Fabrics of Discourse

Essays in Honor of
Vernon K. Robbins

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TRINITY PRESS INTERNATIONAL
A Continuum imprint
HARRISBURG • LONDON • NEW YORK
Shame on the Hypocritical Leaders in the Church

A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of the Reproaches in Matthew 23

— H. J. Bernard Combrink —

Contributing to this volume in honor of Vernon Robbins is a great honor. Over many years he has directly and indirectly enriched and challenged interpreters to redraw boundaries of interpretation of the Bible in a dynamic and interactive manner. This happened through his writings and participation in lectures and seminars — but also in person here at Stellenbosch through his involvement as visiting professor in the Department of Old and New Testament. The dialogue of this volume as a whole will only be another step in this evolving interactive dialogue with such a serious conversation partner.

In this contribution, attention is given to Matt 23, which contains very stringent criticism against the Pharisees that has been a source of unease to many Bible readers. This section of the gospel of Matthew remains extremely relevant to leaders in the church, lay readers of the New Testament, and teachers in theology. We focus on the so-called “Woes” in Matt 23, but this can be done only by taking into consideration the broader context of the chapter as a whole as well as the last of the five discourses of Jesus in Matthew (chs. 23–25). Different textures of the Woes are explored, although not all the textures identified in socio-rhetorical interpretation can be dealt with in this contribution.¹ As Robbins has

dealt with the rationales in 23:1–15, this article endeavors to continue the discussion of Matt 23 and to place the discussion of the Woes in a broader context.

**Inner Texture**

First a word should be said about the delineation of the unit. After addressing the crowds and the disciples in 23:2–12, 23:13 and following are clearly addressed to the scribes and Pharisees. The Woes as a unit seem to extend through at least 23:33. The fact that Jerusalem is addressed in 23:37 as a new addressee probably indicates a break here, which could signify that the Woes extend through v. 36. According to some the unit of the Woes comprises vv. 13–31, with Jesus affirming his authority over the Pharisees in vv. 32–36. The reason for including vv. 32–36 as part of the Woes is discussed below.

**Repetitive Texture and Pattern**

Here attention is given to words and phrases repeated more than once in the unit and thus establishing repetitive texture. This repetition of words and phrases draws attention to certain characters and topics, yet from the repetition as such one is not necessarily able to establish the precise boundaries between units.

The most significant pattern of repetition is the sevenfold repetition of “Woe.” To this structure is added the repetition of “to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites” in six of the seven Woes. The attribute “hypocrites” is added, thus creating a formula repeated six times in exactly the same wording with the exception of a de inserted in Woe 1 (23:13). The seven Woes demarcate this section within the larger unit of Matt 23 where the scribes and Pharisees are already mentioned beginning in v. 2. As was stated above, the final limit of the unit is debated. In Woe 3 (23:16–22) the formula “woe to you, blind guides” replaces “scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.” In v. 17 they are addressed as “blind fools,” and

in v. 19 they are again addressed as “blind.” The phrase “blind guides” of v. 16 is then repeated in v. 24 in Woe 4 (23:23–24) and in v. 26 in Woe 5 (23:25–26) as “blind Pharisees.”

Repetition of certain actions and topics supplements repetition of the characterization and attributes of the scribes and Pharisees. In Woe 1 we read of “not going in,” “locking out,” and “stopping” others from going into the kingdom of heaven. In Woe 2 (23:15) “make a convert” is repeated as “make him a child of hell.” Here the Pharisees and scribes — who do not enter the kingdom of heaven themselves (Woe 1) — are aligned with hell and they make their converts children of hell — the exact opposite of entering the kingdom of heaven. In this way Woe 1 and Woe 2 are linked and seem to form a pair.

In Woe 3 “swear” is repeated ten times, while “sanctuary,” “gold,” “altar,” and “gift” are repeated in a manner constituting two completely parallel cycles (vv. 16–17; 18–19). These cycles are constructed in exactly the same manner by the repetition of two relative constructions “whoever swears” followed by an exclamation about their blindness followed by a rhetorical question “for which is greater.” Three parallel statements follow this repetitive parallelism, underlining that in each case more is involved than only the object of the oath as such, implying that God dwells in the sanctuary and reaching a climax in v. 21 with a reference to heaven (cf. Woe 1) as the throne of God. “Heaven” takes up “heaven” from the kingdom of “heaven” from Woe 1 (v. 13) again.

In Woe 4 the rigorous observance of religious precepts is discussed further, and the tithing of minute herbs is paralleled to the straining out of a gnat, with the antithetical parallel of neglecting the weightier matters of the Law and swallowing a camel. The Pharisees are here again called “blind guides” (vv. 16, 24).

In Woe 5 the Pharisees are again called “blind,” motivated by two parallel sayings of the “outside” and “inside” — the one an antithetical parallelism and the other a synonymous parallelism. In Woe 6 (23:27–28) the contrast of “inside” and “outside” of Woe 5 is repeated while the Pharisees are compared to “whitewashed tombs.”

In Woe 7 (23:29–36) “prophets,” “ancestors,” and “righteous” are repeated in the context of the repetition of “tomb” and “graves,” “kill,” “murder,” “crucify,” “flog,” and “pursue.” This clear pattern of repetition already gives some hints of the close-knit texture of the unit as such, without as yet answering all the questions that may be posed.

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Progressive Texture and Pattern

By analyzing the degree of progress that can be observed in the repetitive texture of the unit, more may be learned about the cohesion of the text.

In vv. 2–3 Jesus warns the crowds and his disciples against the scribes and Pharisees. This warning is now further substantiated by the progressive characterization of these characters. In the appellatives with which the Pharisees and scribes are addressed, a definite progression occurs also in the accusations that are being used. With the exception of Woe 3, the scribes and Pharisees are addressed as hypocrites in all the other Woes.

But in Woes 3–5 they are then addressed as “blind guides,” “blind fools,” again as “blind guides,” and as “blind Pharisee” (v. 26). (Calling them “fools” designates them as outsiders, as 5:22–23 explicitly prohibits calling a brother [insider] a fool.) Woe 6 intensifies the comparison with “whitewashed tombs,” while in Woe 7 the Pharisees and scribes are addressed as “snakes” and a “brood of vipers.” Then, remarkably, in v. 37 Jerusalem is addressed as the “city that kills the prophets.” The line of vilification is being heightened dramatically. “Hypocrites” are “blind guides”; they are like “whitewashed tombs” that may be impressive on the outside, but on the inside they are filled with filth and lawlessness and the bones of the dead; and they are characterized as snakes and vipers.

Progression and intensification can also be seen in the actions of the scribes and Pharisees.

According to Woes 1 and 2, not only are the scribes and Pharisees in their ministry and mission not entering the kingdom of heaven themselves, they are in fact actively locking other people out of it. What is more, they make their converts twice as much children of hell, and not of heaven.

In Woe 3 Jesus addresses the inconsistency in the teaching on oaths often made in Jewish circles. Here they are accused of making a distinction between oaths by the sanctuary and the altar as not binding, and oaths by the gold of the temple and the gift on the altar as binding. Their teaching wittingly or unwittingly encouraged evasive oaths, but they are blind and cannot see the differing degrees of holiness. Furthermore, their teaching ignores that the temple and the altar are manifestations of the holiness of God too.

