Argumentative Christian Story and the Bible

Literary Poetics from the Hebrew Bible to the Quran

Literary Poetics in the Hebrew Bible

The perspective that drives the analysis, research, and interpretation for this book and the series in which it appears concerns the persuasive nature of religious discourse from the Hebrew Bible through the New Testament to the Quran in the seventh century CE. Paul Ricoeur helped to inaugurate the approach in this book and in this series with his essay in 1980 entitled “Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation.”¹ In this essay, he discusses five discourses in the Hebrew Bible: prophetic, narrative, prescriptive, wisdom, and hymnic discourse.² Ricoeur’s approach helped to move biblical interpretation beyond historical and theological issues into an appreciation of the Hebrew Bible from the perspective of the literary poetics it made conventional in Jewish tradition. This means, for Ricoeur, that there are five conventional “poetics” in the Hebrew Bible. In each instance there are two or more entire books in the Hebrew Bible that contain a conventional poetics. Ricoeur does not list them, but it is easy to see the literary home of prophetic poetics in the major and minor prophets; the literary home of narrative poetics in Genesis through Exodus 19, Joshua through 2 Kings, Ezra–Nehemiah through 1–2 Chronicles, and perhaps Ruth; the literary home of prescriptive poetics in Exodus 20–40, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy; the liter-


² From my perspective, Ricoeur does not give substantive consideration to apocalyptic discourse when he refers to it 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 an assessment of discourses in the NT.
ary home of wisdom poetics in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job; and the literary home of hymnic poetics in Psalms and Songs of Solomon. This was an important advance in biblical interpretation, because it called attention to the power of biblical literature to create poetic modes that functioned as conventional ways to construct responsible, creative images of human life in the world.

**Literary Poetics in the Dead Sea Scrolls**

The literary forms in the Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit a close relation to the literary poetics of the Hebrew Bible. In a context where scribes were copying and recopying multiple versions of all the writings in the Hebrew Bible except Esther, they built new literary modes deeply influenced by literary poetics in the Hebrew Bible. Accordingly, Qumranites adapted Psalms into Thanksgiving Hymns, apocryphal and non-canonical psalms, and songs for the burnt offering on the sabbath. In addition, they created wisdom poems that blend proverbial wisdom with psalmonic verse, lamentation, beatitude, and exorcism against demons. Also, they adapted covenant legislation in the Torah into the Manual of Discipline, the Damascus Document, a halakhic letter and other halakhic texts. They adapted the accounts of the holy wars of Israel against its neighbors into the War Scroll and the Temple Scroll. In other ways they enacted literary poetics of the writings in the Hebrew Bible either by writing line-by-line commentaries on them or by weaving biblical verses with others into a florilegium. Beyond this, there is “re-written Hebrew Bible,” plus other writing related to Hebrew Bible. The literature at Qumran, then, exhibits a deep literary poetic relation to the writings in the Hebrew Bible.

**Literary Poetics in the Old Testament Apocrypha**

In the context of Greek and Latin translation and transmission of the Bible, the Hebrew Bible corpus expanded with the addition of a number of entire books and with a number of additions to books. These additions are commonly called the Old Testament Apocrypha. Five of

---

2 Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 301-18; Martinez, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 303-16.
7 Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 460-504; Martinez, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 185-216.
the books are additions to the narrative poetics in the Hebrew Bible (Tobit; Judith; 3 Ezra [1 or 3 Esdras]; 1-2 Maccabees), plus two of the additions to Daniel (Susanna; Bel and the Dragon). Two of the OT Apocrypha books add distinctively to the wisdom poetics in the Hebrew Bible: Ben Sira (Sirach or Ecclesiasticus) and the Wisdom of Solomon. In addition, the middle part of Baruch contains a wisdom poem (3:9–4:4). The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men elaborate the prayers and doxologies in Dan 2:20–23; 3:28; 4:3, 34–35, 37; and 6:27–27 with hymnic discourse.\(^{12}\) Also, Baruch includes hymnic discourse as it ends with a poem of consolation (4:5–5:9), part of which (4:36–5:9) resembles Psalms of Solomon 11:1–7.

It is of special interest as one moves toward the New Testament that two books in the OT Apocrypha present themselves as epistolary discourse: the Epistle of Jeremiah and Baruch. The Epistle of Jeremiah is a seventy-two or seventy-three verse exhortation from Jeremiah to Jews in Babylon not to fear or worship idols. It imitates the act of letter writing in Jer 29:1–23 to the same people in exile, and Jer 10:1–6 is a notable resource for its subject matter.\(^{13}\) In turn, the narrative introduction to Baruch (1:1–9) presents the composition as a letter sent by Jeremiah’s secretary and friend, Baruch, to the priests and people of Jerusalem from his location in Babylon, where he was in exile early in the sixth century BCE.

The letter writing in the Old Testament Apocrypha extends a literary poetic that is embedded in various books in the Hebrew Bible. According to D. Pardee, there are eleven Hebrew letter fragments reported in direct speech in the Hebrew Bible.\(^{14}\) Beyond this, contents of various letters and decrees occur in indirect speech in Esth 1:22; 3:13; 9:21; 2 Chr 30:1. In addition to the Hebrew letter fragments, Paul E. Dion has identified seven Aramaic letters in the Hebrew Bible.\(^{15}\) The Epistle of Jeremiah and Baruch, then, are extensions of an epistolary poetic embedded in various other poetics in the Hebrew Bible, rather than the emergence of a new poetic.

In addition to the Epistle of Jeremiah and Baruch in the OT Apocrypha, the six Greek expansions of Esther called the *Additions to Esther* include two versions of an official letter from King Artaxerxes to the

\(^{12}\) This is an extension of the common practice of inserting poetic compositions into prose works (cf. 1 Sam 2; 2 Sam 22) in the process of editing the OT works.

