew 23:1-15:

- (1) 3: for they preach, but do not practice.
- (2) 5: for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long,  
6: and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues,  
7: and salutations in the market places, and being called rabbi by men.
- (3) 8: for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren.
- (4) 9: for you have one Father, who is in heaven.
- (5) 10: for you have one master, the Christ.
- (6) 13: because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men;  
(7) for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in.
- (8) 15: for you traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

In the context of these rationales, there are two adversative clauses:

- (1) 3: but they do not practice.
- (2) 4: but they themselves will not move them [heavy burdens] with their finger.

These adversatives reveal things those who have been chosen have “not” done, thus not fulfilling their responsibility for righteousness.

Rule/Case/Result analysis yields the following sequence:

- 1: Then said Jesus to the crowds and to his disciples,
  - (1) [**Rule:** People must follow the teaching of the leaders God has chosen to sit on Moses’ seat.]
  - 2: **Case:** “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat;
  - 3: **Result:** so practice and observe whatever they tell you,  
**Contrary Result:** but not what they do;  
**Contrary Case:** for they preach, but do not practice.
  - 4: They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger.
    - (2) 5: [**Rule:** God chose the scribes and Pharisees to do all their deeds to be seen by God.]  
**Contrary Result:** They do all their deeds to be seen by men;  
**Contrary Case:** for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long,  
6: and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues,  
7: and salutations in the market places, and being called rabbi by men.
    - (3) 8: **Result:** But you are not to be called rabbi,  
**Case:** for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren.  
[**Rule:** God has chosen one teacher for you and made you all brethren.]

(4) 9: **Result:** And call no man your father on earth,

**Case:** for you have one Father, who is in heaven.

[**Rule:** God in heaven has chosen you to be his children.]

(5) 10: **Result:** Neither be called masters,

**Case:** for you have one master, the Christ.

[**Rule:** God has chosen one master, the Christ, for you.]

(6) 11: **Result:** He who is greatest among you shall be your servant;

12: **Case:** whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

[**Rule:** God has chosen to humble the exalted and exalt the humble.]

13: **Result:** “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

**Case:** because you shut the kingdom of heaven against people;

for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in.

[**Rule:** God has chosen the scribes and Pharisees to open the kingdom of heaven to people and to enter it themselves.]

15: **Result:** Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

**Case:** for you traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

[**Rule:** God has chosen the scribes and Pharisees to make people into children of heaven.]

In each Result/Case enthymeme, the unexpressed Rule is that God has chosen either specific people or groups of people to fulfill a particular role in the production of righteousness in the human realm on earth. The Rule in prophetic discourse, then, naturally moves beyond a generalized sentence characteristic of wisdom discourse into a specific circumstance or event in which God has chosen certain people to be leaders or representatives of righteousness.

An example of prophetic discourse in an epistle occurs in 1 Corinthians 9:16-17. The topics are: preaching the gospel, boasting, necessity, one’s own will, reward, and being entrusted with a commission.

There are three rationales in this unit of text:

(1) 16: For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting.

(2) 16: For necessity is laid upon me.

(3) 17: For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward.

Two of these rationales contain a conditional construction. In addition, there is a woe-saying containing a conditional construction and an adversative clause containing a conditional construction, which makes a sequence of four conditional constructions:

- (1) 16: if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting.
- (2) 17: Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!
- (3) 17: if I do this of my own will, I have a reward.
- (4) 17: if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission.

All of this produces an argumentative elaboration containing a Case/Result/Rule syllogism followed by a Result/Case enthymeme containing a Case/Result argument from the Contrary:

(1) 16: **Case:** For if I preach the gospel,

**Result:** that gives me no ground for boasting.

**Rule:** For necessity is laid upon me [by God's choosing of me].

(2) 16: **Result:** Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

17: **Case:** For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward;

**Contrary Case:** but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission.

[**Rule:** God chose me and entrusted me with a commission to preach the gospel.]

The key to the dynamics of this passage lies in the perception that the nature of the discourse is prophetic. The presupposition for the Rules is that at some time in the past God has chosen Paul to perform a particular task in the production of righteousness in the human realm on earth. In each instance, then, the Rule is not simply a general characterization of the nature of God or a general presupposition about the relation of humans to one another and to God. Rather, the Rule presupposes a specific act of choosing by God as an event in the past for a particular purpose.

