Emerging in the 1970s, socio-rhetorical interpretation received its name in 1984 with an integration of rhetorical, anthropological, and social-psychological insights in a study of the Gospel of Mark. During the 1980s, ancient Progymnasmata manuals guided the development of rhetorical strategies to interpret argumentation in first century Christian and Greco-Roman literature. During the 1990s, investigation of inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, ideological texture and sacred texture moved the approach into an interpretive analytic. Currently, incorporation of conceptual blending and critical spatiality theory is guiding interpretation of six rhetorolects in early Christian discourse: wisdom, prophetic, miracle, precreation, priestly and apocalyptic.

I. Introduction

Socio-rhetorical interpretation is a multi-dimensional approach to texts\(^1\) guided by a multi-dimensional hermeneutic.\(^2\) Rather than being one more method for interpreting


texts, socio-rhetorical interpretation is an interpretive analytic – an approach that evaluates and reorients its strategies as it engages in multi-faceted dialogue with the texts and other phenomena that come within its purview. This means that it invites methods and methodological results into the environment of its activities, but those methods and results are always under scrutiny. Using insights from sociolinguistics, semiotics, rhetoric, ethnography, literary studies, social sciences, and ideological studies, socio-rhetorical interpretation enacts an interactive interpretive analytic that juxtaposes and interrelates phenomena by drawing and redrawing boundaries of analysis and interpretation. The approach uses a transmodern philosophical position of relationism to interrelate ancient, modern and post-modern systems of thought with one another.

Socio-rhetorical interpretation began to emerge after 1975, with a goal of integrating rhetorical and anthropological modes of interpretation. An additional, feature


of socio-rhetorical interpretation is its special interest in the orality of texts.\textsuperscript{7} Bernard Brandon Scott and Margaret E. Dean have developed this aspect of the approach into a special area of investigation with its own strategies of analysis and interpretation.\textsuperscript{8}

During the 1990s, socio-rhetorical criticism featured analysis and interpretation of multiple textures of texts.\textsuperscript{9} Five textures have been central to the interpretive activity: inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, ideological texture, and sacred texture.\textsuperscript{10} A wide range of socio-rhetorical studies using textural strategies emerged during the 1990s. The seven ‘Pepperdine’ rhetoric conferences, initiated and nurtured by Thomas H. Olbricht, played an important role for advances in rhetorical biblical study from 1992 to 2002,\textsuperscript{11} and socio-rhetorical interpretation has benefited and grown in the


\textsuperscript{9} Robbins, \textit{Tapestry}; \textit{idem}, \textit{Exploring}.

\textsuperscript{10} See the online ‘Dictionary of Socio-Rhetorical Terms’:
http://userwww.service.emory.edu/~Edgowler/REarticle.htm.

context of these conferences and the volumes that have emerged from them. The SBL section on Rhetoric and the New Testament played a special role during the 1990s in nurturing socio-rhetorical interpretation of apocalyptic and miracle discourse in the New Testament. L. Gregory Bloomquist, the current Chair of the SBL section, has published a series of essays developing various aspects of socio-rhetorical

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Duane F. Watson,16 the former Chair of the SBL Section, and H. J. Bernard Combrink17 have written programmatic essays on the challenges and benefits of


writing socio-rhetorical commentary. During 1999-2003, the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas provided the context for a Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation Seminar that met at annual meetings in South Africa, Israel, Canada, Great Britain, and Germany. Progress is well under way currently for production of socio-rhetorical commentaries in a series entitled ‘Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity’.

II. Initial Socio-Rhetorical Studies

Socio-rhetorical interpretation began with analysis and interpretation of social and cultural dynamics in written works. The first sustained socio-rhetorical study was an analysis of the relation of the we-passages in Acts to ancient Mediterranean sea voyages. As Vernon K. Robbins observed in a later study: ‘This study in 1975 revealed that traveling in a boat on the sea with other people created a social environment that made it natural for some authors in antiquity to use first-person plural ‘we’ for literary accounts of sea voyages’. This common social environment became a well-known cultural phenomenon in Mediterranean literature. In 1999, Dennis R. MacDonald published an essay in NTS emphasizing that the cultural intertexture of the sea voyages in Acts goes back to Homer’s *Odyssey* and arguing that Acts reconfigures basic scenes in the widely-known Homeric tradition. Other interpreters have focused so intently either on the historical intertexture of the sea voyages in Acts or on literary coherence in Acts

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18 The meetings occurred in Pretoria, Tel Aviv, Montreal, Durham, and Bonn.
21 Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher* (pbk ed.) xix.
itself that they have missed the broader social and cultural intertexture of the sea voyage accounts.\textsuperscript{23} Robbins’s 1975 study was an initial interpretation of social and cultural intertexture among the sea voyages in Acts and other Mediterranean accounts of sea voyages.\textsuperscript{24}

The second sustained socio-rhetorical analysis concerned the teaching-learning cycle in the Gospel of Mark. The first steps of this analysis appeared in studies of Jesus’ calling of his disciples and of repetitive-progressive summoning in the Gospel of Mark.\textsuperscript{25} The full-scale study of these phenomena in Mark, which appeared in 1984, appealed to the works of Kenneth Burke and the ancient rhetorical treatises entitled \textit{progymnasmata}\textsuperscript{26} for analysis of rhetorical repetition and progression.\textsuperscript{27} It also appealed to the works of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item For social and cultural intertexture, see Robbins, \textit{Tapestry}, 108-18; \textit{idem}, \textit{Exploring}, 58-63.
\item Robbins, \textit{Jesus the Teacher}.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Clifford Geertz, William Bascom, Roger D. Abrahams, Roger M. Keesing, Theodore R. Sarbin and Vernon L. Allen for social, cultural and social-psychological analysis. This study revealed evidence of a Mediterranean teaching-learning cycle in Plato’s *Dialogues*, Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*, ancient comedy, Philostratus’ *Life of Apollonius*, the Abraham story, the Moses story, the Elijah-Elisha story, the Israelite prophets, Philo of Alexandria, Josephus and rabbinic literature. Subsequent studies have built on the analysis and interpretation in this book.\(^{28}\)