\(^{13}\) Also see Ex 20:3–5; Deut 4:27–28; 5:7–9; 32:8–9; Ps 115:3–8; 135:15–18; Isa 40:18–20; 44:9–20; 46:1–7.


governors of the hundred twenty-seven provinces from India to Ethiopia and to the officials under them (Add Esth B13:1-7; E 16:1-24 [HCSB]). These letters are official decrees by the king informing the officials in the provinces that Jews must be permitted to live according to their own laws, with instructions concerning their right to defend themselves if attacked. 1 Maccabees contains eight letters. Two of the letters present information from one group of people to another (8:23-32; 12:5-18), one letter is from a King to a group of people (10:25-45), and five are letters from one individual to another (10:18-20; 11:30-37; 11:57; 12:19-23; 13:36-40). They range in length from a one-sentence letter from King Antiochus VI to Jonathan (11:57) to a 21-verse decree from King Demetrius I to the nation of the Jews (10:25-45). 16 Two Maccabees contains two prefixed letters: 1:1-9 from the Jews in Jerusalem and the land of Judea to the Jews in Egypt; and 1:10-2:18 from the people of Jerusalem, Judea, the senate and Judas to Aristobulus and the Jews of Egypt. In addition, it contains a letter from Antiochus IV to the Jewish citizens in 9:19-27 and four letters in chapter 11. 17 Three Maccabees contains two letters: 3:12-29 is a letter from King Ptolemy Philopator to his generals and soldiers in Egypt and all its districts and 7:1-9 is a letter from King Ptolemy Philopator to the generals in Egypt and all in authority in his government. 1 Esdras contains six letters, decrees, or references to the writing of letters. 18 1 Esdr 6:8-22 is of special interest, since it includes a narrative report of events with attributed speech. Thus, in addition to the two books in the OT Apocrypha where the

16 1 Macc 8:23-32 = a letter written on bronze tablets by Romans and sent to Jerusalem (8:22); 10:18-20 = a letter from King Alexander Epiphanes (Bala) to his brother Jonathan (8:17-18); 10:25-45 = a written “message” from King Demetrius I to the nation of the Jews (10:25); 11:30-37 = a letter from King Demetrius II to Jonathan; 11:57 = a one-sentence letter from King Antiochus VI to Jonathan; 12:5-18 = The high priest Jonathan, the senate of the nation, the priests, and the rest of the Jewish people to the Spartans; 12:19-23 = a letter from King Arius of the Spartans to High Priest Onias; 13:36-40 = a letter from King Demetrius II to Simon.

17 From Lysias to the Jews in 11:16-21; from Antiochus V to Lysias in 11:22-26; from Antiochus V to the senate of the Jews and other Jews in 11:27-33; from envoys of the Romans to the Jews in 11:34-38.

18 1 Esdras 2:3-7 = a proclamation of King Cyrus of Persia; 2:17-24 = a letter from Boilam, Mathidates, Tabed, Rehun, Belthenus, the scribe Shimmah, and the rest of their associates living in Samaria and other places to King Artaxerxes of Persia against those living in Judea and Jerusalem (2:16); 2:26-29 = King Artaxerxes’ reply to the people in Samaria and its surroundings; 4:47 = reference to King Darius writing letters to all going to build Jerusalem (4:48-57 reports the contents of the letter in indirect quotation); 6:8-22 = a letter from Sisines the governor of Syria and Phoenicia, Sathrabuzanes, and their associates the local rulers in Syria and Phoenicia to King Darius (includes narrative report of events with attributed speech); 6:24-26, 28-31 = decrees to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem and begin the rituals in it.
opening narration presents them as letters, there are 22 or 23 letters embedded in the books that are additions to the Hebrew Bible.

Some of the books in the OT Apocrypha exhibit a growing tendency to interweave multiple literary poetics together in one composition. Baruch, for example, is a letter that is to be read aloud as a confessional liturgy at festivals and appointed seasons (1:14). After the initial confession (1:15-2:10) and a prayer (2:11-3:8), the middle of the writing contains a wisdom poem (3:9-4:4). Then, the writing ends with a poem of consolation (4:5-5:9), part of which (4:36-5:9) resembles Psalms of Solomon 11:1-7. Probably written somewhere between 200 and 60 BCE, Baruch exhibits how writers were interweaving various modes of biblically-influenced discourse in compositions they presented as letters.

Finally, 4 Ezra (2 Esdras) is not present in the oldest Greek codices of the LXX, so it is regularly considered by interpreters to be among the books of the OT Pseudepigrapha. It was, however, often included in the Vulgate during the Middle Ages, and can usually be found in an appendix to the Latin Bible, after the NT. The Apocrypha of the Church of England and many Protestant churches included it. The variation in the inclusion or exclusion of it is of special interest, of course, since 4 Ezra is an apocalypse. No book in the Hebrew Bible is an apocalypse, but Daniel 7-12 is regularly considered to represent the genre of apocalypse in the Bible. The first part of the apocalypse (Dan 7:1-28) is in Aramaic, and the remainder is in Hebrew.

In the OT Apocrypha, then, one sees narrative, wisdom, and hymnic discourse related to discourse in the Hebrew Bible. There is no significant addition to prescriptive discourse, like Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Some of the additions to prophetic discourse are more like hymnic discourse than prophetic oracle. Other additions to prophetic discourse are epistolary, a phenomenon of special interest for the NT corpus. In addition, there is a move toward apocalyptic discourse with the inclusion of 4 Ezra in many Latin Bibles during the Medieval Period and in the Church of England and many Protestant Bibles in the OT Apocrypha. The presence of apocalyptic on the horizons of the OT Apocrypha is, of course, of special interest in relation to the literary poetics of books in the NT.