Prophetic discourse contains a combination of topics of wisdom and miracle discourse, with a new dimension in the Rule that God chooses certain individuals and groups to receive special blessings and to exercise special responsibilities for righteousness on earth. Thus, when prophetic discourse is in a centripetal position, or when it moves centrifugally into wisdom or miracle discourse, specific acts of choosing by God regularly fill the content of the Rules in the argumentation. Prophetic discourse plays a centripetal role in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts (biographical history), Galatians, 2 Peter (epistle), and Revelation (apocalypse). In this literature especially, one sees the Rules, Cases, and Results of God's choosing of certain individuals and groups for the production of righteousness in the human realm.

## Argumentation in Early Christian Suffering-Death Discourse

Suffering-death argumentation has a significant history both in the HB and in general Mediterranean discourse.<sup>29</sup> In the context of wisdom, miracle, and prophetic discourse, socio-rhetorical investigation has yielded three kinds of suffering-death argumentation in the NT. One is basic wisdom argumentation about suffering and death: the one who, choosing righteousness, suffers unjustly receives God's approval. A second is Christian prophetic discourse about suffering and death: one who suffers fulfilling God's calling is following the example of Christ. A third is Christian atonement argumentation about suffering and death: Christ's sinless death removes the sins of those who choose Christ as specially chosen mediator of God's redemption.

The special power of suffering-death discourse lies in its naming of rejection, abuse, or death as the result of actions by fellow members of one's society, or perhaps by neighbor inhabitants. When suffering-death discourse uses specificity, it takes the form of *narratio* and has the power of fact told by an eyewitness. When it takes a more generalized form in Christian discourse it becomes creedal, articulating special forms of belief about God and Christ.

1 Peter 2:18-25 presents three kinds of suffering-death argumentation in a sequence. 1 Peter 2:18-20 presents a basic suffering-death argument in the form of wisdom discourse. Some of the topics of argumentation concern the relation of humans in different social locations: slaves/masters, submission, honor, receiving credit, kindness, gentleness, doing wrong, patiently enduring, doing right, and receiving God's approval. Into these topics characteristic of wisdom discourse are embedded the special topics of enduring pain and suffering unjustly. Thus, the topics exhibit a discussion of suffering and death from the perspective of wisdom discourse.

In this suffering-death argumentation there are two rationales containing two conditional constructions and one adversative construction. All of these specifically concern suffering:

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<sup>29</sup> Sam K. Williams, *Jesus' Death as Saving Event: The Origin of a Concept* (HDR 2; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1975); Martin Hengel, *Atonement: The Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981); David Seeley, *The Noble Death: Graeco-Roman Martyrology and Paul's Concept of Salvation* (JSNTSS 28; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990); Arthur J. Droge, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London: Routledge, 1995); Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism (Figurae: Reading Medieval Culture)* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); H. Stephen Brown, "The Martyrs on Trial: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Second Century Christian Court Narrative" (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1999).

9: For one is approved if, mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly.

20: For what credit is it, if when you do wrong and are beaten for it you take it patiently?

But if when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God's approval.

The entire context produces a Result/Rule/Case syllogism.

18: **Result:** Slaves, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to the kind and gentle but also to the overbearing.

19: **Rule:** For one is approved if, mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly.

20: **Case:** For what credit is it, if when you do wrong and are beaten for it you take it patiently?

But if when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God's approval.

The Rule and the Case directly concern suffering, and they work from a generalized conditional statement to a more specific conditional statement and an adversative construction that tests the reasoning through an argument from the contrary. The Result is a wisdom sentence directly concerning relations of humans to one another. Thus, the reasoning about suffering in 1 Peter 1:18-20 leads to instruction in the mode of wisdom discourse.

1 Peter 2:21 shifts from suffering-death argumentation in a wisdom mode to suffering-death argumentation in a prophetic mode. Its topics are: being called, Christ's suffering, Christ as example, and following in the steps of the example. The unit contains two rationales, with no adversatives or conditional constructions:

(1) 21: For to this you have been called,

(2) because Christ also suffered for you.