Additional socio-rhetorical studies between 1983 and 1991 focused on Luke-Acts,\(^{29}\) pronouncement stories, miracle stories and sayings.\(^{30}\) During the same period of


programmatic essay on the development of socio-rhetorical interpretation showing the manner in which it developed out of literary, rhetorical, social and cultural studies during the 1970s and 1980s. These studies were precursors to the organization of socio-rhetorical interpretation on the basis of multiple textures of signification, meanings and meaning effects in texts. David Hester Amador included a full-length critical assessment of socio-rhetorical interpretation in this earlier form in a book that appeared in 1999. Amador perceived the approach during this earlier phase to be driven by disciplinary strategies and goals, rather than being truly interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary in its approach.

III. Expansion beyond Biblical Literature


34 Gowler, ‘The Development of Socio-Rhetorical Criticism’.
37 Robbins, Jesus the Teacher, 87-94, 136-47.
38 Robbins, Jesus the Teacher, 54, 60-68, 86, 126-8, 172-3, 206-9.
sections of Flavius Josephus and Philo Judaeus, rabbinic literature, Philostratus’s *Life of Apollonius*, and the *Discourses* of Dio Chrysostom. Half a decade later, it led to the publication of over 1500 selections from biblical, Greco-Roman, early Christian, rabbinic, and Muslim literature in *Ancient Quotes & Anecdotes*.

During the 1990s, socio-rhetorical interpretation moved into a wider and wider range of sacred texts. One of the reasons is that socio-rhetorical interpretation features a constellation of interests that naturally moves an interpreter into programmatic analysis and interpretation of literatures of various kinds in various cultures, both on their own terms and in their own contexts. Another reason, however, was that interpreters from various areas of specialty began to apply socio-rhetorical analysis and interpretation in their own fields of study. In 1994, Jack N. Lightstone published a socio-rhetorical investigation of portions of the Babylonian Talmud, followed in 2002 with portions of the Mishnah, Tosefta, and Semahot. In 1997, Martin Oosthuizen produced a multiple

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40 Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher*, 101-5.


49 T. J. Bell, The Paraclete Abbey Bridal Tapestry: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Peter Abelard’s Sequences Virgines castae and Epithalamica (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1999).


of Peter. In turn, Robbins extended his socio-rhetorical studies into the Coptic Gospel of Thomas, portions of the Book of Mormon, the Mishnah, and the Apocalypse of Paul. During the 1990s, Robbins and Newby teamed with Laurie L. Patton in Emory College and Ph.D. courses in ‘interactive’ socio-rhetorical interpretation of Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist sacred texts. In 2001, R. Kevin Jaques used socio-rhetorical strategies of interpretation in his Ph.D. dissertation on Islamic Law.

2002, Stuart Young produced as a senior honors thesis a socio-rhetorical study of African-American slave songs. Most recently, Robbins and Newby have begun special teamwork on socio-rhetorical interpretation of the relation of the Qur’an and the Bible, and Robbins has begun a special investigation of Gospel traditions in the Qur’an. Socio-rhetorical interpretation has continually moved beyond biblical studies into other disciplines and traditions. This is a natural result of its interdisciplinary and intercultural base and focus, and one can expect an even greater extension of this approach into other fields in the coming years.

IV. The Emergence of Multiple Textures in Sacred Texts

The paperback edition of Robbins’s *Jesus the Teacher*, which appeared in 1992, contained an introduction that launched the organization of socio-rhetorical strategies of analysis and interpretation according to inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, and ideological texture. Robbins’s initial display of a multi-textural approach occurred in a 1992 essay on the Woman who Anointed Jesus, written for the purpose of inviting multiple authors into a context of interpretation and discussion of the multiple versions of the story in the Gospels. Robbins published his first programmatic multi-

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58 S. Young, “‘My Lord’s Coming Again’: Biblical Interpretation through Slave Songs’ (B.A. Senior Honors Thesis, Emory University, 2002). Online: http://www.emory.edu/COLLEGE/RELIGION/faculty/robbins/Pdfs/YoungThesis.pdf.

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68 Robbins, Tapestry.
Raymond E. Brown’s *The Death of the Messiah,* contributted to the sections interpreting this chapter of the second Gospel. Robbins’s *Exploring* added sacred texture to the four textures included in earlier studies and in *Tapestry.*

The entire textural mode of interpretation, as it exists at present, is available in an interactive mode on the web (see Figure 1). Excellent examples of integrated multitemporal interpretation can be found in the works of David A. deSilva. These studies

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72 Online: [http://www.emory.edu/COLLEGE/RELIGION/faculty/robbins/SRI/defns/index.html](http://www.emory.edu/COLLEGE/RELIGION/faculty/robbins/SRI/defns/index.html).

regularly observe where different textures converge with one another in a text, and the interpretation proceeds on the basis of the convergences. H. J. B. Combrink wrote essays probing the Gospel of Matthew from a rhetorical perspective that was moving toward social-rhetorical analysis and interpretation. During this period of time, Robbins