**Literary Poetics in the New Testament**

When an interpreter moves to the New Testament, it is obvious that there is no book of Psalms and no book of Prophetic oracles in it. This means there is no entire book containing hymnic or prophetic discourse. Also, there is no entire book containing extended prescriptive

---

discourse like Exodus 20–40, Leuiticus, or Deuteronomy. In addition, there is no book of Proverbs in the New Testament. But this does not mean there is no entire book containing wisdom discourse. The Epistle of James is regularly considered wisdom discourse. It is different in many ways from Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job in the Hebrew Bible; but it has important relationships with Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon in the OT Apocrypha. There are five biographical-historiographies in the NT: the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. In Ricoeur’s terminology, all of these books are some kind of “narrative.” After the five biographical-historiographies, a reader finds twenty-one letters in the New Testament, commonly referred to by the term “epistle” to indicate that they are somehow more formal than everyday letters. Then, the New Testament ends with an apocalypse, which we have seen embedded in Daniel in the Hebrew Bible and on the horizons of the OT Apocrypha with 4 Ezra.

In many ways, what one might call an invasion of epistolary poetics into scripture becomes most noticeable in the New Testament. In addition to the twenty-one books that are presented as epistles, there are two letters in the Acts of the Apostles (15:22–29; 23:25–30) and seven in the Apocalypse of John (2:1–3:22). In fact, the nature of the opening and closing of the Apocalypse gives it the framework of an ancient letter. In the New Testament, then, the literary poetics of biographical historiography, epistle, and apocalypse take center stage. This is a decisive move away from the literary poetics of the Hebrew Bible, except for the dominance of biographical historiography (Gospels and Acts) at the beginning of the corpus.

Literary Poetics in the New Testament Apocrypha

Christian literature written in the literary genres of the New Testament, regularly called NT Apocrypha, were never collected discretely into a corpus for religious reading. Rather, the New Testament Apocrypha is a modern, scholarly collection of Christian writings related to the literary poetics of the NT. For these purposes, most scholars have used four primary categories: gospels, acts, epistles, and apocalypses. J. K. Elliott includes eleven manuscripts he considers to be apocryphal Gospels; nine papyrus fragments; a discussion of ten lost gospels (including fragments in early Christian writings); various sayings attributed to Jesus called “agrapha”; and a discussion of approximately fifteen other pieces of writing he considers to be related to “apocryphal gospels.” He includes manuscripts of six apocryphal Acts; three manuscripts of “secon-

20 Roman Christians report in Acts 28:21 that they have received no letters from Judea about Paul.
2. Argumentative Christian Story and the Bible

dary apocryphal Acts”; and portions of eight other apocryphal Acts. Then he includes nineteen apocryphal epistles: Abgar to Jesus; Jesus to Abgar; Letter of Lentulus; To the Laodiceans; fourteen Paul and Seneca letters; and the Epistle of the Apostles. Last, he includes the extended text of five apocryphal Apocalypses and information about nine other apocalypses in Christian literature. Overall, one sees Christian writings throughout the subsequent centuries that extend the poetics of New Testament writings, rather than writings that return to Hebrew Bible modes of writing.


Literary Poetics in the Quran

During the seventh century of the Common Era, biblical tradition emerged in a new form in Quranic discourse. The Quran contains one hundred fourteen surahs or chapters, organized basically on the principle of the longest to the shortest. Most scholars describe the nature of its discourse as rhyming prose. The nature of the Quran is important for this book on the sociorhetorical nature of the NT, since the Quran represents a later, major reconfiguration of biblical discourse that functions as “sacred writing” for another distinctive religious tradition in the world, namely Islam. A general preview of some items may suffice at this point to suggest the importance for the project in this book of keeping the Quran in view on the horizons.

The Quran was produced in a milieu significantly influenced by both Jewish and Christian traditions. An interpreter of biblical tradition can see this in Surah 1, which has been called “the Islamic equivalent of the Lord's Prayer in Christianity.” In fact, Surah 1 exhibits a fascinating blending of aspects characteristic of the Lord’s Prayer with aspects characteristic of Psalm 1 in the Hebrew Bible.

After Surah 1 comes the longest chapter in the Quran, and one of the most complex. In Michael Sells’s description, “For those familiar with the Bible, it would be as if the second page opened with a combination of legal discussions in Leviticus, the historical polemic in the book of Judges, and apocalyptic allusions from Revelation, with the
various topics mixed together and beginning in mid-topic." Using Ricoeur’s language and our observations about the NT, the reader encounters prescriptive discourse blended with narrative and apocalyptic discourse in ways that move abruptly and energetically both from one topic to another and back and forth among topics.

The thesis of this book is that blending of multiple topics and modes of discourse already occurs in the New Testament. In fact, one of the major reasons the NT has a distinctive nature in relation to the Hebrew Bible is the intensive manner in which it reconfigures biblical discourse by blending it energetically and dynamically in a new context. It is also a thesis of this book that it is not sufficient to remain in the domain of literary poetics to describe the achievement of either the NT or the Quran. Rather, it is necessary to adopt an approach that is alert both to social and rhetorical phenomena in their discourse.26

**Rhetorics in the Hebrew Bible**

Walter Brueggemann moved analysis and interpretation of the Hebrew Bible beyond its literary poetics into its “rhetorics” in his *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*.27 This is a very significant move, since it embeds the poetics of the Hebrew Bible in its oral power to effect change within human community. It is well known that throughout Mediterranean antiquity people did not regularly read texts individually, like we do today. Rather, people experienced written text as a flow of sounds in a context where someone performed the text orally. Biblical text, then, was first and foremost an oral performance for people.29 During and after the fourth century CE, certain people began...

---

to read the Bible individually. Still to our present day, however, many
people experience the Bible primarily through oral performance of it
in public settings.