The entire unit presents a Case/Rule/Result syllogism:

21: **Case:** For to this you have been called,

**Rule:** because Christ also suffered for you,

**Result:** leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

In this instance the Rule is the action of Christ. This is a natural feature in prophetic discourse, where the actions of God or the model of specially selected individuals or groups establish the Rule for the reasoning. The Case concerns the specific ones called by God for special activity. Once again, the Result has the nature of wisdom instruction, but in this instance it focuses specifically on the "example" cited in the Rule. Rather than wisdom about

action based on a general principle from basic social relations, the wisdom emerges from the action of a specific individual chosen by God to enact righteousness in the human realm, namely, Christ.

1 Peter 2:22-25 presents suffering-death discourse in the mode of Christian atonement argumentation. Its topics are: committing sin, guile, being reviled, suffering, threatening, trusting, being judged justly, bearing sins, dying to sin, living to righteousness, wounds, being healed, straying like sheep, and returning to one's Shepherd and Guardian.

1 Peter 2:22-25 contains one rationale:

25: For you were straying like sheep.

In addition, it contains two adversatives:

23: but he trusted to him who judges justly.

25: but have now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

The first adversative explains the manner in which Christ countered natural inclinations to return evil with evil in the context of suffering and death. The second adversative explains how the wounds of Christ have reversed the sinful circumstances of those focused on Christ as the mediator of God's beneficence.

The syllogistic argumentation in the sequence is as follows:

22: **Case:** He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips.

23: When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly.

24: **Rule:** He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

**Result:** By his wounds you have been healed.

25: **Case:** For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

In Christian atonement argumentation, the actions of Christ are the primary Case (the one who suffered and died maintaining integrity with a righteous life), and the responses of people to Christ are the secondary Case. The Rule that governs the Results is a principle that lies within a mysterious process God has devised whereby the righteous action of a particular person whom God has chosen can bring the benefits of righteous life to a group of people God has chosen to bless. In other words, in contexts where suffering-death discourse moves into a centripetal position in Christian literature, there is a potential for suffering-death discourse to move beyond wisdom and prophetic argumentation into an assertion of vicarious atonement. The key lies

in the Rule, where it is a principle within God's prerogatives that one specially chosen by God can, by acting righteously in a context of suffering and death, "bear" the sins of others in his or her own body. The result is an extension of miracle discourse into atonement discourse: By his wounds you have been healed (1 Peter 2:24). In early Christian discourse, then, suffering-death discourse does not only move centrifugally into wisdom, miracle, and prophetic discourse. Rather, suffering-death discourse becomes centripetal discourse that gathers dynamics of wisdom, miracle, and prophetic discourse into itself. Argumentation about Christ's suffering and death brings together the wisdom of living with integrity in a context of suffering and death, the prophetic blessing that comes upon one who righteously fulfills a task given by God, and the possibility of healing that God can offer under certain conditions. Christian atonement argumentation gathers these three modes of discourse together in a manner that produces a process in God's world where a person chosen specially by God can bring healing to many by bearing their sins in his own body in a context of suffering and death.

Suffering-death discourse plays a centripetal role in the four Gospels and Acts (biographical history); 1 Thessalonians, 1-2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 2 Timothy, Hebrews, and 1 Peter (epistle); and Revelation (apocalypse). Luke's passion narrative appears to present suffering-death discourse in a mode especially characteristic of wisdom discourse. In 1 Thessalonians 1-3, Paul presents suffering-death discourse especially in a mode characteristic of prophetic discourse. Mark 14-15 presents suffering-death narrative in a mode that evokes Christian atonement argumentation. A challenge lies before socio-rhetorical interpretation to produce specific commentary on the centripetal-centrifugal rhetorical movement of suffering-death argumentation in this literature.