Shame on the Hypocritical Leaders in the Church

In Woe 4 their emphasis on the smallest detail in compliance with the tithing requirements of the Law is typical of their care about minutiae of the Law. Although Jews were debating about whether these herbs were subject to the agrarian tithe, the Pharisees were so eager to comply with even the smallest detail of the Law that they tithed also dill, cummin, and mint. In the process they neglect the basic requirements of the Law of justice, mercy, and faith according to Deut 10:12–13 and Mic 6:8.

In Woe 5 the issue is the debates between Hillelites and Shammasites about whether a cup should be cleansed inside or outside to be clean. Jesus challenges their emphasis on the external dimension of purity and uncleanness. Here their actions again underline their blindness and inability to discern the really important matters of the Law beyond ritual purity practices. The irony is that besides the external ritual cleaning, deeds of robbery and lack of self-control are also implied.

The contrast between the outside and the inside of Woe 5 is continued in Woe 6. But while in Woe 5 the cup and dish (as metaphor) are said to be full of robbery and lack of self-control, in Woe 6 the comparison between the whitewashed tombs and the Pharisees is made explicit. It is now spelled out that they themselves are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness within, although on the outside they may appear to be righteous.

The progressive repetition and intensification reaches a climax in Woe 7. Building and decorating the tombs of the prophets and the righteous create the appearance of honoring the prophets; moreover, the Pharisees deceive themselves and believe they are honoring the prophets (v. 30). The statement by the Pharisees in v. 30 that they would not have been part of the murdering of the prophets is in opposition to their witness against themselves that they are the children of the murderers in v. 31.6 Irony is at play here in the references to ancestors and descendants. While the Jews were claiming physical descent, “Jesus responds by saying in effect that they are sons all right—more than they realize. They show their paternity by resembling their fathers.”7 Without literally being used, the contrast between the honoring of the prophets on the outside and the inner allegiance to their murderers deepens the contrast of the previous Woes. In the previous Woe, reference was made to the fact that the graves (and the Pharisees) are full of uncleanness. Here


6. Patte, Matthew, 327.

this is deepened progressively with the ironic exhortation to fill to the brim the role of the prophet-murderers before them in v. 32. This statement is intensified by calling them a “brood of vipers” who after having made converts children of hell (v. 15) will now not escape hell themselves (v. 33). In v. 34 they are then explicitly characterized as people who will also scourge, persecute, kill, and crucify the prophets, wise men, and scribes. They shall be responsible (like their ancestors) for the death of the righteous and the innocent.

The progression in the repetitive texture of this section is significant. Some commentators see the structure of this section as a 2 + 2 + 2 + 1 pattern. As mentioned earlier, Woes 1 and 2 deal with the gaining of followers, and with the contrast of heaven and hell they form a pair. Some interpreters take Woes 3 and 4 together in light of the repetition of casuistic detail observation of the Law while ignoring God and the more important dimensions of the Law. This approach can be supported by the repetition of the blind fools and blind guides. Woes 5 and 6 can also be grouped together in the light of purity rules and the disparity between the inside and the outside that is repeated.

But elements of repetition overlap this pattern in the texture. The attribute “blind” occurs not only in Woes 3 and 4, but also in Woe 5 (v. 26). In Woes 5 and 6 a repetition occurs of the contrast between “inside” and “outside,” which is similar to the repetition in Woe 4 of the contrast between emphases on small things while neglecting the greater. But progression also takes place from Woe 6 to Woe 7 through the repetition of “graves” (vv. 27, 29) and “righteous” (vv. 28, 29), as well as “bones of the dead” (v. 27) to various references to “kill,” “murder,” etc., in Woe 7.

In the larger unit of Matt 23 it is significant that in v. 3 we hear “therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach.” The motif of “doing” which is so important at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matt 7:15–27, is here taken up in its negative form of “not doing” with the verb poiein repeated three times in v. 3. While one is not to follow what the Pharisees do, Woe 4 states that what they do not do, but should have done, is the weightier matter of the Law (v. 23). So progression also takes place here from the statement that they do not practice what they preach to a statement about what they should have practiced but did not do: justice and mercy and faith.

Narrational Texture and Pattern

Robbins reminds us that narrational texture resides in voices — either the voice of the narrator, or the voice of written texts cited, or that of characters speaking or whose speech the narrator reports. Often a pattern may emerge from the alternation of narration and attributed speech, as is the case in Matthew with the five speeches attributed to Jesus. Now it is important to see how the Woes form an integral part of the first section of Jesus’ last speech that is addressed to the crowds and the disciples (chs. 23–25). Some scholars are of the opinion that we have two speeches in Matt 23–25: the first against the scribes and Pharisees (ch. 23), and the second to the disciples (chs. 24–25). In 24:1–2 Jesus leaves the temple and starts answering the questions of the disciples. Yet this is the same kind of change in audience and location that we also find in the third speech in Matt 13:36 when Jesus leaves the crowds, goes into the house, and continues his discussion with the disciples alone. In terms of the unfolding of the narrative, this functions as one speech, just as Matt 13 functions as one speech.

The rhetorical function of the speeches is important, in light of the significant way in which speeches function in ancient narratives and biographies. After establishing the ethos of the person by the standard topics dealing with the birth, youth, and young adulthood, “then large units of material featuring paradigmata (‘examples’), apomnēmoneumata (‘reminiscences’), and speeches gradually extend and elaborate the issues as the author carries out the overall goals for the account.”

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provoking the audience to emulate the activity of Jesus and to identify with his disciples, the speeches play a significant role as an important part of the narrative as a whole.

This first section of the last sermon of Jesus in Matthew (chs. 23–25) cannot be seen in isolation from the narrative section preceding it. In fact, in the narrative scribes and Pharisees are linked earlier in 12:38 and 15:1, despite the fact that the two groups were not identical and not normally associated in this manner. In 21:1–22:46 Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and his authoritative action in the temple are narrated. Following on the entry, the narrative deals with a series of eight dialogues between Jesus and his opponents. The opponents vary, but we encounter the chief priests and the scribes (21:13), the chief priests and the elders (21:23), the chief priests and the Pharisees (21:45), the Pharisees and the Herodians (22:15), the Sadducees (22:23), and the Pharisees (22:34, 41). The Woes against the Pharisees and scribes continue this line of narration.

Another aspect is the correlation with the Sermon on the Mount of Matt 5–7. In Luke's gospel the four Beatitudes (6:20–22) are balanced by the four Woes (6:24–26), yet in the Sermon on the Mount in Matt 5 only the Beatitudes are present, whereas the Woes occur here in Matt 23 in the last sermon of Jesus in Matthew. Because of the important role of conflict in the plot of the narrative, one can conclude that the religious leaders are more central to the plot of Matthew than the disciples. The fact that this section of the speech is addressed to the leaders again underlines this assertion. But although in Jesus' speech the Woes are addressed to the scribes and Pharisees, in the narrative the text is rhetorically addressed to the Christian readers.14

The conflict with the Jewish leaders calls for attention to the rhetorical situation of the speech. After the section 16:21–20:34, which is bound together by Jesus' three passion announcements, a new section of the narrative starts with the entry into Jerusalem (21:1–22:46). In the narrative section directly preceding Jesus' last speech in Matt 23–25, the narrator highlights very graphically the escalating conflict between the Jewish leaders and Jesus in deed and debate (21:15–16, 38, 45–46). Mattea has pointed out that the kernel plot event here is the cleansing of the temple because it confronts the inhabitants of Jerusalem with the question of Jesus' authority.15 This sparks off a series of parables by Jesus and controversies with his opponents. The outcome of these debates is that the opposing Jewish leaders fall silent in the end, not even daring to ask Jesus another question (22:46). This conclusion is, however, no indication of a lessening of the tension that has now developed to the point of their planning to arrest him (21:46).16 Inevitably, therefore, after their verbal opposition, and the closing of this section where Jesus states that the Christ is greater than the Son of David (22:41–46), and after his final speech (chs. 23–25), the narrator informs the reader of the leaders' resolve to arrest Jesus by deceit and kill him (26:3–5). The fact that these Jewish leaders, who claim to be interpreting the Law of Moses, are here warned that the Kingdom of God is to be taken away from them (21:43) calls for an explanation to clarify this rift between Jesus and the leaders of the people of God. Their rejection of Jesus (23:37) as God-with-us (1:23) amounts to a seeming rejection of the covenant of God and aligns them with their forefathers (23:31–32).