Brueggemann’s analysis and interpretation of the Hebrew Bible
brings to life the multiple rhetorics of testimony to God. The core tes-
timony of Israel features: (a) verbal sentences (pp. 145-212); (b) adjectives
(characteristic markings of Yahweh: pp. 213-228); (c) nouns
(Yahweh as constant: pp. 229-266); and (d) Yahweh fully uttered (pp.
267-303). The countertestimony of Israel features: (a) cross-examining
Israel’s core testimony (pp. 317-332); (b) the hiddenness of Yahweh (pp.
333-358); (c) ambiguity and the character of Yahweh (pp. 359-372); and
(d) Yahweh and negativity (pp. 373-399). The unsolicited testimony of
Israel features: (a) Israel as Yahweh’s partner (pp. 413-449); (b) the hu-
mans his as Yahweh’s partner (pp. 450-491); (c) the nations as Yah-
weh’s partner (pp. 492-527); and (d) creation as Yahweh’s partner (pp.
528-551). The embodied testimony of Israel features: (a) the Torah as
mediator (pp. 578-599); (b) the king as mediator (pp. 600-621); (c) the
prophet as mediator (pp. 622-679); and (d) the sage as mediator (pp.
680-694). This is a rhetorical theology of the Hebrew Bible that con-
tributes directly to the sociorhetorical analysis and interpretation of
early Christian discourse that follows. The major question for us is how
first century Christians appropriated and reconfigured conventional
rhetorics in the Mediterranean world, which included the rhetorics in
the Hebrew Bible.

Social Rhetorics from the New Testament to the Quran

Social Rhetorics in the New Testament

My proposal is that, with the aid of three major literary modes – bio-
ographical historiography (Gospels and Acts); epistles; and apocalypse –
first century Christians blended at least six rhetorolects30 – wisdom,

30 For purposes of pronunciation and meaning, I have shortened the term “rhetorolect” to “rhetorolect” in this volume. I used the term “rhetorolect” when I discussed the multiple early Christian modes of discourse in 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.htm. For basic insights into the argumentative nature of each rhetorolect, see idem, “Argumentative Textures in Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation,” in Rhetorical Argumentation in...
prophetic, apocalyptic, precreation, miracle, and priestly – into a distinctive, dynamic, and multivalent mode of discourse in the Mediterranean world. Perhaps now it will be appropriate to extend the discussion of rhetorolect, which we first introduced in chapter 1.

A rhetorolect is a form of language variety or discourse identifiable on the basis of a distinctive configuration of themes, topics, reasonings, and argumentations… By their nature, rhetorolects interpenetrate one another and interact with one another like dialects do when people from different dialectical areas converse with one another. The interaction of rhetorolects in early Christianity created new configurations of speech as the movement grew. Every early Christian writing contains a configuration of rhetorolects that is somewhat different from every other writing. These differences, interacting with one another, create the overall rhetorical environment properly called early Christian discourse.31

In order to understand each rhetorolect, it is necessary to understand the nature of rhetorical discourse. Ancient rhetorical treatises teach us that rhetorical discourse elaborates *topoi* in two ways: (1) pictorial-narrative; and (2) argumentative-enthymematic.32 Identification and interpretation of *topoi* in NT literature received considerable attention during the last part of the twentieth century.33 Abraham J. Malherbe and his associates have made extensive investigations of the amplificatory function of *topoi* of the hellenistic moralists in NT literature.34 Their focus on these *topoi* reveals that early Christians participated actively in first century Mediterranean wisdom discourse. In addition, members of

---

the Context Group have identified the presence of common social and cultural topics and values in all the writings in the NT.  

A beginning point for us can be to understand that *topoi* are related to well-known social, political, cultural, and religious locations of thought and action in the Mediterranean world. A major task for NT interpreters is to analyze and interpret both the pictorial-narrative function and the argumentative-enthymematic function of *topoi* in which first century Christians found a conceptual home in the Mediterranean world. The author of this volume and the forthcoming companion volume has accepted the challenge to show the reader that first century Christians nurtured widespread Mediterranean *topoi* into at least six prototypical Christian rhetorolects. The language of “prototypical” comes from cognitive science findings about conceptual metaphor, which will be explained in the next chapter. The prototypical Christian rhetorolects exhibit the presence of human bodies both in physical and conceptual domains of household (wisdom), kingdom (prophetic), empire (apocalyptic; precreation), intersubjective body (miracle), and temple (priestly). Synagogue, country-village, and city are three additional contexts that early Christians experienced firsthand, and other interpreters may explore the functions of these places in early Christian discourse. In the view of the author of these two volumes, synagogue does not function as a prototypical location for first century Christian discourse, even though synagogues are very important places in the Gospels and Acts, since imagery related to the Jerusalem temple was so prototypically dominant in first century Christian thought that it drove synagogue into the margins of Christian discourse. In turn, country-village imagery does not function as a prototypical location for first century Christian discourse, even though country-villages are especially important in the Gospels, since imagery of the heavenly temple-city dominates over it, especially in Colossians, Ephesians, Hebrews, and

---


The invention of Christian discourse becomes a dominant location for Christian thought and action during the second to fourth centuries CE, rather than during the first century, and these cities become the location for the classical creedal Christian rhetorolect that emerges in the fourth and fifth centuries CE.

Social Rhetorics in Rabbinic Literature

Second through fifth century rabbinic discourse bypassed the influences of first century Christian rhetorics as it developed its special rhetorics for rabbinic tradition. Jack Lightstone’s sociorhetorical analysis of discourse in Mishnah, Tosefta, Semachot, and the Talmuds, along with Daniel Boyarin’s *Dying for God*, show how Judaism developed a distinctive mode of discourse alongside emergent and developing Christian discourse.

Jack Lightstone has presented a sociorhetorical analysis and interpretation of the other major alternative discourse that emerged out of Hebrew Bible discourse by the end of the second century, namely the discourse of Mishnah-Tosephta. In contrast to early Christian discourse, rabbinic discourse focused on the Torah as the agent of God’s attributes and actions. Lightstone considers early Rabbinic Rhetoric to be grounded in “Priestly-Scribal Bureaucratic Virtuosity.” In contrast, we may describe Christian discourse in terms of “Apostolic Coalitional

---

37 See Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy.*


40 Kenneth L. Vaux’s *Being Well* (Challenges in Ethics; Nashville: Abingdon, 1997) is suggestive for understanding how the succeeding centuries in Western culture built upon four major traditions of discourse: Hebrew, Greek, apocalyptic, and Christian. A person might think that apocalyptic should simply be embedded in Christian discourse. In sociorhetorical terms, his analysis reveals that Christian discourse interwove wisdom, miracle, prophetic, priestly, apocalyptic, and precreation discourse into a religious mode that domesticated apocalyptic thought in the context of precreation thought. Following the lead of Paul Ramsey, Kenneth L. Vaux’s *Birth Ethics: Religious and Cultural Values in the Genesis of Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1989) proposes “genetic apocalyptic” discourse to confront the dynamics of technology, health, and the body during the 21st century.