### **Argumentation in Early Christian Apocalyptic Discourse**

The special power of apocalyptic discourse lies in its reconfiguration of all time (past, present, and future) and all space (cosmic, earthly, and in personal bodies) in terms of holy and profane, or good and evil. The specificity and concreteness of apocalyptic discourse lies in revelation to specific people, display of very detailed descriptions of beings (God, beasts, evil personages, good personages), display of places (bountiful gardens, beautiful cities, places of punishment, places of worship, altars, temples, walls), and display of procedures (programmatically destruction of portions of the earth, specific procedures of torture, specific processes of journey of the righteous soul into

heaven and then into the paradise of jubilation, specific processes of journeys through the heavens and throughout the cosmos).<sup>30</sup>

In the context of specific descriptions of all kinds, rationales appear that summarize the attributes of God, the actions of God in the past, the nature of God's action in the present, and the nature of God's action in the future. Also, the rationales tell the evil actions of humans in the past, present, and future. The effect of these rationales is to make God's actions in all time (past, present, and future) and all space (heaven, earth, Sheol, etc.) into the Rule that governs Cases and Results. In other words, the rule is not limited to God's giving of Torah (wisdom discourse), God's intervention in particular unusual circumstances (miracle discourse), God's choosing of particular individuals or groups (prophetic discourse), or God's giving of a particular effect of healing from sin through suffering and death (suffering-death discourse). Rather, the Rule in apocalyptic discourse evokes all of God's actions at all times. All past, present, and future events (human and divine) are "God's story" that creates a universe where righteousness is preserved and unrighteousness is destroyed. The Cases feature "the identification" of those who are righteous and those who are evil. The Results feature the manner in which the righteous will be preserved and the unrighteous will be destroyed. The overall result of apocalyptic discourse, then, is that "the entire biblical story" becomes "scripture": God's "Word" that produces the Rules for being preserved or destroyed. This means that the story of God in the HB is simply the beginning of God's story. God's story continues into the present and into the future. Thus, apocalyptic discourse authorizes post-biblical interpretations of the present and the future as "scripture," since all of God's ongoing story is "Rule."

1 Enoch 100:1-6 exhibits well a syllogistic structure in which God's actions in the past, present, and future become the Rule which functions as the major premise governing the nature of the Result for the Cases:

100:1 **Result:** And in those days in one place the fathers together with their sons shall be smitten  
And brothers one with another shall fall in death  
Till the streams flow with their blood.

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<sup>30</sup> John J. Collins, ed., *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre* (Semeia 14; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1979); idem, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997); idem, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (2<sup>d</sup> ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); idem, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* (vol. 1 of *The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*; New York: Continuum, 1998); Adela Yarbro Collins, "Early Christian Apocalyptic Literature," *ANRW* 25.6:4666-4711; Gregory Cary and L. Gregory Bloomquist, *Vision and Persuasion: Rhetorical Dimensions of Apocalyptic Discourse* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice, 1999).

2 **Case:** For a man shall not withhold his hand from slaying his sons and his sons' sons,  
And the sinner shall not withhold his hand from his honoured brother:  
From dawn till sunset they shall slay one another.

3 And the horse shall walk up to the breast in the blood of sinners,  
And the chariot shall be submerged to its height.

4 **Rule:** In those days the angels shall descend into the secret places  
And gather together into one place all those who brought down sin  
And the Most High will arise on that day of judgement  
To execute great judgement amongst sinners.

5 And over all the righteous and holy He will appoint guardians  
from amongst the holy angels  
To guard them as the apple of an eye,  
Until He makes an end of all wickedness and all sin,  
And though the righteous sleep a long sleep, they have nought to fear.

6 And (then) the children of the earth shall see the wise in security,  
And shall understand all the words of this book,  
And recognize that their riches shall not be able to save them  
In the overthrow of their sins.

1 Enoch 100:4-6 present the Rule that governs the reasoning in 100:1-3. The major premises for judging all actions of humans on earth reside in the events that will occur “in those days” (100:4-6). The Rule speaks about righteousness as well as judgment. If the Case in 100:2-3 were about one or more righteous people, the Result in 100:1 would talk about the preservation of them through resurrection or some other means. Thus, the Rule in the syllogistic reasoning of apocalyptic discourse contains all of God’s actions in the past, present, and future.