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produced additional socio-rhetorical studies of various kinds.\textsuperscript{75} In addition to the Ph.D. dissertations of Braun, Wachob and Sisson, four additional socio-rhetorical dissertations were produced by 1997.\textsuperscript{76} Then two more full-scale multi-textural dissertations were written by H. Stephen Brown on two second-century Christian martyr texts and by Thomas J. Bell on two medieval musical sequences attributed to Peter Abelard.\textsuperscript{77} Also, Jon Ma Asgeirsson produced a series of studies on the Gospel of Thomas that contain significant socio-rhetorical dimensions.\textsuperscript{78} During the 1990s, other people also produced

\begin{itemize}
\item H. S. Brown, ‘The Martyrs on Trial: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Second Century Christian Court Narrative’ (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1999); T. J. Bell, ‘The Paraclete Abbey Bridal Tapestry: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Peter Abelard’s Sequences \textit{Virgines castae} and \textit{Epithalamica}’ (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1999).
\item J. M. Asgeirsson, ‘Arguments and Audience(s) in the Gospel of Thomas (Part I)’, \textit{SBLSP} 36 (1997) 47-85; \textit{idem}, ‘Arguments and Audience(s) in the Gospel of Thomas (Part II)’, \textit{SBLSP} 37 (1998) 325-42; \textit{idem}, ‘Doublets and Strata: Towards a Rhetorical Approach to the Gospel of Thomas’ (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate University, 1998); \textit{idem}, ‘The Chria as Principle and
studies that contained significant use of socio-rhetorical strategies of analysis and interpretation.\textsuperscript{79} The beginning of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century exhibits an increasing rate of socio-rhetorical studies appearing on multiple continents.\textsuperscript{80}

V. Socio-Rhetorical Hermeneutics Versus Other Kinds of Hermeneutics

As various interpreters began to integrate social and rhetorical strategies of interpretation during the 1990s, it became obvious that different hermeneutics guided interpreters in different ways. One obvious mode was a historical or historical-theological hermeneutic. Randall C. Webber perhaps was the first person to use the term socio-rhetorical in a context guided by a dominantly historical hermeneutic. Since then,
Ben Witherington has produced commentaries that use social and rhetorical strategies of interpretation within a historical-theological hermeneutic.⁸³

John H. Elliott began in the 1980s with a historical hermeneutic influenced by sociological and rhetorical strategies of analysis and interpretation, and during the 1990s he nurtured these strategies in ways that are more directly social-scientific in nature.⁸⁴ Beginning in 1988, many publications by Jerome H. Neyrey exhibited an integration of social-scientific exegesis with rhetorical analysis and interpretation, and in some instances his strategies have become explicitly socio-rhetorical.⁸⁵ Thus, some interpreters

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approach socio-rhetorical interpretation from a social scientific perspective, and they vary in the manner in which they allow a socio-rhetorical hermeneutic guide their interpretations.\textsuperscript{86}

During this period of time, Robbins participated actively in the Context Group, which uses a social-scientific hermeneutic to guide its work, and he produced two essays that explicitly use aspects of social-scientific analysis and interpretation.\textsuperscript{87} In addition, Robbins incorporated many insights and interpretive strategies from the works of Bruce J. Malina in \textit{Tapestry} and \textit{Exploring}.\textsuperscript{88} Robbins, however, approaches social scientific analysis and interpretation from a socio-rhetorical perspective. This means that he uses a socio-rhetorical hermeneutic as an interpretive analytic to guide the incorporation of social scientific insights into analysis and interpretation of a text, artistic object, or other social, cultural, ideological, or religious phenomenon.

A noticeable alternative to either a historical or social-scientific hermeneutic is a literary hermeneutic. Robert C. Tannehill developed a literary hermeneutic during the


\textsuperscript{88} Robbins, \textit{Tapestry}, 159-66; \textit{idem, Exploring}, 30-31, 75-86, 100-1, 107.
1970s that was richly rhetorical in nature, and his approach was deeply influential on socio-rhetorical interpretation. After explicit dialogue between Tannehill and members of the Context Group during the early 1990s, in 1996 Tannehill produced a socio-literary commentary on the Gospel of Luke that contains significant socio-rhetorical dimensions.\(^89\) One of the people with whom Tannehill dialogued was Richard L. Rohrbaugh, a member of the Context Group who integrated social-scientific exegesis with literary readings that were essentially rhetorical interpretations during the 1990s.\(^90\) Some interpreters, in contrast to Tannehill and Rohrbaugh, interacted appreciatively but critically with socio-rhetorical interpretation from the perspective of a literary or a social-scientific hermeneutic.\(^91\) Robbins wrote an essay on the relationship between social-scientific and literary hermeneutics from the perspective of a socio-rhetorical hermeneutic\(^92\) and later wrote a socio-rhetorical interpretation with a special focus on aesthetic texture for Robert Tannehill’s Festschrift.\(^93\)


Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza activated a political hermeneutic in a direct criticism of socio-rhetorical interpretation in her address at the first South African Rhetorical Conference in 1994. Robbins responded in the Florence Conference in 1998, analyzing the oppositional rhetoric Fiorenza used in the address and recommending ways the discussion could move forward using socio-rhetorical strategies of dialogue and discussion. Then Robbins in 2002 was invited to exhibit a ‘full-turn’ socio-rhetorical approach that might inform feminist interpretation. Priscilla Geisterfer Nyvlt has written a substantive response to Fiorenza’s essay from the perspective of feminist criticism.

H. J. B. Combrink has written a series of essays that use a socio-rhetorical hermeneutic to analyze, interpret, and challenge the present climate of NT interpretation in the new South Africa. In addition, L. Gregory Bloomquist has written a series of studies that probe the inner nature of a socio-rhetorical hermeneutic in the context of sociological, philosophical, and theological systems of thought and practice. In this

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95 Robbins, ‘Rhetorical-Political Analysis’.

96 Robbins, ‘Feminist Hermeneutics’.


context, both Combrink and Duane F. Watson have written essays that probe the implications of using a socio-rhetorical hermeneutic, rather than an alternative hermeneutic, to guide the writing of commentary on biblical texts.\(^{100}\) One of the results of this work has been an increased emphasis on the role of ideological texture in socio-rhetorical interpretation.\(^{101}\) Thus, the implications of using a socio-rhetorical hermeneutic, rather than a hermeneutic from a different arena of interpretation, to guide socio-rhetorical analysis and interpretation has become more evident during the last

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decade. The implications lie primarily in the sphere of socio-rhetorical interpretation as an interpretive analytic that negotiates multiple arenas of analysis. An interpretive analytic is designed to negotiate analysis and interpretation produced by multiple disciplinary methods, rather than to pursue analysis and interpretation within the strictly drawn boundaries of one disciplinary method.