Although in the course of the narrative the disciples have more than once been witness to debates between Jesus and the religious leaders as his opponents, these most recent rounds of debate make it urgent that Jesus should clarify to his audience this sharp antithesis between him and his opponents.17 As will further be apparent from the speech itself, "Jesus shows by his discourse (23:2–39) that he does not trust the crowds and the disciples to have understood what was at stake in his ongoing disputes with Jewish leaders since his entrance into Jerusalem (21:14–22:46)."18

But something else in the rhetorical situation is urgent at this point in the narrative. The tension in the plot that had been mounting steadily throughout the complication phase of the narrative has been heightened considerably in the most recent sequences. Various remarks by the narrator draw attention to this tension, such as his reference to the anger of high priests and scribes (21:15), or their intent to trap (22:15–16) and arrest (21:46) Jesus, or that the lawyer of the Pharisees is repeating the

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temptation by the devil (ch. 4) in 22:35.\textsuperscript{19} Actually, the Jewish leaders are pictured as murderers (21:38–22:14).\textsuperscript{20} In the light of the narrator’s remark that they were planning his arrest (21:46), the rhetorical situation calls for something of a “farewell speech” by Jesus to his disciples on the eve of his arrest and death, now an impending reality. This address is given in the last speech of chs. 23–25.

The issue of the rhetorical audience at this stage of the narration should also be clarified. The rhetorical audience, “those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change,”\textsuperscript{21} cannot be the Pharisees and scribes as might perhaps be concluded from the repeated address of the Woes in 23:13, 15, etc. Actually an intriguing alternation between the second and third persons takes place here. In the much-discussed 23:3 the crowds and disciples are addressed directly in the second person. After establishing that the Pharisees do have authority as teachers of the Law, because the Law has authority (23:2), Jesus addresses his rhetorical audience, the crowds and disciples, very deliberately in v. 3 when he warns them once again against the dichotomy of words and deeds of the Pharisees.

The sudden change in 23:8–12 from the third-person references to the (absent) Pharisees back to the direct second-person appeals to his audience suggests that even the statements in the third person, although referring to the Pharisees, are actually meant directly for his audience too.\textsuperscript{22} From 23:13–33 the audience then clearly seems to be the Pharisees and scribes in the woe sayings. Nevertheless, this rhetorical strategy is used to warn the real rhetorical audience, the disciples and the crowds, against following the example of the Pharisees and scribes. This tactic also applies to vv. 34–36, as well as to vv. 37–39 where Jerusalem is the addressee.

We have here the well-known classical figure of style, apostrophe/aversio, which amounts to a highly effective manner of addressing the actual audience in an indirect manner by ostensibly addressing somebody else.\textsuperscript{23} “By the use of apostrophe, a speaker will address that which is personified and has therefore become capable of being made a hearer.”\textsuperscript{24} By making use of this figure, communion between the speaker and his audience is also increased in an effort to involve its members even more in his exposition.\textsuperscript{25}

In the beginning of his ministry, Jesus became successively involved with three major groups which function as characters in Matthew’s narrative: the disciples (4:18–22), the crowds together with the disciples (4:25; 5:1–2), and the religious leaders (9:2–13). As the central section of the gospel, the complication of the narrative in chs. 5–25\textsuperscript{26} is drawing to a close, the narrator signals this closure through the fact that Jesus’ involvement with these groups is now being terminated in inverse order (chaistically).\textsuperscript{27} First, the religious leaders become silent, and 22:46 and 23:1 imply that they are not present anymore.\textsuperscript{28} Then Jesus addresses the crowds and the disciples in the first part of his final speech, and he continues his speech to his disciples (without the crowds) after leaving the temple (24:1–3).

The audience of the first part of the speech, therefore, consists of the crowds and the disciples, but from 24:3 onwards the audience is the disciples alone. This shift in audience and location is the same kind as in ch. 13 and does not necessitate a new speech. Therefore ch. 23 initially has the same audience as in the Sermon on the Mount (5:1; 7:28–29). Without at this stage going into the points of contact and similarity between the first and last speeches of Jesus, it must be underscored that Jesus here deals with an audience consisting of people whom he has called to follow him and whom he could expect to identify with his calling. This was his narrative program in 4:17 as filled in by the Sermon on the Mount and the other successive speeches.

Yet another dimension of the rhetorical audience must be taken into consideration. The speech of Jesus as character in Matt 23 is a part of the narrative as a whole, and on this level Jesus functions in the narrated world of the narrator (and eventually the author). The manner in which

\begin{itemize}
\item 25. Ibid., 178.
\item 27. Kingsbury, Matthew as Story, 84.
\item 28. Garland, Intention of Matthew 23, 37; Patte, Matthew, 319.
\end{itemize}
ch. 23 (as part of chs. 23–25) fits into the last section of the complication of the narrative (chs. 21–25) suggests that the author has something to say here to his own congregation (to the implied reader initially). The negative example of Israel serves to warn the congregation (reader) to be aware of going the same way.

Kingsbury's also calls attention to the phenomenon of Jesus “speaking past” his audience when the narrator is actually addressing the narrator. Keeping the different levels of story and discourse in the narrative constantly in mind is important. Something of what may appear to be “speaking past” the audience on the story level is to be seen in the light of the rhetorical situation as discussed earlier. Nevertheless, the relevance of the communication to the implied reader and the contemporary audience must be kept in mind as the author tries to gain or increase adherence from his audience to his theses through his narrative and its speeches. In this respect the warning against hypocrisy and only talking about but not doing righteousness, as well as the admonition to be vigilant while serving God and men, would be highly relevant in the situation where the author intended to persuade by means of the Gospel as a whole.

In determining the question behind the speech of Jesus in chs. 23–25, one has to distinguish — just as in the case of the rhetorical situation — between the question in the narrative context and the question relevant to the aims Matthew has with his gospel. The question that Jesus as a character in the narrative addresses in the first part of his speech (ch. 23) has to do with the teaching and practice of the Pharisees and scribes: a definite question involving specific persons, the religious leaders of the Jews, and involving the stasis of the quality of their words and actions and of the true righteousness. This question is not really surprising, as Jesus already in his first speech contrasted the righteousness that is expected from his disciples with that of the Pharisees and scribes (5:20).