In a context where all events become “God’s story,” argument from analogy moves beyond its role of similarity among all spheres throughout the universe (wisdom discourse) or among events where God’s power has intervened in an extraordinary manner (miracle discourse) into a role of imagery that exhibits the nature of good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness. Apocalyptic discourse describes people through analogy with dragons, locusts, cows, bulls, bears, eagles, etc. Analogy is part of “seeing,” and “seeing, interpreted by a heavenly being, is knowing.” The sensory-aesthetic region of the head is central, with special emphasis on seeing and hearing. Seeing is not simply believing, as it is in miracle discourse, but seeing is knowing. This is a link apocalyptic discourse has with wisdom discourse (where seeing and hearing also are knowing). Wisdom discourse places first emphasis on hearing, which starts a process of “learning to see God’s ways.” Apocalyptic uses hearing as a medium to get people to look beyond the human realm into the heavenly realm, where

seeing incredible things becomes “knowing the story of God.” In this context, “knowing” is understanding the deepest consequences of good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness. Thus, one sees “a person in the form of a beast” (Revelation 13) in contrast to “a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars” (Revelation 12:1).

Apocalyptic discourse shares with wisdom discourse the belief that God created the earth and heavens and all that are in it. Apocalyptic discourse, however, emphasizes dramatic scenes of seeing and hymns of praise to God. In these contexts, rationales often appear, either making declarations about God or assertions about time. Revelation 4:2-11 presents a scene that shows the relation of apocalyptic discourse to wisdom discourse at the same time it exhibits the remarkable differences.

The topics in Revelation 4:2-11 are: God, thrones, holiness, worship, singing, and creation.

The entire unit of text contains one rationale:

11: for thou [God] didst create all things,  
and by thy will they existed and were created.

The topic of the rationale is God’s action of creating all things. The rationale does not limit itself to the action of creation, however, but extends into the will of God and the existence of things into the present and future. Its rhetorical form, is “abbreviation of narrative.” The rationale could be expanded to recount any number of God’s acts of creating and exercising divine will over the things and beings that exist in it.

There are no conditional or adversative constructions in Revelation 4:2-11. The presence of the rationale, however, provides a clue for its overall syllogistic structure.

4:2: **Case:** a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne!

3: And he who sat there appeared like jasper and carnelian, and round the throne was a rainbow that looked like an emerald.

4: Round the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clad in white garments, with golden crowns upon their heads.

5: From the throne issue flashes of lightning, and voices and peals of thunder, and before the throne burn seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God;

6: and before the throne there is as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. And round the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind:

7: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle.

8: **Result:** And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all round and within, and day and night they never cease to sing,  
“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,  
who was and is and is to come!”

9: And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives for ever and ever,

10: the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing,

11: “Worthy art thou, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honor and power,

**Rule:** for thou didst create all things,  
and by thy will they existed and were created.”

The description of God, the thrones, and all the other accouterments of heaven present the Case which produces the Result of worship, and the hymn in the context of worship provides the Rule that governs the overall reasoning. Because God created all things and rules over them, the place where God dwells is splendid in every way, and the result of its magnificence is worship and praise. This reasoning establishes a syllogistic structure for apocalyptic discourse in which God’s actions in the past, present, and future become the Rule which functions as the major premise for all things that occur.

One can see how early Christian discourse nurtured the Rule into more and more specific events featuring additional evil and holy personages and beings in Revelation 4:6-13. David A. deSilva has explored this unit in detail with socio-rhetorical strategies of interpretation.<sup>31</sup> This unit of text contains an enthymeme at the beginning and the end, and a full syllogism in the middle. The two enthymemes are:

(1) 7: **Result:** “Fear God and give him glory, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water.”

**Case:** for the hour of his judgment has come.

(2) 13: **Case:** Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth.” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit,

**Result:** “that they may rest from their labors,

**Rule:** for their deeds follow them!”

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<sup>31</sup> David A. deSilva, “The Persuasive Strategy of the Apocalypse: A Socio-Rhetorical Investigation of Revelation 14:6-13,” *SBL Seminar Papers*, 1998 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998) 785-806; idem, “A Socio-Rhetorical Investigation of Revelation 14:6-13: A Call to Act Justly toward the Just and Judging God,” *BBR* 9 (1999) 65-117.