VI. The Emergence of Multiple Rhetorolects in Early Christianity

By 1996, socio-rhetorical analysis and interpretation began to exhibit significantly different textures for different kinds of early Christian discourse. For example, early Christian miracle discourse has a different texture than wisdom or apocalyptic discourse. In addition, early Christian prophetic discourse is different from precreation discourse. In an essay that appeared in 1996, Robbins defined and described six kinds of discourse in the New Testament as ‘rhetorolects’.

According to the essay, ‘A rhetorolect is a form of language variety or discourse identifiable on the basis of a distinctive configuration of themes, topics, reasonings, and argumentations’. Each rhetorolect blends with the other rhetorolects during the first seven decades of the emergence of early Christian discourse. This raises a challenge for interpreters to describe the texture of each rhetorolect and to explain and display the manner in which each rhetorolect blends with the other rhetorolects during the emergence of Christian discourse as an identifiable phenomenon in the Mediterranean world.

Robbins’s move to analysis of rhetorolects had actually started with his papers at the 1992 Heidelberg conference and the 1993 annual Exegetiska dagen at the University of Uppsala, where he investigated difference kinds of culture in relation to different kinds of discourse. This means that attention to multiple textures in early Christian discourse

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began to emerge prior to the publication of the books that presented the multi-textural approach in 1996. However, Robbins actually launched the multiple discourse approach in a paper on the dialectical nature of six kinds of early Christian rhetoric at the second annual South African Rhetorical Conference in 1996 at the University of Stellenbosch. The names that have gradually evolved for these six rhetoric are: wisdom, miracle, prophetic, precreation, priestly, and apocalyptic. In 1996, Robbins also published an article on the game-like nature of the wisdom discourse in the Epistle of James, using insights from the anthropologist Bradd Shore. As Robbins began to analyze different modes of early Christian discourse more intensively, socio-rhetorical analysis of enthymemes became a more prominent feature of the approach. The result was a conclusion that enthymemes work with social, cultural, ideological and theological topics and values, using some topics and values as a context for reconfiguring others.

Beginning in 1998, Robbins’s analysis and interpretation of enthymemes began to display rule, case, and result, rather than simply major premise, minor premise, and conclusion. The purpose was to invite a discussion concerning the relation of

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106 The names ‘oppositional, suffering-death-resurrection and cosmic’ in the 1996 essay gradually have changed to ‘prophetic, priestly and precreation’.

deductive, inductive, and abductive reasoning in early Christian argumentation, and this is now in process. Robbins has argued for the unusual sequence of argumentation in Luke 11:4 and 11:13 as abductive in the context of enthymematic networks about praying to God to be forgiven in a context where one forgives others and God’s giving of the Holy Spirit in a context where one sees God as Father who gives food and other basic needs to people in God’s kingdom.110 In addition, Robbins has argued for a series of instances of abductive reasoning in the Gospel of Thomas.111 L. G. Bloomquist, in a context of careful exploration of C. S. Peirce’s statements about abduction, has concluded that only in a few instances might one be able to detect abductive reasoning in New Testament texts.112 Rather, he suggests, ‘What Peirce calls deduction, as the tracing out of necessary and probable consequences of certain original hypotheses that were held, seems widely present in the New Testament argumentation and, in fact, appears to be the primary argumentative form.’113 D. E. Aune has objected to any discussion of abduction in relation to enthymemes in the New Testament, asserting that ‘Enthymemes, like syllogisms, are always deductive…’114 Aune does not discuss Bloomquist’s essay, nor does he cite Robbins’s essay on the Gospel of Thomas nor Richard L. Lanigan’s discussion of abduction and the enthymeme in his 1995 essay,115 on which Robbins’s analysis was initially based. Socio-rhetorical analysis and interpretation of enthymemes is still in its early stages, and it appears that it may be the center of some considerable

113 Bloomquist, ‘A Possible Direction’, 85.
discuss the near future. Jeffrey Walker has recently published an important analysis and interpretation of the ‘lyric enthymeme’ in the writings of Pindar, Alcaeus, Sappho, and Solon. This study promises to contribute substantively to the discussion, since it contains enthymematic interpretation of quite lengthy sections of text that people have not regularly considered to be rhetorically argumentative.

In 1999, Robbins turned to apocalyptic discourse and produced an essay on Mark 13 that contains a significant amount of socio-rhetorical analysis of its enthymematic texture in a context that interprets the passage as transferring holiness from the Jerusalem temple to the bodies of Jesus’ disciples. Bloomquist also has produced socio-rhetorical studies of apocalyptic discourse. Newby, who began socio-rhetorical analysis in the Quran in 1997, also has produced an essay on apocalyptic discourse in Surahs 2, 10, and 18 of the Quran. Thus apocalyptic rhetorolect, which blends extended sequences of vivid, graphic images with emphatic assertions about God’s actions, became the testing ground for rhetorical analysis and interpretation that moved beyond semi-philosophically oriented wisdom rhetorolect grounded in God’s created order to a rhetorolect grounded in

120 Newby, ‘Qur’anic Texture’; *idem*, ‘Folded Time’.

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God’s ability to act as an omnipotent emperor who can destroy all evil in the universe and transport all holy souls into an environment of complete well-being.