Related to this, yet different, is the question about the quality of their action in plotting to arrest and kill Jesus, clearly suggested in the narrative section preceding the last speech (21:39, 46). But it is more complicated. Because of the apostrophe being used here, and the fact that Jesus is really addressing his disciples and the crowds, the stasis involved is the quality of discipleship of those who will continue to follow him, even in the face of the growing opposition against Jesus. Although one would not have thought that this kind of problem would have been a relevant issue at this stage of the narrative, 20:20–28 signals that the persistent lack of understanding and the desire for authority and influence among the disciples contribute to the growing tension of the plot of the narrative.

Opening-Middle-Closing Texture and Pattern

In an effort to determine the opening-middle-closing texture of the Woes, clearly the Woes (23:13–36) form the greatest part of the first section of the last of Jesus' five speeches in Matt 23–25 addressed to the crowds and the disciples. One should therefore consider the Woes as part of the broader unit and see whether attention to the opening-middle-closing texture may contribute to getting into the inner texture of the text, keeping in mind that this kind of texture can be quite complex. In the following section on argumentative texture and pattern, more is said that deals with the Woes as a central part of the argumentative speech of Matt 23. At this stage seeing 23:2–7 — with its discussion of the opposition between the authoritative teaching of the Pharisees and scribes and their deeds — as the opening section seems sufficient. An exhortation directly addressed to the disciples in 23:8–12 then follows. This initial elaboration on the chreia in 23:3a together with the exhortation may be seen to begin the opening-middle-closing texture.

The elaboration is then followed by the Woes in 23:13–33 that functions as amplification of the opening section and so form the middle of the section. Although close links are apparent between Woe 7 (23:29–33) and 23:34–36, an important stylistic change occurs in v. 34. Where Jesus as speaker had remained up to this point in a certain sense outside the discourse, he now addresses the audience in the first person, which then leads to the closing section in vv. 37–39 where Jesus addresses Jerusalem. Nevertheless, in the case of Matt 23, the invention and organization of the discourse can be dealt with more adequately in the next section.

Argumentative Texture and Pattern

Robbins points to logical and qualitative dimensions of reasoning as some of the multiple inner kinds of reasoning present in a discourse. Aspects of the logical reasoning present in the Woes may also be referred to as part of the oral-scribal intertexture as different discourses and traditions are here being reconfigured.

As far as qualitative reasoning goes, "the quality of images and descriptions encourages the reader to accept the portrayal as true and real," which is a constitutive part of the inner texture. The progression in the portrayal of the leaders was already discussed above; this progression also constitutes qualitative reasoning. The scribes and Pharisees are characterized as "hypocrites" in vv. 13 and 15. In Woes 3–5 they are further characterized five times as "blind" — "blind guides" (v. 16), "blind fools" (v. 17), "blind" (v. 19), "blind guides" (v. 24), and "blind Pharisees" (v. 26). The argument against them is then intensified when in v. 27 they are characterized as "whitewashed tombs" and in v. 33 as "snakes" and a "brood of vipers."

At the same time the scribes and Pharisees are portrayed as themselves not entering the kingdom of heaven and keeping other people out. They are also described as zealous but making their converts sons of hell (Woes 1, 2). In Woes 3–5 they are furthermore characterized as people who make misguided use of Scripture (Woes 3, 5) and who fail to discern the basic thrust of Scripture (Woe 4). The argument reaches a climax in Woes 6–7 when the leaders are portrayed as people who have the appearance of righteousness but inside they are full of death and filth, and in fact as equal to their ancestors who killed the prophets and the righteous, they will continue to pursue, kill, and murder. This strong language is then continued in the closing section of the chapter in the lament over Jerusalem when the city is depicted as "the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it" (v. 37)!

In analyzing the logical reasoning of Matt 23, the role of invention as the planning of a discourse and its arguments, as well as the rhetorical topics (topoi) involved, is important for socio-rhetorical interpretation. The typical argumentative topics can thus be helpful to discern the logical argumentative texture here. The standard speech had four sections: introduction, statement of the facts of the case, argumentation of proofs, and conclusion. Mack describes how this basic pattern had been extended in various ways by different authors in the Hellenistic period and that the traditional distinction between judicial and deliberative types of speeches had broken down at that stage. The value of the patterns observed in the work of Theon, Hermogenes, and the Ad Herennium "is just that it reduces the lengthy theoretical discussions and the interminable lists of topics and devices and their arrangements found in the technical handbooks to a list of basic and fundamental items needed for a comprehensive argumentation."

The first section of Jesus’ speech addressed to the crowds and the disciples seems to be an expanded version of a complete argument, as can be seen in the elaboration of a chreia in the Hellenistic school, for example in the work of Hermogenes. A complete argument may occur when one or more of the following elements are used in combination with the initial ingredients of an introduction, chreia and rationale: a contrary statement in which the initial thesis is restated or clarified; an analogy from another sphere of human life or nature; an authoritative person as example (paradigm or model); a judgment consisting of an authoritative saying (written or from well-known sayings); and a conclusion by way of summary, exhortation, or other techniques. A chreia could actually function as the starting point for an entire argumentative speech (forensic, deliberative, or epideictic) because of the power of such form of communication. Against this background, Matt 23 can be viewed as an example of a chreia elaboration; for our purposes we have to look at the argument in Matt 23 as a whole in order to determine the role of argumentation in the Woes. The expanded version of a complete argument in Matt 23 can be described as follows:

An encomium (brief word of praise) is found in 23:2. Here reference is made to the fact of the authority the leaders have. This characterization of the Pharisees and scribes in the narrative is not new.

36. Mack and Robbins, Patterns of Persuasion, 64.
37. Ibid., 51–63.
38. Ibid., 27–28.
feature of the elaboration pattern) are given as rationale of what has been stated in the contrary — doing things only to be seen by the people.

The sudden switch to addressing the audience of crowds and disciples directly in 23:8–12 introduces the next element of the elaboration: the exhortation, which consists of three negative and one positive command. With each command a rationale is given. The way in which this follows on the remark in v. 7 — that the Jewish leaders love to be called “rabbi” — underscores that the references in the preceding and following sections of the speech use the leaders as a foil in addressing the real audience of the crowds and the disciples. The positive command to seek greatness in being a servant and its rationale is given in the form of a precedent judgment, which usually is “an authoritative saying or principle gleaned from written documents or well-known sayings.”

In this case the positive command to be a servant is recalling what Jesus had said previously (as an authoritative saying) in a context where he had to reprimand them for not being different from the leaders of the nations (20:26–27). The judgment in 23:12 is recalling a saying of Jesus in 18:4. In this way the last speech is linked to the fourth speech as well as to the subsequent discussions of Jesus and his disciples in the next narrative section.

From 23:13 to 23:33 the rhetorical technique of apostrophe is used to warn the audience by way of the seven Woes ostensively addressed to the Pharisees and scribes. This apparent epideictic rhetoric functions as amplification of the exhortation and judgment in vv. 8–12. In the Sermon on the Mount, the disciples and crowds have already been warned against and addressed as hypocrites (6:2; 7:5). Such a series of Woes is also familiar from the Old Testament prophets (e.g., Isa 5:8–23; Hab 2:6–19). Although the different Woes are not quotations from the Old Testament, the series of seven Woes functions as an amplification of the authoritative judgment by Jesus, and in a form reminiscent of the Old Testament judgments. When one furthermore considers that in Luke’s sermon on the plain the beatitudes and Woes are grouped together (6:20–26), the Woes function here almost as a converse to the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount.  