The full syllogism occurs in 14:8-11:

14:8: (Another angel, a second, followed, saying,)

**Result:** “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great,

**Case:** she who made all nations drink the wine of her impure passion.”

9: (And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice,)

**Rule:** “If any one worships the beast and its image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand,

10: he also shall drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and he shall be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.

11: And the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever; and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.”

The Rule now emerges from a story that not only features people like Enoch in the past and God’s angels in the future, but “the beast,” its image, the holy angels, and the Lamb. Early Christian apocalyptic discourse nurtures the story further into the future, featuring characters that are not present in preceding apocalypses, and the events around these characters function as Rules that govern over Cases that produce Results according to the new rules that emerge.

Apocalyptic discourse plays a centripetal role in Matthew and Mark (biographical history); 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Corinthians, Ephesians, 2 Peter, and Jude (epistle); and Revelation (apocalypse). Socio-rhetorical interpretation has been started on apocalyptic discourse,<sup>32</sup> but a full-scale analysis and interpretation awaits.

## **Argumentation in Early Christian Pre-Creation Discourse**

Pre-creation discourse focuses on the redemptive effect for humans and the cosmos of Christ’s relation to God prior to creation. In close alliance with creation discourse, analogy between earthly fathers and their children establishes the dynamics for reasoning about God’s relation both to Christ and to humans. Yet the focus of attention is on the attributes and activity of Christ the Son in the past and present. The focus on Christ in pre-creation discourse

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<sup>32</sup> deSilva, “Persuasive Strategy” and “A Call to Act”; Vernon K. Robbins, “Rhetorical Ritual: Apocalyptic Discourse in Mark 13,” in *Vision and Persuasion: Rhetorical Dimensions of Apocalyptic Discourse* (ed. Gregory Carey and L. Gregory Bloomquist; St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice, 1999), 95-121.

places “the story of Christ and the world” in the position of the Case, supported by God’s story in the background as the Rule. The redemptive Result emerges from the reasoning from God the Father through the Son to humans and the cosmos.

The reasoning in pre-creation discourse is dynamically abductive rather than primarily inductive-deductive like the five other kinds of discourse. Abductive reasoning proceeds either through invention or discovery that puts “together [metonymy] what we had never dreamed of putting together which flashes the new suggestion [metaphor] before our contemplation.”<sup>33</sup> Pre-creation discourse puts the attributes and actions of Christ together with the attributes and actions of God in the Rule, with special focus on the relation of Christ to God prior to creation of the world. From this emerges the insights about Christ in the Case as one who is the image of the invisible God (light), the first of all creation (life), the one who came into the world (dwelling in flesh), who is the head of all things, who holds all things together, and who reconciles both humans and the cosmos to God. The Result is that light shines in darkness, humans become children of God, and the cosmos becomes reconciled to God.

As a close ally of creation discourse, pre-creation discourse coheres naturally with miracle and prophetic discourse, and through its coherence with prophetic and suffering-death discourse, it invites Christian atonement reasoning centripetally into pre-creation reasoning. Colossians 1:11-20 exhibits pre-creation reasoning in an epistle very well. Its syllogistic structure is as follows:

11: May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy,

12: giving thanks to the Father.

**Result:** The Father has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

13: He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,

14: in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

15: **Case:** He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation;

16: **Rule:** for in him all things were created [by God], in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities -- all things were created through him and for him [by God].

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<sup>33</sup> Charles S. Peirce in Richard L. Lanigan, “From Enthymeme to Abduction: The Classical Law of Logic and the Postmodern Rule of Rhetoric,” in *Recovering Pragmatism’s Voice: The Classical Tradition, Rorty, and the Philosophy of Communication* (ed. Lenore Langsdorf and Andrew R. Smith; Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1995), 66, Lanigan’s insertions.

17: **Case:** He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

18: He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent.