Faithfulness.” Rather than priestly-scribal activities standing at the center, early Christians placed apostleship – being sent into the world to perform specific tasks – at the center. Some form of “apostel-” or “apostol-” occurs in twenty-two of the twenty-seven books in the NT. In addition, a comprehensive investigation by James L. Kinneavy has called to our attention that the noun *pistis* and the verb *pisteuein* occur 491 times in the NT, and in every NT writing except 2-3 John. Moreover, his investigation concludes that “a substantial part of the concept of faith found in the New Testament can be found in the rhetorical concept of persuasion, which was a major meaning of the noun *pistis* (to believe) in Greek language at the period the New Testament was written.” He also observes that “The trust, assent, and knowledge of the model of faith have important similarities to the ethical, pathetic, and logical elements of the model of persuasion.”

**Social Rhetorics in Second and Third Century Christianity**

An essay by Karen Jo Torjesen helps us to move a step further in our understanding of the rhetorics of first century Christian discourse. In addition to the apocryphal literature, she explains, second and third century Christians produced literature that configured first century Christian discourse into five major christological discourses: (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 (*pantocratōr*), exhibiting the context of the basilica. Her conclusions show that the NT functioned not only as a resource for a new literary poetics but also as a rhetorical resource for christological descriptions of Jesus that functioned dynamically in multiple contexts of Christian belief, teaching, worship, and practice.

From the perspective of NT discourse, Jesus as divine wisdom (*sophia*), Jesus as divine teacher (*didaskalos*), and Jesus as cosmic reason (*logos*) are elaborations of paraenetic and precreation wisdom discourse in the NT; Jesus as victor over death and the powers is a merger of miracle, priestly, and apocalyptic discourse; and Jesus as world ruler

---

42 Only 2 Thessalonians, Philemon, James, and 2-3 John do not contain “apostle” vocabulary.
(pantocrator) is a merger of apocalyptic and precreation wisdom discourse. This means that second through fourth century Christians found multiple ways to expand and differentiate wisdom discourse for its own purposes, and this was a strategic development in a culture where philosophy had become a fully public mode of discourse. In addition, second through fourth century Christians maintained a dynamic, interactive relation with multiple kinds of NT discourse as they moved their speech, actions, beliefs, and thoughts energetically out into the world of the Roman empire and beyond.

Torjesen’s analysis exhibits how Christian discourse became centrally christological during the second and third centuries. This helps to clarify that NT discourse is in a stage of progression from theological discourse grounded in the attributes and actions of God toward christological discourse, where Christ becomes central in the reasoning. During the first century, early Christian discourse finds its coherence in a consensus that Jesus Christ and holy spirit are agents of the attributes and actions of God. During the second and third centuries, the emphasis shifts towards Christ as the dynamic center of the Godhead. Prior to the second and third centuries, one must understand the innermost dynamics of God in order to understand Jesus Christ and holy spirit. By the end of the third century, one must understand the innermost dynamics of Jesus Christ in order to understand God. A significant amount of NT interpretation during the last half of the twentieth century has been unable to explore the full range of NT discourse as a result of a view that this discourse is christological rather than theological in its grounding.

Social Rhetorics in the Quran

The Quran contains substantive miracle, wisdom, prophetic, and apocalyptic discourse. Precreation discourse is implicit rather than explicit in the Quran. In decades after the death of the prophet Muhammad, the Quran itself became a dynamic subject of precreation discourse, in particular in the controversy about whether the Quran was created or uncreated. In a context where Christians were arguing that Jesus existed with God prior to creation as the Logos, and Jesus was never created, many Muslims argued that the Quran existed with God prior to creation and was never created. In turn, Jewish tradition in contemporaneous midrashic works, for example, Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer, argued that seven things existed with God prior to creation: Torah; Gehinnom, the

---

garden of Eden, the throne of glory, the temple, repentance, and the name of the messiah. The Quran does not develop priestly discourse characteristic of Christianity. Six verses in the Quran assert that the prophets were wrongfully slain. Opposition in Islamic belief to the Christian belief that Jesus was slain is so strong that priestly discourse is not prominent in Quranic discourse.

**Miracle Discourse in the Quran**

Miracle discourse is prominent in the Quran. Thirty-six times in the Quran the clause “Allah is (Thou art/He is) able to do all things” occurs. In addition, ten verses refer to Allah as “Almighty,” and forty-eight verses refer to Allah as “Mighty.” In Quranic discourse, the miraculous power of Allah is grounded in Allah’s creation of the heavens and the earth. As Q 50:38 says: “And verily We created the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them, in six Days, and naught of weariness touched Us.” Since Allah produced all creation originally, Allah has the power to reproduce it. Indeed, God’s ability to produce and reproduce creation is easy, and people can easily see the evidence that God produced it by “travelling in the land” (Q 29:20). In addition, God has no difficulty giving life to humans, and resurrecting them to new life, since humans are one of God’s creations out of dust. As Q 64:7 says: “Those who disbelieve assert that they will not be raised again. Say (unto them, O Muhammad): Ye come again and then ye will be informed of what ye did; and that is easy for Allah.” The emphasis on humans as made of earth occurs clearly in Q 30:19: “He brings forth the living from the dead, and He brings forth the dead from the living, and He revives the earth after her death. And even so will you be brought forth.”