40. Mack and Robbins, Patterns of Persuasion, 90.
41. Ibid., 58.
42. Ibid., 27.
An important stylistic change occurs in 23:34. Whereas Jesus as speaker up to this point had remained outside the discourse, he now addresses the scribes and Pharisees in the first person. The correspondence between Jesus as the Wisdom that sends prophets and wise men and the prophets as beings sent by God in 23:29–31 entails an identification of Jesus with God. As Patte explains, "Jesus plays the same role as God. So Jesus suddenly appears not only as the one who has the authority to proclaim God’s curse upon the Pharisees but also the one who himself has the authority to curse them and bring about the realization of this curse." 43

This change is rhetorically of great importance, as it enhances the ethos of the speaker and contributes to the persuasiveness and perceived truth of the message. In this manner the appearance and authority of Jesus is given a decisive presence that prevents it from being neglected. 46

The conclusion or exhortation follows in 23:37–39. An apparent change of address also takes place here, as Jerusalem is now the object of Jesus' speech. Yet as both Jerusalem and the Pharisees have the attribute of killing the prophets, they are to be associated, and in this way the scope of the opposition is broadened. But again the rhetorical function has to be kept in mind, as Jesus is still actually addressing the disciples and the crowds. Now the danger of the crowds (being part of Jerusalem) and the disciples (being part of the people as a whole) reacting in the same manner is brought home in even stronger force. Therefore, the opposition between what Jesus wanted to do (ἐθέλεσαι ἐπισυναγεῖν, v. 37) and their reaction (καὶ οὐκ ἐθέλεσατε) is important. The concluding verse (v. 39) does, however, imply that there is still the possibility that they will welcome the Coming One in an appropriate manner. The implication also is that this concluding section of the first part of the speech of Jesus functions as a concluding exhortation to his audience for the appropriate reaction, for greater adherence to his point of departure.

Besides the different components of the complete argument that have been discussed already, the phenomenon of assertions supported by rationales should also receive more attention. Scholars have long recognized that assertions accompanied by rationales play an important role in argumentation as rhetorical syllogisms. Characteristic of these rhetorical syllogisms is to leave a premise or conclusion unstated in the presumption that such a missing element can be deduced from the broader context as such. Such formulations are called "enthexemes." "Enthymemic discourse then invites a context to fill out its meanings." 47 In his article on "Argumentative Texture in Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation," Robbins has already discussed the argumentation and rationales in 23:1–15 in the context of a discussion of early Christian prophetic discourse. 48

Looking at the Woes from this perspective it is then important to try to map the type of argumentation and rationales employed here. Without entering into a broad discussion of the six kinds of rhetorical discourses in the New Testament, attention must be given to the category of early Christian prophetic discourse. According to Robbins the primary topos in prophetic discourse concerns the royal kingdom. Prophetic discourse focuses on God as king and the responsibility of certain people chosen as leaders of his kingdom to enact righteousness. 49 A common presupposition would be that those people chosen by God failed to fulfill their task with the result that God chooses another person or group. When the chosen leaders become untrue to their calling, God calls prophets to challenge them. 50

Woe 1

13 Result: But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!
Case: For you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven. (Rationale)
For you do not go in yourselves, (Rationale)
and when others are going in, you stop them.

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

This is a Result/Case enthymeme in prophetic discourse with an unexpressed Rule that God has chosen certain people to fulfill particular

49. Ibid.
roles as leaders to provide righteousness; what could be generally true as a Rule in wisdom discourse now becomes a Rule in prophetic discourse applied to the specific circumstances of God's dealings with his people and his choosing certain people to be its leaders. Because the scribes and Pharisees are untrue to their prophetic calling as selected leaders, Jesus pronounces a woe over them.

Woe 2

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

Case: For you cross sea and land to make a single convert, and you make the new convert twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

[Rule: God has chosen the scribes and the Pharisees (or: leaders of the people of God) to make people into children of heaven.]

This is again a Rule/Case enthymeme with an unexpressed Rule that God chooses people and entrusts them with a specific task. In his case Jesus is referring to the scribes and Pharisees entrusted by God as leaders of the people of God with the task to make the people into children of heaven. Because they pervert this responsibility, the woe is pronounced over them.

Woe 3

16 Result: Woe to you, blind guides,

Case: you who say, "Whoever swears by the sanctuary is bound by nothing, but whoever swears by the gold of the sanctuary is bound by the oath."

17 Result: You blind fools!

Rule: For which is greater, the gold or the sanctuary that has made the gold sacred?
[Unexpressed Rule 1: Guides who teach the people wrongly deserve to be shamed.]
[Unexpressed Rule 2: Guides who teach that oaths by the gold is more binding than oaths by the sanctuary deserve to be shamed.]

18 Case: And you say, "Whoever swears by the altar is bound by nothing, but whoever swears by the gift that is on the altar is bound by the oath."

Here we encounter prophetic discourse again concerning the scribes and Pharisees who are called "blind guides" in v. 16 and "blind" in v. 19. Whereas the first two Woes deal with their wrong action, the argument here is about people who are supposed to be spiritual guides but who teach people in a wrong way. These leaders have the responsibility to interpret the Torah correctly for the people, but they do not fulfill this responsibility. The issue of the popular abuse of oaths and the practice of introducing surrogate objects by which to swear was addressed already in 5:33–37. As all oaths by implication call on God as witness, Jesus there taught that oaths were not necessary and that every word should be truthful. But here the issue is the wrong teaching of the blind guides. The rule by which this is measured in the prophetic discourse is the Torah wisdom that heaven and earth ( Isa 66:1–2), Jerusalem (Ps 48:2), as well as the temple and everything in it (Matt 23:20–22) belong to God.

Woe 4

19 Result: How blind you are!

Rule: For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred?
[Unexpressed Rule 1: Guides who teach the people wrongly deserve to be shamed.]
[Unexpressed Rule 2: Guides who teach that oaths by the gold is more binding than oaths by the sanctuary deserve to be shamed.]

20 Rule: So whoever swears by the altar, swears by it and by everything on it;
and whoever swears by the sanctuary, swears by it and by the one who dwells in it;
22 and whoever swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by the one who is seated upon it.

This is again prophetic discourse based on the Rule mentioned in v. 23 that what the Law requires is really justice and mercy and faith, which is
the Torah wisdom of God and reflects the prophetic discourse as can be seen in Isa 1:17, Jer 22:3, Hos 6:6, Zech 7:9–10, and Mic 6:8. Again, this enthymematic reasoning departs from what the scribes and Pharisees as appointed leaders do and neglect. In the contrary statement of the case, there is no criticism of even their most detailed observance of tithing, but instead of the neglect of the basic requirements of the Law. Although the emphasis is here on their deeds — the scrupulous observance of tithing and the culpable neglect of the weightier matters of the Law — this cannot be divorced from their teaching. Their deeds are correlated to the debates and the teaching of the leaders of the people. Through their own deeds these leaders set a wrong example for the people and in this way prove that they are indeed blind guides, which is emphasized in the second contrary formulation of the Case in v. 24.

Woe 5

25 Result: Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

Case: For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

[Unexpressed Rule: Leaders who clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside are full of greed and self-indulgence, are to be shamed.]

26 Case: You blind Pharisee!

[Unexpressed Rule: Utensils and people should be clean, not only on the outside but also on the inside.]

Result: First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may become clean.