By the time of the Lund Rhetoric Conference in 2000, it was becoming evident that different ways of ‘elaborating’ topoi held the key for describing each rhetorolect on its own terms and in relation to the other rhetorolects in early Christian discourse. Robbins’s socio-rhetorical essay for the Lund conference worked programmatically with enthymematically argumentative elaboration in the six rhetorolects that are perceived to be central to first century Christian discourse. In the context of writing a socio-rhetorical study of the intertexture of apocalyptic discourse in Mark for the 1999 SBL NT Rhetoric session, Robbins began to distinguish between narrative-descriptive and argumentative-enthymemetic elaboration, and to work with their relation to one another in each rhetorolect. Since 2000, Robbins considers narrative description to be ‘rhetography’ (picturesque expression) and calls rhetography ‘pictorial narration’. In turn, Robbins considers argumentative enthymeme to be ‘rhetology’ (argumentative expression) and calls rhetology ‘argumentation’. Narrative begins by creating a verbal picture (pictograph). Elaboration of one verbal picture by means of additional pictures in a sequence creates a graphic story (rhetography). Argumentation, in contrast, begins by asserting a thesis (logos). Elaboration of a thesis through some combination of rationale, opposite, contrary, analogy, example, citation of authoritative testimony, and/or

conclusion creates an argument (rhetology). Each early Christian rhetorolect has its own way of blending pictorial narration and argumentation.

The essay on the intertexture of apocalyptic discourse in Mark, mentioned above, focused primarily on enthymematic argumentation. Virtually every instance identified as a ‘Case’ features pictorial narration. In addition, it is characteristic of apocalyptic discourse to create both ‘Rules’ and ‘Results’ through pictorial narration. This means that the enthymematic argumentation (rhetology) of apocalyptic discourse unfolds through pictorial narration (rhetography). The essay states many of these things only implicitly, however, as it attempts to exhibit the sequential rhetology (enthymematic argumentation) of Markan apocalyptic discourse through different sequences of Rule, Case, and Result, and through different manifestations of Rule, Case, and Result (e.g., contrary Rule, contrary Case, contrary Result, exhortative Result, petitionary Result). Both the 1999 SBL essay and the 2000 Lund essay explicitly attempt to negotiate multiple early Christian rhetorolects in a context of analysis and interpretation of enthymematic argumentation. H. J. B. Combrink has contributed to this most recently in an investigation of the enthymematic nature of prophetic rhetorolect in Matthew 23.

VII. Conceptual Blending of Multiple Social Locations in Rhetorolects

In the context of analysis and interpretation of the different modes of argumentation in the six major early Christian rhetorolects, reasoning associated with particular social, cultural, and religious locations began to emerge as highly significant. This has led more and more to analysis of the ‘social’ in socio-rhetorical interpretation. It became obvious,


first of all, that a major characteristic of early Christian discourse emerges from the patterns with which it creates enthymematic argumentation out of pictorial narration and reasoning related to people’s bodies, households, villages, synagogues, cities, temples, kingdoms and empires. In other words, the cognitions and reasonings were emerging from ‘lived experiences’ in specific places in the first century Mediterranean world. This has led to the use of ‘critical spatiality theory’ in socio-rhetorical interpretation. This area of study, located in the field of cultural geography studies, builds in particular on writings by Henri Lefebvre, Robert D. Sack, Pierre Bourdieu, Edward W. Soja, and Stephen Toulmin. James W. Flanagan has been especially instrumental in bringing critical spatiality theory into biblical study. In 1991, Robbins used Robert D. Sack’s *Human Territoriality* for socio-rhetorical analysis of ‘images of empire’ in Acts and T. F. Carney’s *The Shape of the Past* for the social location of the implied author of Luke-

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See his ‘Constructions of Ancient Space’ site online: [http://guildzone.org/](http://guildzone.org/).
Acts. Jerome H. Neyrey has applied strategies for interpreting the social location of the implied author to Jude and 2 Peter, Luke’s social location of Paul, the Gospel of John, and to Paul’s writings. Since 2000, Roland Boer has written an important study on ‘the production of space’ in 1 Samuel 1-2, Michael McKeever an analysis of ‘refiguring space in the Lukan passion narrative,’ Claudia V. Camp an important essay on ‘storied space’ in Sirach, Victor H. Matthews an important discussion of physical,

imagined, and ‘lived’ space in ancient Israel,\textsuperscript{146} and Thomas B. Dozeman an essay on Ezra-Nehemiah\textsuperscript{147}.

Socio-rhetorical interpretation is using critical spatiality theory together with cognitive theory about ‘conceptual blending’ to analyze and interpret the nature of early Christian discourse. Here the foundational work is Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner’s \textit{The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind’s Hidden Complexities}.\textsuperscript{148} The merger of conceptual blending theory with critical spatiality theory is clarifying the relation of social places to cultural, ideological and religious spaces in the six major early Christian rhetorolects. According to Fauconnier and Turner: ‘Conceptual integration always involves a blended space and at least two inputs and a generic space’.\textsuperscript{149} Socio-rhetorical analysis and interpretation of rhetorolects begins, therefore, with a perception that places and spaces are related to conceptual blending in manner displayed in Figure 2:

\begin{figure*}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure2.png}
\caption{Conceptual Blending according to the Categories of Experience, Place and Space in Rhetorolects}
\end{figure*}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{Bodily experiences} \hspace{2cm} Sensory-aesthetic experiences of the body
\item \textbf{Social places} \hspace{2cm} Location of the body in social places
\item \textbf{Spaces of blending} \hspace{2cm} Cultural, ideological and religious spaces provide the material for debate and reconciliation in the rhetorolects
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{148} G. Fauconnier and M. Turner, \textit{The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind’s Hidden Complexities} (New York: Basic Books, 2002). The use of this book for socio-rhetorical commentary is the result of an e-mail by L. G. Bloomquist on Dec. 4, 2002, which called attention to the relation conceptual blending theory to early Christian blending of rhetorolects, which was a topic of discussion at the Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity meetings prior to the AAR/SBL sessions at Toronto in November, 2002.
\textsuperscript{149} Fauconnier and Turner, \textit{The Way We Think}, xv, 279.
Sensory-aesthetic experiences of the body in various social places – like household, village, city, synagogue, kingdom and temple – in the world create the contexts in which people grow in cognitive and conceptual abilities that interpret the social places they experience as cultural, ideological and religious spaces. People’s interpretations in the ongoing context of their sensory-aesthetic experiences are the ‘spaces of blending’ in which they lead their daily lives. Socio-rhetorical interpreters are accepting the challenge of analyzing and interpreting six rhetorolects that emerge in early Christian discourse in relation to these places and spaces: wisdom, prophetic, miracle, precreation, priestly and apocalyptic. Figure 3 below presents an initial display of important places and spaces that play a role in the six early Christian rhetorolects.