19: **Rule:** For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell,

20: and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

One of the keys is to see the references to the action of God in the Rules. Like apocalyptic discourse, the actions of God create the Rule for the reasoning. In contrast to apocalyptic discourse, pre-creation discourse focuses all of its attention on the action of God “through Christ.” God created all things “in Christ, through Christ, and for Christ” (1:16). In addition, all of God’s fulness took the pleasure of dwelling in Christ, of reconciling all things in earth and heaven to himself, and of making peace by the blood of Christ’s cross (1:19-20). In the Rules, then, God is active in the background working through Christ. In contrast to apocalyptic discourse, there is no reference in Colossians to God’s sending of angels or other cosmic beings to perform certain tasks. The Cases focus on the attributes and actions of Christ. He is “the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation” (1:15). He is also “before all things,” “in him all things hold together,” and he is “the head of the body, the church” (1:17). The Results then describe what God the Father has done for humans through Christ: “qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints of light” (1:12), “delivered us from the dominion of darkness,” and “transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (1:13), in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (1:14). Colossians 1:12-14 focuses on humans as the blessed recipients of the action both of God and Christ.

John 1:1-18 also exhibits pre-creation discourse in an exemplary manner. Its syllogistic structure is as follows:

1: **Rule:** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2: He was in the beginning with God;

3: all things were made through him [by God], and without him was not anything made that was made [by God].

4: **Case:** In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

5: **Result:** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

6: **Case:** There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

7: He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him.

8: He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light.

9: **Case:** The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world.  
 10: He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not.  
 11: He came to his own home, and his own people received him not.  
 12: **Result:** But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God;  
 13: who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.  
 14: **Case:** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth;  
**Result:** we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.  
 15: **Case:** John bore witness to him, and cried, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me.’“  
 16: **Result:** And from his fulness have we all received, grace upon grace.  
 17: **Rule:** For the law was given [by God] through Moses; grace and truth came [from God] through Jesus Christ.  
 18: **Contrary Case:** No one has ever seen God;  
**Case:** the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.

The Rule is that Christ the Word was in the beginning with God, they were inseparable, and God made all things through Christ the Word (1:1). In addition, God gave grace and truth through Jesus Christ; in contrast, God gave the law through Moses (1:17). The Case is that there was life in Christ, and this life was the light of humans (1:4). Also, there was a man named John, also sent by God, who bore witness to the light as it came into the world and was rejected by the world (1:6-11). By this process, the only Son of God has made God known to humans (1:15, 18). The Result is that “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (1:5); to all who received him he gave power to become children of God (1:12-13); and from his fullness all humans who believe have received grace upon grace (1:16). Both the Rule and the Case, then, are “stories” about Christ embedded in a story about God. Since Christ came to earth, all the things that happened on earth around Christ are part of the Case. The Result exhibits how the stories about Christ and God are the medium for benefits to come from God to humans. Those who focus their lives in accordance with this story about God and Christ receive God’s redemption.

In pre-creation discourse, then, the story of Christ’s relation to God prior to and during creation provides the Rule for Christ’s attributes and actions. The result of the attributes and actions of both God and Christ are redemption of both humans and the cosmos. Pre-creation discourse plays a centripetal

role in the Gospel of John (biographical history), Philippians, Colossians, Hebrews, and 1 John (epistle), and Revelation (apocalypse).

## Conclusion

Each NT writing has its own particular centripetal-centrifugal rhetorical movement and interaction. The result of this rhetorical dynamic in NT literature is a powerful inductive-deductive-abductive rhetorical environment of argumentation. Wisdom discourse highlights inductive-deductive reasoning that leads to an understanding of the ways of God, whose beneficence brought forth an ordered, just world. Analogies throughout all spheres of the universe support this reasoning and leave the hearer in a position of deciding to live according to the way of life or the way of death, which is built into the created order. Miracle discourse, featuring topics of human ailment, disease, or crisis, presupposes the existence of God's power to intervene in the human and cosmic realms. Presenting arguments that imply a stasis of "fact," miracle discourse exhibits and discusses the conditions in which God's power counters opposing forces to produce well-being and order through extraordinary means. Prophetic discourse features God's choosing of people to oversee righteousness, in a context where there are negative consequences for people who do not participate in righteousness. While abductive reasoning surrounds the assertion of God's choice (the Rule) in prophetic argumentation, inductive-deductive reasoning about God's righteousness produces Results that apply to various individuals and groups in God's world. Suffering-death discourse occurs in a wisdom mode, a prophetic mode, and a Christian atonement mode. In its atonement mode it brings dynamics of wisdom, miracle, and prophetic discourse centripetally into its own discourse and evokes abductive Results concerning death's miraculous removal of sin and guilt. In apocalyptic discourse, the entire story of God and the world in the past, present, and future provides the Rules that govern the Case and the Result. In pre-creation discourse, the story of the relation of Christ to God prior to and during creation provide the Rule, the attributes and actions of Christ provide the Case, and what God has achieved through Christ for humans and the cosmos is the Result.