The emphasis is obviously on clean and unclean, which suggests that the debate may be on issues of ritual purity. But the metaphor in v. 25 makes clear that the concern here is with the Case of the hypocrisy of the leaders who have the appearance of being clean on the outside but who are full of deeds of robbery and lack of self-control on the inside. The unexpressed Rule makes clear that such hypocrisy of the leaders deserves to be shamed, which is the Result stated at the beginning of v. 25. This enthymematic reasoning from the Case of the hypocritical conduct of the scribes and Pharisees fits well in the prophetic discourse so far.

54. Davies and Allison, Matthew, 298.
55. Ibid., 302.

Shame on the Hypocritical Leaders in the Church

The reasoning in v. 26 may be abductive because the Case and Result are now combined to become a new Case: the blind Pharisee. This reasoning leads then, based on the unexpressed Rule that (utensils and) people should be clean on the outside as well as on the inside, to the new abductive Result, “first clean the inside of the cup,” with a clear metaphorical meaning. This approach is also in line with the prophetic discourse of the Sermon on the Mount with the emphasis on anger (an internal disposition) as the cause of murder as the external act. In 15:11, 19–20 the emphasis is also on the heart as source of external acts. Under-scoring the metaphorical stance of this woe is the fact that no solid evidence exists to support the assumption that cleaning the outside is determinative for issues of purity by any authority.

Woe 6

27 Result: Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

Case: For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth.

28 So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

[Unexpressed Rule: Leaders who on the outside look righteous to others, but inside are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness, are to be shamed.]

Some interpreters take the whitewashed tombs as a reference to the custom of whitewashing graves (especially at Passover time) in order to warn passersby of the danger of inadvertently becoming ritually unclean through contact with a grave. Yet the emphasis is probably more on the fact that the tombs were often plastered with lime and that the point of reference is indeed that the tombs looked beautiful on the outside. Thus this woe uses a simile in addition to the previous metaphor, but still deals with the same contrast between the external and internal. The
previous argument in Woe 5 is extended by the use of analogy from the inside and outside of cups and plates to the inside and outside of the leaders. This argument may be taken to be typical wisdom discourse, as this enthymematic argument is obviously applicable in a broader context, but situated here in the flow of the argument in Matt 23, this is again to be taken as prophetic discourse as it deals with the chosen leaders of the people of God and the discrepancy in their lives. For this reason, the leaders should be shamed.

Woe 7

29 Result: Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!
   Case: for you build the tombs of the prophets
   and decorate the graves of the righteous,
   and you say,
   ‘If we had lived in the days of our ancestors,
   we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood
   of the prophets.’

31 Thus you testify against yourselves
   that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets.
   [Unexpressed Rule: Only if they mourned the deaths of prophets whom God
   sent and the righteous who followed the guidelines of the prophets, and
   confessed the sin of killing the prophets and the righteous, would they be
   descendants of the people who responded to the criticisms of the prophets.
   Otherwise, they are descendants of the murderers and should be shamed.]

32 Result: Fill up, then, the measure of your ancestors.

33 You snakes, you brood of vipers!
   How can you escape being sentenced to hell?
   [Unexpressed Rule 1: True descendants of murderers should act likewise.]
   [Unexpressed Rule 2: People killing God’s prophets deserve to be sentenced
to hell.]

34 Rule: Therefore I send you prophets, sages, and scribes,
   Case: some of whom you will kill
   and crucify,
   and some you will flog in your synagogues
   and pursue from town to town,

35 Result: so that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth,
   from the blood of righteous Abel
   to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah,
   whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.

36 Truly I tell you, all this will come upon this generation.

Woe 7 again contains argumentation building on hypocrisy as the discrepancy between the external and the internal, between words and deeds, a contrast that has become something of a refrain in Matthew. The reasoning is reaching a climax in the last woe. Here the unexpressed Rule presupposes that if the scribes and Pharisees were true descendants of their ancestors, they should display a fitting response to the messengers God had been sending to his people, even in their own day, and not display merely external deeds. The Case is, however, that they are only responding by external deeds — in fact, testifying against themselves that they are true sons of the murderers of the prophets and not of the righteous who did respond to the prophets. The Result is that they ought to be shamed. So far this is enthymematic reasoning. Verse 32 ironically presupposes the unexpressed Rule that they should act true to their own testimony according to v. 31 (Case) that they are descendants of the murderers of the prophets, implying that they should murder the true Prophet among them. But they then deserve to be sentenced to hell. Here we are hearing suffering-death discourse, but as part of prophetic discourse. The emphasis is on the prophetic judgment on those who cause the suffering and death of God’s appointed messengers and who will be judged for it.

Opinions differ about where the seventh woe ends. Hagner sees vv. 34–36 as an appendix to the seventh woe. Carson sees vv. 33–36 as the conclusion to the Woes. Davies and Allison treat vv. 34–36 together with the lament over Jerusalem in vv. 37–39. We have earlier drawn attention to the significant stylistic change at v. 34, yet the important repetition of terms — (shedding of) blood, righteous, murder/kill, crucify — underlines the continuation of the reasoning of vv. 29–33 in vv. 34–36, which is substantiated by the development of the reasoning here. What has been stated as the Result in the ironic imperative in v. 32 (the exhortation to fill up the measure of the ancestors) now becomes the Case in v. 34, which states that they will kill the messengers sent by God (Rule) with the Result that the righteous blood shed on earth may come upon them. This prophetic discourse again describes the fate of God’s prophets as well as those who reject them.

58. Davies and Allison, Matthew, 311-12.
37 Case: Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!

Rule: [God sent the prophets.]
How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings,

Case: and you were not willing!

38 Result: See, your house is left to you, desolate.

39 For I tell you, you will not see me again
until you say, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”

This section serves as the climax of the Woes as well as of Jesus’ public ministry to Israel. Without discussing the lament over Jerusalem in detail (vv. 37–39), the repetition of the topic of the killing of the prophets by Jerusalem links this subunit closely to the conclusion of the Woes. The prophetic discourse here recalls the tragedy of the Case of Jerusalem (like the leaders of the people) rejecting and killing the prophets sent to her by God (Rule) leading to the Result of the desolation of Jerusalem. Yet, the ray of hope in the Result is the possibility that in the Parousia of Jesus Jerusalem may welcome him again with the same words from Ps 118:26 that were used at his entry into Jerusalem in Matt 21:9.

The importance of giving attention to the reasoning of this prophetic discourse in Matt 23 is that it underscores the responsibility of the leaders of the people of God in accepting the messengers God sent to his people. This discourse also warns of the danger of hypocrisy, giving careful attention to minute details and external matters while neglecting the cardinal issues of the Law and being full of lawlessness on the inside.

**Sensory-Aesthetic Texture and Pattern**

The sensory-aesthetic texture of a text deals with the range of senses evoked by or embodied in the text. This texture may underline dimensions of a text that highlight the tone and color of the repetitive, progressive, narrational, or argumentative texture of a discourse.  

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In Woe 1 mention is made of bodies going in or being kept out of the kingdom of heaven, which is the sphere of purposeful action. Woe 2 emphasizes real purposeful action involved in the zeal to make converts, but the making of converts must involve self-expressive speech and communication.