Early Christian wisdom rhetorolect (generic space) blends human experiences of the household and the created world (firstspace: two places of social experience) with the cultural space of God’s cosmos (secondspace). In the space of blending (thirdspace), God functions as heavenly Father over God’s children in the world, who are to produce goodness and righteousness through the medium of God’s wisdom (light). Wisdom rhetorolect, then, features productivity and reproductivity. The goal of the conceptual blending is to create people who produce good, righteous action, thought, will, and speech with the aid of God’s light, which equals God’s wisdom which certain people speak on earth.

Early Christian prophetic rhetorolect blends human experiences of a prophet’s body with the cosmos, under the presupposition that God’s will has been communicated to the prophet. In the space of blending, God functions as heavenly King over his righteous kingdom on earth. Prophetic rhetorolect, then, features the performance of righteousness on the earth according to God’s will. The goal of the conceptual blending is to create a governed realm on earth where God’s righteousness is enacted among all the people in the realm with the aid of God’s specially transmitted word in the form of prophetic action and speech.

Early Christian miracle rhetorolect blends human experiences of a bodily agent of God’s power with the cosmos, where God’s power to create and restore life is opposed by powers of death. In the space of blending, God functions as healer of inter-subjective bodies of people on earth. This means that as God heals malfunctioning bodies of
Figure 3: Blended Spaces and Locations in Early Christian Rhetorolects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generic spaces (Rhetorolects)</th>
<th>Wisdom</th>
<th>Prophetic</th>
<th>Miracle</th>
<th>Precreation</th>
<th>Priestly</th>
<th>Apocalyptic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Places of Social Relationships (Firstspace)</strong></td>
<td>Household and Created World (Nature) - Garden</td>
<td>Prophet’s body as communication of God’s will to persons - Tabernacle - Temple - Wilderness - Mountain</td>
<td>Bodily agent and recipient of God’s power</td>
<td>Empire - Emperor’s household</td>
<td>Temple City and Afflicted body</td>
<td>Empire - Imperial Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culturally Configured Spaces (Secondspace)</strong></td>
<td>Cosmos (God the heavenly Father)</td>
<td>Cosmos (God the heavenly King)</td>
<td>Cosmos (God as power of life vs. powers of death)</td>
<td>Cosmos (God as heavenly emperor Father)</td>
<td>Cosmos - Temple</td>
<td>Holy bodies - Temple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spaces of Mental Conception</strong></td>
<td>Cause-effect, change, time, identity, intentionality, representation, part-whole</td>
<td>Formal argumentative topics: opposites, grammatical forms of the same word, correlatives, more and less, time, turning back upon the opponent, definition, varied meanings, division, induction, previous judgment, parts, consequence, contrast, openly and secretly, analogy, same result, before and after, purpose as cause, for and against, implausible probabilities, contradictions, cause of false impression, cause and effect, better, doing contrary to what has been done, mistakes, meaning of a name. 150</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Space of Blending or Livedspace (Thirdspace)</strong></td>
<td>Bodies of people who produce goodness and righteousness</td>
<td>God’s righteous kingdom on earth</td>
<td>Inter-subjective bodies of people with full social well-being</td>
<td>God’s household giving people eternal benefits</td>
<td>Sacrificial bodies effecting beneficial exchange between God and people</td>
<td>Holy cosmos filled with well-being and presence of God</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Individual people, God is restoring communities of people to relationships of well-being among one another. Miracle rhetorolect, then, features transformation through healing and restoration. The goal of this blending is to create full social well-being among all inter-subjective bodies on the earth with the aid of God’s power in the form of a miraculous event.

Early Christian precreation rhetorolect blends human experiences of the emperor and his household with the cosmos, with the presupposition that God has the status of a loving heavenly emperor with a household populated by loving people. The result of this

blending is the presence in God’s heavenly household of God the loving Emperor Father, God’s Son who does what His Father asks him to do, and heirs and friends of the emperor and his son, who receive eternal benefits from their relation to God’s household through its members. In the space of blending, God functions as heavenly Emperor Father who possesses eternal blessings He will give to people as a result of his love for the world and the people in it. People may enter into this love by believing, honoring and worshipping not only God but also members and friends of God’s household whom he sends out with a message of eternal blessings. Precreation rhetorolect, then, features love that is the source of all things in the world and the means by which people may enter into God’s eternal love. In this rhetorolect, God’s light is love that provides the possibility for entering into eternal love, rather than being limited to light that is the basis for the production and reproduction of goodness and righteousness. The goal of the blending in precreation rhetorolect is to guide people towards community that is formed through God’s love, which reflects the eternal intimacy present in God’s precreation household.

Early Christian priestly rhetorolect blends human experiences of the temple city with God’s cosmos, with a presupposition that specific actions in the temple are actions that benefit God in a manner that activates divine benefits for humans on earth. In the space of blending, people make sacrifices by giving up things that give them well being in the form of giving them to God. Things like food, possessions and money but also things like comfort and honor may be given up to God. Some of these things may be given to God by giving them to other people on earth, or by allowing other people to take things like honor or fame away without protest. The greatest sacrifice people can offer to God, of course, is their entire life. Usually, in contrast, a person gives up only certain highly valued things in life. Priestly rhetorolect, then, features beneficial exchange between God and humans. The goal of the conceptual blending is to create people who are willing to give up things they highly value in exchange for special divine benefits that come to them, because these sacrifices are perceived to benefit God as well as humans. In other words, sacrificial actions by humans create an environment in which God acts redemptively among humans in the world.