In the Hebrew Bible, narratives about Moses, Elijah, and Elisha describe scenes with dramatic miracle discourse. The Quran refers to Moses

---

54 Q 29:19; 30:27.
more than any other person in the Bible or anywhere in the world\textsuperscript{56} (137 times), and there are a significant number of words in the context of these references that qualify as miracle discourse. In the context of nine references to Moses, there is explicit mention of clear proofs or miracles,\textsuperscript{57} a term that occurs fifty times in the Quran.\textsuperscript{58} There are seventy-four references to Pharaoh in the Quran, and most of these references recount, speak directly about, or evoke dynamics of Moses’ confrontations with Pharaoh. A number of these verses use constructions like “when we did deliver you” (2:49) “we rescued you” (2:50), “and we drowned the folk of Pharaoh” (2:50) to communicate God’s miraculous activity of leading the people of Israel out of Egypt. Q 7:133 refers to the flood, locusts, vermin, frogs, and blood as a succession of clear signs or miracles which Pharaoh and his people did not heed.

The Quran articulates no discourse with an emphasis on miracle either for Elijah or Elisha. Reference to Elisha occurs only twice in Quranic discourse: once he is listed with Ishmael, Jonah, and Lot as people whom God preferred among God’s creatures (6:86[87]); and once he is listed with Ishmael and Dhu’l Kifl as of the chosen (38:48). There is no emphasis on miracle in either context referring to Elijah or Elisha.

The Quran refers to Elijah three times. Q 6:85(86) lists Elijah along with Zechariah (father of John the Baptist), John (the Baptist), and Jesus as among the righteous. While there is no emphasis on miracle in this context, Quranic discourse about Zechariah and Jesus includes an emphasis on miracle, and John’s birth is miraculous. Thus, in an implicit manner the grouping of Elijah with Zechariah, John, and Jesus may be perceived to evoke an image of righteous people around whom God’s miraculous powers were at work in a special way. One should mention again, however, that the emphasis in the context is on these men as “of the righteous,” without any reference to God’s miraculous work in the world. The other two references to Elijah occur in Q 37:123, 130, where the discourse attributes speech to Elijah as one who was sent to warn. Since the content of Elijah’s speech is apocalyptic in tone, discussion of these references is present in the section below on apocalyptic discourse.

\textsuperscript{56} One might think the Quran would refer to Muhammad more times than anyone else. Since many verses in the Quran address Muhammad directly, Pickthall’s English version adds Muhammad’s name in parentheses so often that a concordance search exhibits 277 occurrences of his name. However, the name Muhammad occurs only four times in the Arabic text of the Quran (3:144; 33:40; 47:2; 48:29).


Unlike the Quran’s reference to Elijah only three times, the New Testament refers to Elijah 29 times in comparison to 66 references to Elijah in the Hebrew Bible. Luke 4:25–26 and James 5:16–17 summarize episodes in which God’s miraculous power worked through Elijah, and Jesus’ raising of the son of the widow of Nain from death in Luke 7:11–17 is a reconfiguration of Elijah’s raising of the son of the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17:17–24.\(^{59}\) In addition, the Elijah-Elisha stories in the Hebrew Bible functioned for early Christians as a prefiguration of Jesus’ miracles and played a highly formative role in the narrative portrayal of those activities in the Gospels of Mark and Luke.\(^{61}\) Moreover, the one explicit reference to Elisha in the New Testament (Luke 4:27) focuses on his healing of Naaman the Syrian from his leprosy.\(^{62}\)

There are 79 references to Moses in the New Testament.\(^{63}\) Only Rev 15:3, however, comes close to associating Moses with miraculous discourse when the song of Moses and the Lamb begins with “Great and amazing are your deeds.” John 6:32 refers to Moses’ giving of the bread out of heaven to the people, but it is doubtful that there is any emphasis on the miraculous in the assertion. In contrast, the miracle is “the true bread from heaven which the Father gives.” One could almost say, then, that the New Testament and the Quran exhibit a reversal of emphasis on miracle in the context of Elijah and Moses. For the New Testament, Elijah is the prominent miracle prophet in the story of Israel, and Elisha is included in this emphasis; for the Quran, Moses is the prominent miracle prophet in the story of Israel rather than Elijah and Elisha.

The other person whom Quranic discourse associates explicitly with miracles is Jesus, son of Mary. Q 2:87 emphasizes that Jesus followed after Moses with “clear proofs”, and God supported Jesus with the holy spirit.\(^{64}\) Once the Quran clearly groups Moses and Jesus together (2:136), and once Moses and Jesus are grouped together at the end of a list of four prophets including Noah and Abraham (33:7). Jesus is the only one in the Quran, besides God himself, who is given the power to raise the dead. Jesus raises the dead with God’s permission (3:49; 5:110)


\(^{60}\) A similar story is recounted of Elisha in 2 Kgs 4:32-37.


\(^{62}\) The Hebrew Bible contains 86 references to Elisha in comparison with 66 references to Elijah.

\(^{63}\) The Hebrew Bible refers to Moses more than 700 times.

\(^{64}\) Cf. Q 2:92, 253.
alongside of his creating a live bird out of clay, healing the blind, and healing the leper. Quranic discourse refers to these activities respectively as Jesus’ coming with a sign (3:49) and with clear proofs (5:110).

The Quran refers to Jesus twenty-five times,65 exactly the same number of times it refers to Adam.66 No miracles are attributed to Adam, but the Quran asserts that “the likeness of Jesus with God is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust, then He said unto him: Be! and he is” (Q 3:59). Like Adam, Jesus was human; but also like Adam, God created Jesus simply by saying, “Be!” As the angel explained to Mary, “So (it will be). God creates what He will. If He decrees a thing, He says unto it only; ‘Be!’ and it is” (Q 3:47).