Woe 3 deals with self-expressive speech in the teaching about different forms of swearing, but this is placed in the context of the leaders being blind guides. This speech is born from the sphere of emotion-fused thought, which is now depicted as blindness and lack of perception and understanding. In Woe 4 tithing is an example of purposeful action, as well as doing or not doing the really important things of the Law. But this Woe is again placed in the context of being blind guides, which again implies emotion-fused thought from which action is born. In Woe 5 ritual cleansing is another example of purposeful action, as well as being full of deeds of greed and self-indulgence. As with Woe 4, however, it is again placed in the context of being blind guides, which is emotion-fused thought from which this action is born.

In Woe 6 emotion-fused thought is involved again in the metaphor and consequences of Pharisees as tombs. At the same time the graves being full of dead bones and bodies and filth also focus very vividly on the bodies that may seem to be passive but in fact are portraying the leaders being full of acts of hypocrisy and lawlessness. This activity of the bodies becomes very clear in Woe 7, with its contrasting activities of building tombs and decorating graves that will culminate in pursuing and killing the prophets and the righteous.

In the light of the discussion of the different textures so far, the Woes appear available for grouping in the following manner: Woes 1–2 form a pair dealing with the purposeful action of the leaders who pervert their calling by God to open up the kingdom of heaven for people. Woes 3–5 are linked together by the leaders being pictured as blind guides who teach and act in a hypocritical manner, emphasizing the outside of things while neglecting the true weighty matters of the Law. But the result of this lack of perception has consequences for their self-expressive speech in their teaching on oaths in Woe 3. A further consequence is their neglect of the true intention of the Law while observing it in the utmost detail, according to their perception in Woe 4. In Woe 5 the consequence of their lack of perception results in their own actions of greed and self-indulgence. Woes 6–7 form a pair with the common topos of graves,
but also the progression from inner uncleanness resulting in deeds of lawlessness and killing of the real messengers of God.60

**Intertexture**

**Oral-Scribal Intertexture**

The major goal of intertextual analysis is to give careful attention to the way that phenomena outside the text have been configured and re-configured in the text.61 These issues normally receive detailed attention in research on the Woes, and references to links in documents like the Gospel of Thomas, Dead Sea Scrolls, and rabbinic and other documents are often explored.

Concerning the constitutive function of the speeches in Matthew, attention has been drawn to the literary examples of speeches and prayers playing a crucial role in the Deuteronomist. Frankemölle is even of the opinion that the five speeches in Matthew are together functioning in the same way as the farewell speech of Jesus in John.62 This analysis underlines the importance of the possible influence of the oral-scribal intertexture in the formation of Matthew as narrative as a whole. Although this proposal has much in it to commend itself, enough weight should be given to the specific rhetorical situation of each of the particular speeches, as has been proposed.

A clear intertextual relationship exists between the Woes in Matthew and Luke. Davies and Allison despair of reconstructing a common Q source, but they find Streeter’s conjecture that the Woes in Matthew are to be seen as a conflation of Q and M still to be the best explanation of the data.63 Thus, the unit in Matthew is an example of Matthew’s reconfiguration of the Woes, however the history of the tradition and redaction should be constructed. The same obviously applies to Luke too. In Luke 11:42–52 there are six Woes, three against the Pharisees and three against the lawyers, compared with the seven in Matthew, all

Shame on the Hypocritical Leaders in the Church

addressed to the scribes and Pharisees. Woe 1 (key) is Woe 6 (the last one) in Luke 11:52 to the lawyers.

The parallels between Matthew and Luke can be tabulated as shown in the following table.64

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Matthew 23</th>
<th>Luke 11</th>
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<tr>
<td>4: burdens</td>
<td>39–41: cup</td>
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<tr>
<td>6–7a: seats and greetings</td>
<td>42: tithes (Woe 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13: key</td>
<td>43: seats and greetings (Woe 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15: proselytes</td>
<td>44: tombs (Woe 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16–22: oaths</td>
<td>46: burdens (Woe 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23–24: tithes</td>
<td>47–48: murder (Woe 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–26: cup</td>
<td>52: key (Woe 6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>27–28: tombs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29–33: murder</td>
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</table>

Without going into the detail of the different uses made of other texts, note that commentaries often give information about shorter or longer lists of Woes in other texts. Lists ranging from two Woes (e.g., 1 Sam 4:7–8; 1QS 2.5–9) to eight Woes (1 En. 98:9–99:2 and b. Pe’aḥ 57a) can be found.65 It was a common *topos* in Jewish literature.

Commentaries normally deal with the different forms of oral-scribal intertexture and cultural intertexture present in the Woes without utilizing this terminology. It may be helpful to use this grid here to sensitize us to relevant aspects of the interactive world of the text. No examples of recitation are to be found here; neither do we find clear examples of recontextualization of the text as quotations from biblical texts without explicit reference to that fact.66 Most of the occurrences of intertextual references can be seen as reconfigurations — that is, the recounting of words or events in new contexts and often adapting them in ways resulting in the latter event becoming actually new in relation to the previous. Such an adaptation can be seen in the relationship between the Woes in Matthew and in Luke — a good example of reconfiguration in the Matthean narrative and context. Another example is the reconfiguration of Mic 6:8 in Matt 23:23. From another perspective, 23:23 can be seen as an example of narrative amplification of 7:12, which is taken up again in 22:34–40 where the Law and prophets are summed up in a

61. Robbins, Exploring, 40.
64. See ibid., 283.
65. Ibid., 285.
word, as well as here in 23:23. At the same time this reconfiguration may also be an example of a typical cultural intertextual echo of a rabbinic tradition in this respect. See, for example, b. Sab. 31a, “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor, that is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary,” as well as t. Pe’ah 4:19, “Charity and deeds of loving-kindness outweigh all other commandments of the Torah.” Other examples of cultural intertextual echoes could be the reference to the straining of wine in 23:24 as an echo of Amos 6:6, as well as to Lev 11:41 (cf. m. Sab. 20:2 cf. b. Hull. 67a), and Lev 11:4 with the reference to the camel as unclean. Careful attention to the oral-scribal, cultural, and social intertexture then confirms that the Matthean polemic against the scribes and Pharisees is in many ways drawing unfair caricatures of them, as is to be seen from their own writings, and has to be interpreted in the rhetorical context as discussed already. Simeon the scribe (first century) said: “not the expounding of the Law is the chief thing but the doing of it” (m. ‘Abot 1:17). 67 When placed in this context, the language of the Woes is not ancient anti-Judaic language, but rather the language resembling sectarian Judaism like 1 Enoch, 2 Baruch, 4 Ezra, and Psalms of Solomon. 68 Matthew warns the leaders in his own community through the prism of the disobedient religious establishment: Amos 1–3. 69

**Social and Cultural Texture**

In a careful reading of the Woes in Matt 23, the contribution of a consideration of the common social and cultural topics involved is obviously of great relevance. David deSilva has given a clear and informative discussion of honor discourse in Matthew. 70 He does this in the broader context of showing how the readers should be sensitive to the honor scripts in the text of the New Testament, also taking into consideration that honor discourse can be present in the three well-known rhetorical modes of logos, ethos, and pathos. The gospel leads readers to establish a “court of reputation,” establishing whose opinion is of importance for the readers and whose is not. To focus our attention on the honor