Early Christian apocalyptic rhetorolect blends human experiences of the emperor and his imperial army with God’s heavenly temple city, which can only be occupied by
holy, undefiled people. In the space of blending, God functions as a heavenly emperor who gives commands to emissaries to destroy all the evil in the universe and to create a cosmic environment where holy bodies experience perfect well-being in the presence of God. Apocalyptic rhetorolect, then, features destruction of evil and construction of a cosmic environment of perfect well-being. The goal of this blending is to call people into action and thought guided by perfect holiness. The presupposition of the rhetorolect is that only perfect holiness and righteousness can bring a person into the presence of God, who destroys all evil and gathers all holiness together in His presence. Apocalyptic redemption, therefore, means the presence of all of God’s holy beings in a realm where God’s holiness and righteousness are completely and eternally present.

The inclusion of conceptual blending theory and critical spatiality theory in socio-rhetorical interpretation allows an interpreter to construct a topology of spaces in early Christian rhetorolects and to interpret the rhetorical power of the blending of spaces in these rhetorolects. Since each of the rhetorolects presents social, cultural and ideological language, story-telling and argumentation that evoke specific pictures, emotions, cognitions and reasonings, each rhetorolect made vital contributions to a new culture of discourse that was emerging during the first century. Since many of the social places present in early Christian discourse (like household, village, places of sacred ritual, city, etc.) continue to exist to the present day in some kind of reconfigured form, early Christian discourse continually functions anew in places believers perceive to be similar in social, cultural and religious function. Some believers locate their thinking primarily in one rhetorolect at a time, blending aspects of other rhetorolects into this one rhetorolect for very specific purposes. Other believers locate their thinking in a particular blend of multiple rhetorolects, inviting specific aspects of other rhetorolects in implicit, subtle and nuanced ways. These variations produce a dynamic conceptual, cognitive and verbal system of Christian discourse that is highly adaptive to multiple contexts and cultures. Figure 4 below exhibits the dominant social, cultural and ideological rhetoric internal to each rhetorolect. Figure 5 exhibits the multiple kinds of expression that could emerge in early Christian discourse as a result of blendings of the rhetorolects with one another.
Dynamic blending of the six early Christian rhetorolects created a richly variegated culture of early Christian discourse by the end of the first century. Believers blended each rhetorolect dynamically with the other rhetorolects either by blending multiple rhetorolects into one dominant rhetorolect or by blending particular rhetorolects together in a particularly forceful manner. The dynamics of these blendings throughout the verbal culture of early Christianity produced a continually increasing combination of cognitions, reasonings, picturings, and argumentations. This interactive process continued in Christian discourse throughout the centuries, and it continues in our present day.

Starting from the top, left corner of Figure 5, one sees that Christian wisdom rhetorolect features people’s production of goodness and righteousness through guidance from God’s speech, which functions as light in human bodies. When wisdom rhetorolect blends with prophetic rhetorolect, the emphasis is on the production of righteousness and justice that motivates leaders and people in God’s kingdom to provide food, clothing and shelter for the poor, the widow, the outcast and the foreigner. When wisdom rhetorolect blends with miracle rhetorolect, the emphasis is on the miraculous transformation of people who usually focus on themselves and their own possessions into people who produce goodness and righteousness in the world through their beneficial actions toward others. When wisdom rhetorolect blends with precreation rhetorolect, the emphasis is on God’s speech as a medium through which believers receive eternal life. When wisdom rhetorolect blends with priestly rhetorolect, the emphasis is on Christ’s sacrifice, which creates a model of losing one’s life for the sake of receiving life. When wisdom rhetorolect blends with apocalyptic rhetorolect, the emphasis is on Christ’s production of new fruit with his initial coming to earth and his production of a final harvest of abundant fruit when he comes again.
Christian prophetic rhetorolect features a divine call to people and groups to produce righteousness and justice in an earthly kingdom that is perceived to be God’s kingdom. The call regularly requires a person with a message about God’s will to confront people whom the narration perceives to have strayed from doing God’s will.
When prophetic rhetorolect blends with wisdom rhetorolect, the emphasis is on God’s speech which, through Christ, chooses special people and groups to produce righteousness and justice on earth, which is perceived to be the realm of God’s kingdom. When prophetic rhetorolect blends with miracle rhetorolect, the emphasis is on God’s power working in and through people whom God calls to confront other people with God’s power, for the purpose of transforming people to God’s will. When prophetic rhetorolect blends with precreation rhetorolect, the emphasis is on God’s choice of particular people and groups to be leaders and members of God’s eternal kingdom. When prophetic rhetorolect blends with priestly rhetorolect, God’s sending of Christ to die as a sacrifice produces a call to people to live a life of sacrificial action, which is an internal characteristic of God’s holy kingdom of believers. When prophetic rhetorolect blends with apocalyptic rhetorolect, God’s initial sending of Christ brought a call to people to come into God’s righteous kingdom on earth, and Christ’s return will call people into Christ’s kingdom.

Christian miracle rhetorolect features God’s power working in and through people to produce bodily transformation. When miracle rhetorolect blends with wisdom rhetorolect, the emphasis is on God’s speech working through Christ miraculously to produce benevolence and well-being in people’s bodies. When miracle rhetorolect blends with prophetic rhetorolect, the emphasis is on God and Christ calling people into righteous bodily transformation. When miracle rhetorolect blends with precreation rhetorolect, Christ’s primordial relation to the eternal divinity of God produces eternal redemptive transformation of believing people’s bodies. When miracle rhetorolect blends with priestly rhetorolect, Christ’s sacrifice produces holy bodily transformation of believers eternally. When miracle rhetorolect blends with apocalyptic rhetorolect, Christ’s initial coming produces exorcism of demons from people’s bodies, and Christ’s return will produce resurrection of people’s bodies to eternal life.