Wisdom Discourse in the Quran
Since “God creates what He will” (5:17) and is able to do all things, there could be great difficulty if Allah’s will were arbitrary. To the good fortune of all, Allah’s power and will are grounded in wisdom, which includes mercy and forgiveness. Forty-eight times the Quran refers to Allah as “(Al)mighty, Wise”67 and seven times as “Knower, Powerful” or “Mighty, Knower.”68 In the Quran, God’s knowledge is fully as great as God’s power. Words referring to knowing, knowledge, and knower occur, on the basis of Pickthall’s version, 692 times in the Quran. Thirty-two times the Quran refers to God as “Knower, Wise.”69 Thirteen times the Quran says that God is “the Knower of all things.”70 God knows the invisible and the visible,71 the things hidden,72 the unseen.73 God knows what is in the breasts of people,74 and God knows sins.75

68 Q 16:70; 30:54; 40:2; 41:12; 42:3; 50; 43:9.
70 Q 2:29, 282; 4:32, 176; 5:97; 8:75; 24:35; 64; 33:54; 42:12; 57:3; 58:7; 64:11; cf. 4:70 (Knower); 36:79 (Knower of every creation); 13:86 (all wise Creator); 4:12; 22:59 (Knower, Indulgent).
73 Q 34:3; 35:38; 72:26; cf. 6:50.
75 Q 17:17; 15:58.
The Quran also refers to God in a manner Pickthall rendered as “Aware.” God is aware of “all who are in the heavens and the earth” (17:55). Indeed, God is “Aware of all things.” The Quran refers to God six times as “Wise, Aware,” four times as “Knower, Aware,” four times as “Subtle, Aware,” and twice as “Responsive, Aware.” God is aware of what all people do: both the good things of those who go right and those who do evil or wrong. God is aware of all that is hidden in human breasts.

God is aware of all these things, and knows them, because God both hears and sees all things. God is the Hearer, Knower. As part of this, of course, God is the Hearer of Prayer. In addition, God sees all things (67:19). God is the “Hearer, Seer.” God sees “what you (pl.) do” and “what they do.”

In the Quran, Joseph, son of Jacob, and the Quranic personage Luq–man are the people most closely associated with wisdom, with Solomon and David also included. Joseph received wisdom and knowledge (12:22) from God for his task on earth. This made Joseph a lord of knowledge (12:76). In turn, Joseph is called “the truthful one” (12:46: ayyuha). This wisdom even enables Joseph to make his father Jacob a wise seer who can say: “Said I not unto you that I know from Allah that which ye know not” (12:96). In the Surah titled Luqman, God is “the True” (31:30) and there is an emphasis that God gave Luqman wisdom (31:12). In the context of Joseph and Luqman, there is an emphasis on God as true. In turn, God gave David and Solomon wisdom (judgment

---

77 Q 6:73, 83, 128, 139; 15:25; 27:6; 34:1; cf. 11:1 (Wise, Informed); 24:10 (Clement, Wise).
78 Q 4:35; 31:34; 49:13; 66:3.
80 Q 2:158; 4:147.
86 Q 3:38; 14:39, 37:75.
87 Q 4:58, 134; 17:1; 22:61, 75; 40:56, 20; 42:11; cf. 17:96 (Knower, Seer); 18:26 (clear of sight, keen of hearing).
88 Q 2:110, 232, 237, 265; 3:156, 163; 11:112; 33:9; 34:11; 41:40; 48:24; 49:18; 57:4; 60:3; 64:2; cf. Knower of what you used to do (16:28); Seer of his bondsmen (3:15, 20); 42:27) and Seer of his slaves (35:31, 45).
89 Q 2:96; 5:71; 8:39, 72.
The Invention of Christian Discourse

and knowledge). This made them wise in judgment and understanding (21:78-79).

The Quran does not contain a separate “wisdom” section, but rather, embeds wisdom, attributed to God, throughout many of the surahs. The wise, who submit to God’s will, who become Muslim, are those who see the wisdom within the Quranic discourse itself.

Prophetic Discourse in the Quran

Everyone knows there is prophetic discourse in the Quran, since Muslim tradition emphasizes that Muhammad is the final, most authoritative prophet. Readers of the Quran will know, however, that the word messenger (nasul) is even more frequent than the word prophet (nabi), and that Muslims refer first and foremost to Muhammad as The Messenger. The Quran refers a total of 78 times to a prophet. The New Testament refers to a prophet 150 times, which is almost twice as many times as the Quran. In contrast, the word messenger occurs 368 times in the Quran (Pickthall: 243 times in the singular and 125 times in the plural). This is almost 2.5 times as often as the word prophet occurs in the New Testament and almost 4.75 times more than the word prophet occurs in the Quran.

The remarkable frequency of the word messenger in the Quran indicates that, for this revelational discourse, God sent messengers at various times to people with various combinations of abilities. They are sent as miracle workers; as people who transmitted God’s wisdom, knowledge, and truth; as people who announced God’s good news; and as special warners of the terrible things that will happen to disbelievers. The concept of prophet is closely related to messenger, since God sends prophets. In Quranic discourse, however, God sends all kinds of messengers, and only certain ones are regularly referred to as prophets. God sends only certain messengers with miracles to confirm what they do. There are signs that accompany all of God’s messengers, since God’s creation presents signs of God’s powerful activity every day. These signs function only for believers as portents that reveal the remarkable beneficence and mercy of God, of course. For unbelievers, these signs are simply natural functions of the universe and not anything that especially reveals the nature and magnificence of God.

Surah 21, entitled The Prophets (al-Anbiya’), recounts circumstances around eleven Hebrew Bible people (Noah, Abraham, Lot, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Job), one New Testament

\[57 \text{ times in the singular; 21 times in the plural.}\]
\[64 \text{ times in the singular; 86 times in the plural.}\]
\[A \text{ current web-site contains an article arguing for the introduction of 19 scriptures by 19 successive prophets: http://www.submission.org/Quran-19.html.}\]
person (Zechariah, father of John the Baptist), and three other prophets (Idris [Enoch], Dhu’l-Kifl [Ezekiel or Job], Dhu’n-Nun [Jonah]). In addition to Surah 21, which is devoted entirely to prophets, there are lists of prophets in various verses in the Quran. Jesus is most noticeably absent from Surah 21, since he is included in lists of prophets among Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses in 2:136; 3:84; 4:163–164 and among Noah, Abraham, and Moses in 33:7. Many consider Jonah (Yunus) to be present in Dhu’n-Nun in Surah 21. Jonah (Yunus) appears only once in a list of prophets (4:163–164), but he has wonderful company there: Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Job, and Jesus. In addition, Jonah appears among Ishmael, Elisha, and Lot in 6:86; receives special recognition in 37:139–148 after Noah (37:75–82), Abraham (37:83–111); Isaac (37:112–113), Moses and Aaron (37:114–122), Elijah (37:123–132), and Lot (37:133–138); and there is a Surah named Jonah (10: Yunus).