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67. Cf. M. Davies, Matthew, 158.
73. R. Bauckham, The Gospels for All Christians.
74. deSilva, Hope of Glory, 35.
75. Ibid., 37–38.
name Emmanuel (God with us), but further also through his deeds of virtue, as well as his innocent and noble death for others (1:21; 20:28; 26:27–28). This defense of Jesus’ honor amounts to an indirect appeal to the ethos of Jesus and serves to affirm the readers in their loyalty and following of Jesus. The confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees can be seen in this context as typical challenge-riposte scenarios that are very common in the gospel of Matthew (e.g., 9:1–8, 10:13; 11:2–6; 22:15–22, 23–33, 34–40, 41–46). Already in the important teaching in the first sermon (Matt 5–7), the teaching of Jesus and his interpretation of the Law are qualified as leading to a righteousness surpassing that of the Pharisees. Throughout Matthew the confrontation between Jesus and the Jewish leaders is continued, and this amounts basically to a competition for honor and the results of honor and authority as interpreters of the Torah. Usually the opponents of Jesus challenge him, and the challenge often consists in the accusation that Jesus or his disciples have acted contrary to the Torah. From the side of Jesus his riposte often amounts to a demand for closer reading of Scripture. In Matt 21–23 Jesus takes the initiative. After the series of exchanges in Matt 21–22 the concluding narrative commentary is that from then on nobody dared to ask him any further questions (22:46), which leaves the opportunity for Jesus to have the last word against his opponents in Matt 23.

In the course of the narrative, Jesus acquires honor from the crowds (7:28–29; 22:22, 33). The crowds also give honor to God as a result of the deeds of Jesus (9:8; 15:29–31). Even more significant than the ascribing of honor to Jesus by the crowds is the confirmation of his honor by God himself in the transfiguration scene (17:5). David deSilva sees the resurrection as the final affirmation and vindication of Jesus as the righteous (cf. 2 Macc 7).77 Even before his resurrection it becomes evident that Jesus will act as Son of Man as the eschatological judge (3:11–12; 16:27; 24:30–31; 26:64; see 28:18–20).

Jesus’ censure of the Pharisees in Matt 23 in such an encompassing manner is prefigured by John the Baptist’s denunciation in 3:7–9 where he characterizes the scribes and Pharisees as a “brood of vipers” (cf. 23:33), as well as by Jesus’ riposte in 15:3–9. Significantly he calls them “hypocrites” in 15:7, as well as “blind guides” (cf. 23:16, 24), which is followed in 16:5–12 by Jesus’ warning against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The series of seven woes in Matt 23 is in reality a list of serious insults.78 Although delivering insults can be seen as a fine and frequent art in antiquity, it here obviously suggests a serious conflict between Jesus and his opponents. In the light of a cultural analysis reproaches such as these were clearly well known in that time.79 The Woes/shame attributes can be matched with the Beatitude/honor attributes in the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, as the following table of comparison between the Woes and the Beatitudes shows.80

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shame accusations (23:13–31)</th>
<th>Honor attributes (5:3–12)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>negative</td>
<td>positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>third-person formulation</td>
<td>second-person formulation</td>
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<tr>
<td>addressed to crowds and disciples</td>
<td>addressed to crowds and disciples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with references to opponents</td>
<td>beginning of public career of Jesus</td>
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<tr>
<td>end of public career of Jesus</td>
<td>belonged to kingdom of heaven (vv. 3, 10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>righteous on the outside (v. 28)</td>
<td>hunger for righteousness (v. 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neglect mercy (v. 23)</td>
<td>merciful...receive mercy (v. 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>impure (v. 27)</td>
<td>pure in heart (v. 8a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>swear by throne of God (v. 22)</td>
<td>see God (v. 8b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>son of hell (v. 15)</td>
<td>sons of God (v. 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>descent from murdered prophets (v. 31)</td>
<td>persecuted like prophets (v. 12)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The effect of this development of the honor of Jesus and the dishonor of the Pharisees is to shed light on the rhetorical strategy of Matthew. He affirms the character of insiders and group leaders. Jesus is a reliable, honorable guide to the right knowledge and conduct. The outsiders, here the leaders of non-Christian Judaism, are censured as unreliable guides who are shameless and without honor. By affirming the honor of the reliable guide and exposing the unreliable guides for who they are, the social boundaries of the group are established and reinforced.81 Keep in mind, however, that we are dealing in Matt 23 with the rhetoric of apostrophe that amounts to addressing the actual audience of the disciples in an indirect manner by ostensibly addressing somebody else.

77. deSilva, Hope of Glory, 50.
78. B. Malina and R. L. Rohrbaugh, Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 141.
80. Ibid.; Malina and Rohrbaugh, Social Science Commentary, 47.
81. deSilva, Hope of Glory, 52; Hanson, “How Honorable!"
The severity of these warnings is highlighted by reading it against the background of the social and cultural texture.

**Ideological Texture**

There is an interesting shift in the order in which Robbins treats the various elements of ideological texture in his two publications of 1996. In *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse* he begins with the ideology in texts and ends with a discussion of the ideology in groups and individuals. But in *Exploring the Texture of Texts* he begins his discussion with the individual interpreter and ends with a discussion of the ideology of the implied author and the discourse of the text. This shift in order is perhaps wise because the different dimensions of our own ideological stance inevitably affect our analysis of even the inner texture of the text and the other textures, including the ideological texture. This influence is illustrated in the informative essay by Don Hagner explaining his own position in writing a commentary on Matthew and acknowledging the interconnection between himself as interpreter and the actual interpretation of the text produced by him.

In a stimulating article, Amy-Jill Levine deals with the differing interpretations of Matt 15:21–28 by the older brother (objectivist historical-critical) and younger sister (feminist theory, postcolonial analysis, postmodernism) of biblical interpretation. In a fascinating manner she illustrates that the sister has recognized elements in the text overlooked by the brother, while the sister has to admit that she can learn something from the textually oriented brother. Levine calls our attention to the political and historical context of Matthew's story world where the Church is the real power in the story world and Rome is the real power in the historical context. She further underlines with reference to 15:28 that the anti-Jewish readings of the pericope — those that highlight Jewish ethnocentrism, exclusivity, clannishness, etc. — appear for what they really are: products of the Church. Matthew is not a text written for or preserved by the synagogue. While emerging out of a Jewish matrix, and while still hopeful of Jewish baptism, its focus has shifted to the Gentile world.

On the level of the author of the gospel addressing the audience of his day, the question of the quality of life of the disciple of Jesus in the early church can be seen to be extremely relevant. An even more urgent question would probably be the relationship of the Matthean church to its Jewish heritage. Despite the author's negative view of the Jewish leaders in the narrative as a whole, the fact that Jesus' mission to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (cf. 10:5 and 15:24) is preserved signals that Matthew retains a focus on ethnic Judaism even within a church moving more and more into the Gentile world. This negative view of the Jewish leaders and the sustained polemics against them contributes to Matthew's effort to delegitimize his opponents' interpretation of what the true calling by God to be leaders of his people implies. This caricature of scribes and Pharisees by Matt 23 has in the past often been used as an excuse to denigrate and persecute Jews, actions that express the hypocrisy this chapter condemns. But, as has been pointed out above, this antithetico in Matt 23 functions here secondarily with a view to the primary epideictic rhetorical aim, namely, to strengthen the disposition in the church of Matthew.

This interpretation of Matt 23 by the present author can also not be divorced from an ideological position of being sensitive to the readings of the Woes through the ages in the Christian church, as well as being sensitive to the grave dangers of being religious leaders with the appearance of meticulous observance of Scripture, but in effect neglecting the true intention and the heart of the Law.

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