Christian precreation rhetorolect features God’s eternal divinity working through Christ’s primordial divinity to produce eternal life in believers. When precreation rhetorolect blends with wisdom rhetorolect, Christ’s speech which comes from God produces eternal fruit in believers. When precreation rhetorolect blends with prophetic rhetorolect, God and Christ call people into an eternal righteous kingdom. When...
precreation rhetorolect blends with miracle rhetorolect, God’s power working in and through Christ produces eternal bodily transformation of the bodies of believers. When precreation rhetorolect blends with priestly rhetorolect, Christ’s sacrifice produces eternal holiness in believers. When precreation rhetorolect blends with apocalyptic rhetorolect, Christ’s primordial divinity with God produces eternal destruction of sin and renewal of life within believers.

Christian priestly rhetorolect features Christ’s death on the cross as a sacrifice that produces holy benefit for believers, if believers reciprocally live a life of sacrificial action. When priestly rhetorolect blends with wisdom rhetorolect, God’s speech through Christ produces a sacrificial life that produces holy fruitfulness. When priestly rhetorolect blends with prophetic rhetorolect, God and Christ call people into sacrificial righteousness. When priestly rhetorolect blends with miracle rhetorolect, God’s power working in and through Christ produces holy bodily transformation of believers. When priestly rhetorolect blends with precreation rhetorolect, Christ’s primordial divinity with God produces eternal holiness in believers. When priestly rhetorolect blends with apocalyptic rhetorolect, Christ’s initial coming and return produces new holy benefit for believers through Christ’s death on the cross as a sacrifice for sins.

Christian apocalyptic rhetorolect features Christ’s initial coming to earth to produce a new beginning and Christ’s return to earth to produce a new world. When apocalyptic rhetorolect blends with wisdom rhetorolect, God’s speech through Christ produces new beginnings and good endings. When apocalyptic rhetorolect blends with prophetic rhetorolect, God and Christ call people into new beginnings. When apocalyptic rhetorolect blends with miracle rhetorolect, God’s power working in and through Christ produces new bodily beginnings. When apocalyptic rhetorolect blends with precreation rhetorolect, Christ’s primordial divinity with God produces eternal beginnings in believers that turn endings into a time of joy and celebration. When apocalyptic rhetorolect blends with priestly rhetorolect, Christ’s sacrifice produces holy beginnings for believers.

Believers have the potential to blend every rhetorolect with every other rhetorolect either on the terms of one dominant rhetorolect or a particular blend of rhetorolects. Multiple kinds of blendings created a vibrant, interactive system of
Christian discourse by the end of the first century C.E. This system of discourse was able to address issues and topics concerning individual human bodies, households, villages, synagogues, cities, temples, kingdoms, empires, the created world, and God’s uncreated realm. The ability of this discourse to address microcosmic details about individual bodies on earth as well as macrocosmic details about God’s uncreated realm prepares Christianity not only to function in a context where it became the official religion of the Roman empire but also to function potentially in multiple contexts in any culture anywhere in the world. This discourse was able to do this, because it was interactive with topoi that address issues, concerns, emotions, insights, knowledge and mysteries that cover a spectrum reaching from mundane daily activities to the widest reaches of God’s unknown realm of being. To be sure, there are many topics and issues first century Christian discourse did not address. Nevertheless, the spectrum was so wide-reaching that it successfully launched a new culture of discourse in the Mediterranean world that expanded and became continually more nuanced and complex throughout twenty centuries in the history of the world.

VIII. Conclusion

Socio-rhetorical interpretation began in the 1970s with an attempt to explain special characteristics of language in the accounts of voyaging on the sea in Acts and Jesus’ calling, gathering, teaching and sending out of disciples in the Gospels. In both instances, the goal was to understand the language of New Testament literature in the context of Mediterranean literature, both religious and non-religious. Also, the goal was to understand the use of language in relation to social, cultural, ideological and religious environments and relationships in the Mediterranean world. During the 1980s, the rhetorical treatises entitled *Progymnasmata* (Preliminary Exercises) played a major role in the interpretation of abbreviation, expansion, addition, rebuttal, commendation and elaboration in biblical and Mediterranean literature before and during the time of the emergence of early Christianity. During the 1990s, socio-rhetorical interpretation identified multiple textures of texts for the purpose of reading and re-reading them in ways that activated a wide range of literary, rhetorical, historical, social, cultural, ideological and religious ‘webs of signification’ in texts. This led to a display of
strategies of interpretation for five textures of texts: inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, ideological texture and sacred texture. During the last half of the 1990s, socio-rhetorical interpretation gradually moved toward analysis of different rhetorolects in early Christian discourse. Gradually, six early Christian rhetorolects have appeared: wisdom, prophetic, miracle, precreation, priestly and apocalyptic. Having initially gravitated toward wisdom rhetorolect during the 1980s and early 1990s, socio-rhetorical interpreters focused specifically on apocalyptic and miracle rhetorolect during the last half of the 1990s. Two books on rhetorical interpretation of apocalyptic rhetorolect appeared during the late 1990s, and each includes essays that explicitly display socio-rhetorical strategies of interpretation.¹⁵¹ A session on rhetorical analysis and interpretation of miracle rhetorolect was held at an SBL meeting in 2001, and a book containing essays from the session is forthcoming.¹⁵² A Festschrift appeared in 2003 that reviewed many of the developments in socio-rhetorical interpretation and featured contributions to the approach from various angles.¹⁵³ Socio-rhetorical interpreters still face major challenges of analyzing and interpreting prophetic, precreation and priestly rhetorolect in early Christian writings. In addition, they face the challenge of writing programmatic commentary that displays the manifold ways in which early Christian writings blend early Christian rhetorolects together. Work is under way to display this kind of socio-rhetorical commentary in a forthcoming series entitled Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Carey and Bloomquist, Vision and Persuasion and Watson, The Intertexture of Apocalyptic.
¹⁵² Watson, The Role of Miracle Discourse.
¹⁵³ Fabrics of Discourse.