The term prophethood and the singular or plural of prophet occurs eighty-three times in the Quran. There is no verb that Pickthall interprets in English as “to prophesy.” God promises 117 times. Prophets transmit God’s knowledge, wisdom, truth, and good news; and they warn. Prophets in the Quran do not prophesy. Thus, the Quran makes no references to prophecies, and it does not describe anyone as prophesying. Both God and Satan promise (2:268). This would seem to fit the Islamic contention that Muhammad ends prophecy.

Apocalyptic Discourse in the Quran

Apocalyptic discourse is highly present in the Quran. References to the day of judgment occur 14 times,” to those who believe in God and the last day 27 times,” and things that will happen on the day of resurrection 71 times.” Norman O. Brown, following the lead of Louis Massignon, has called Surah 18 the “Apocalypse of Islam.” “Surah 18,” he says, “is the apocalypse of Islam: the heart of its message, not displayed on the surface, is the distinction between surface and substance, between Zahir and batin.” What Brown asserts about Surah 18 is true for

---

93 Q 1:4; 15:35; 26:82; 37:20; 38:78; 51:12; 56:56; 68:39; 70:26; 74:46; 82:15; 17, 18; 83:11.
most of the Quran. Almost the entire presentation of themes in the Quran involves either an implicit or explicit reference to the Eschaton. As we have indicated elsewhere, the very presentation of time is focused on a compression of the period from Creation to the Last Day, with a resulting emphasis of making all temporal events affected by a sense of the End. In this context, one of the tasks of God’s messengers is to warn people about the rewards of belief and the consequences of disbelief.

Apocalyptic discourse in the Quran sets up the alternative of gardens and paradise for believers and fire for disbelievers. The gardens and paradise as humans’ reward for good action are mentioned 130 times. These gardens, modeled on the garden of Eden in Gen 2-3, have much in common with the heavenly garden-city as it is depicted in Rev 22:1-5. Fire, the reward of those who sin, is mentioned 148 times, and there are 103 references to hell. This means that 64 surahs refer explicitly to the Fire, with one more implying it (Q 42). Forty-two surahs appear not to contain a reference to the fire for unbelievers or allude to it. Surah 2: al-Baqarah, the longest surah in the Quran, has 14 or 15 references to the fire, more references than any other surah.

Imran has eleven references to the Fire. Surah 101: al-Qar’iah ends with the words “raging fire.” It is unusual that the phrase “the fire of God” appears only once in the Quran (104:6), since fire is intimately associated with the nature of God in the Bible.\textsuperscript{102} The Quran appears to present fire much more like the Revelation to John, where fire is explicitly an instrument of God, but not identified so intimately with the internal nature of God.\textsuperscript{103}

In a context where people face an alternative between gardens of delight and the raging fire on the basis of belief or disbelief, a major task of God’s messengers is to warn people about the rewards of belief and the consequences of disbelief. It was noted above in the section on miraculous discourse how the Quran emphasizes the role of Elijah as warners about the consequences of disbelief, rather than as agent of God’s miraculous power. Q 37:123-132 evokes Elijah’s confrontation with the worshippers of Baal with reference to the doom that awaits them, rather than with reference to the manifestation of God’s power in fire that came down and consumed the offerings (1 Kgs 18:36-39; see also 2 Kgs 1:10).

In addition, a number of surahs in the Quran vividly present details of the day of judgment in a manner reminiscent of Mark 13, Matthew 24, Luke 21, and Rev 20-21 in the New Testament. Quran 82: (“‘The Cleaving’ [al-Infitar]) presents in only 19 verses the splitting of the heavens, the dispersing of the planets, the raging of the seas, and the overturning of the graves that will occur on the day of judgment. Quran 75 (“‘The Rising of the Dead’ [al-Qiyamah]) presents in detail the sequence of events at the end, including the darkening of the sun and moon (cf. Mark 13:24 par.), when the righteous will be resurrected.

Noah and Jonah are apocalyptic prophets. In many ways, their discourse brings coherence to all of Quranic discourse, which, as we mentioned above, seems apocalyptic in its overall nature while at the same time using a variety of discourses.

Conclusion

To achieve sociorhetorical analysis and interpretation of books in the NT, it is necessary to move beyond literary poetics, and even beyond literary rhetoric, into the social rhetorics of multiple kinds of discourse in the corpus. One of the most noticeable features of NT literature is its overall reduction of literary poetics to biographical-historiography,

\textsuperscript{102} E.g., Num 16:35; Deut 4:24, 33, 36; 5:4, 5, 22, 24, 26; 9:3; 18:16; 32:22; 1 Kgs 18:24, 38; 2 Kgs 1:10; Job 1:16; Ps 18:8; 29:7; 50:3; 78:21; 79:5; 89:46; 97:3.

epistle, and apocalypse. Another feature of this literature, however, is the energetic reconfiguration and blending of discourses characteristic of the Hebrew Bible, the OT Apocrypha, the OT Pseudepigrapha, and Mediterranean literature outside these cultural arenas. In order to produce sociorhetorical commentary on NT literature, then, it is necessary to enact strategies of rhetorical analysis and interpretation that focus on the blending of multiple rhetorolects in social, cultural, ideological, and religious contexts where people are using reconfigured and reoriented literary poetics.