A major challenge for socio-rhetorical interpretation is to gather NT literature into groups that exhibit their relationships on the basis of these six kinds of discourse. First, it is notable that some writings begin with a similar kind of discourse. For example, Galatians, Romans, 1 Timothy, 1-2 Peter, Mark, Matthew, and Luke begin with a significant presence

of prophetic discourse that is not intertwined with pre-creation discourse. In contrast, Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, and the Gospel of John exhibit a significant presence of pre-creation discourse as they begin. Second, many NT writings contain shifts in argumentation that transform the discourse into “instruction,” Christian *paideia*. In the overall inductive-deductive-abductive rhetorical environment of early Christian discourse, these instructions attain the status of “natural guidelines” grounded in “common sense reasoning” about living in God’s world. For example, 1 Thessalonians, introducing topics of suffering-death discourse as early as 1:6, shifts to a combination of suffering-death and apocalyptic topics in 4:13-17 and negotiates them toward wisdom discourse in 4:18-5:28, with the assistance of an apocalyptic statement in 5:3. 2 Thessalonians, introducing topics of suffering-death discourse as early as 1:4, shifts into apocalyptic topics in 1:5-2:12 and negotiates them toward wisdom discourse in 2:13-3:17. The Gospel of Luke establishes prophetic and miracle discourse centripetally in chapters 1-5 and shifts periodically to wisdom, suffering-death, and apocalyptic discourse to interweave its guidelines for living in God’s world. The Epistle of James, which features wisdom discourse centripetally from beginning to end, invites apocalyptic discourse (5:7-9) and miracle discourse (5:14-18) into its argumentation as it brings its overall wisdom guidelines to a conclusion. Third, a group of NT writings introduce pre-creation discourse as a means of offering “the fullest reasons” why its discourse is “reasonable.” The Gospel of John, for example, establishes pre-creation discourse centripetally in the prologue, in close alliance with suffering-death discourse (“He came to his own, and his own did not receive him”: 1:11). As the story proceeds, it shifts periodically to prophetic, miracle, and wisdom discourse to interweave its guidelines for living in God’s world. Fourth, the rhetorical function of miracle discourse in NT writings needs substantive attention from rhetorical interpreters. On the one hand, miracle discourse functions centripetally only in the biographical histories in the NT (Gospels and Acts), in contrast to the five other forms of discourse, which have a centripetal function at one time or another in each literary mode. On the other hand, emphasis on God’s extraordinary power circulates centrifugally throughout most of the NT corpus, and emphasis on Christ as victor over death and ruler over the world plays a substantive role in second and third century Christian discourse.<sup>34</sup> Peter Brown and Jonathan Z. Smith in particular have argued that a major dynamic in Late Antiquity was

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<sup>34</sup> Torjesen, “You Are the Christ.”

to present the Holy Man as a site of the divine.<sup>35</sup> Another way to formulate this might be to focus on the presence, absence, accessibility, and inaccessibility of God's extraordinary power in special humans. In many ways, then, the dispute is over the manner in which miracle discourse is an appropriate or inappropriate dialect (in our terms "rhetorolect"<sup>36</sup>) for talking about the power of God.

Many challenges stand before rhetorical criticism as interpreters face the centripetal-centrifugal rhetorical interaction both within each NT writing and among all NT writings. Since this interaction evokes the richly complex social, cultural, ideological, and religious environment of thought and action intrinsic to early Christianity, exhibitions of its dynamics can give substantive clues to some of the rhetorical effects of early Christian discourse in Mediterranean society and culture, and potential effects of this kind of discourse in present day society and culture.

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<sup>35</sup> Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978); idem, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>36</sup> Robbins, "Dialectical Nature," 355-7.