The synoptic gospels tantalize us with a variety of traditions about Jesus of Nazareth. We would like to know how these traditions developed, what features in them reliably portray the activities of Jesus, and what settings provided the milieu for their transmission. Scholars have accurately observed that this tradition is characterized by small units, which they have called pericopae.¹ These units contain a variety of phenomena including summaries, scripture quotations, sayings, and stories.

Since the nineteenth century, scholars have used various methods to study these units. Textual criticism has revealed their distinctive wording and language in each gospel. Philology and source criticism have uncovered complex relationships of dependence and independence among them. And form criticism and redaction criticism have probed the interplay of oral and written traditions in them. Even though these disciplines have advanced the analysis of the units in many ways, significant dimensions of the formulation and transmission of the Jesus tradition remain essentially mysterious. Interpreters refer to certain sayings as "free-floating" traditions, certain stories as Palestinian or Galilean in formulation, and certain groups of stories or sayings as collections prior to the composition of the gospels we possess. But only a few studies have explored the logic at work in the abbreviation or expansion of units, or the arrangement of units in a sequence to interpret or defend a particular point of view. It would be beneficial if we could discover the

¹. Aland, Synopsis, divides the units in all four gospels into 367 pericopae.
logic at work in the growth and development of the saying and story, since this logic might help us to understand the issues at stake in the expansion, abbreviation, and recasting of traditions in literature available to us from early Christianity.

Already in antiquity teachers of rhetoric had discussed the inner logic of certain forms of oral and written discourse. The most widely discussed form was the speech. The ancient rhetoricians developed an intricate program for analyzing previously given speeches and for composing new speeches. This program explained the inner progression of the speech, its interweaving of thought, character, and emotion, and its function in different kinds of rhetorical settings. A And several scholars have profitably applied this information about the speech to the analysis of letters in the New Testament during recent years. B During this same period, a number of interpreters have sought to explain the inner unity and organization of various forms of the Jesus tradition. Some of these analyses have probed the feasibility of aretology as a genre for the portrayal of Jesus as a divine man. C Others have used collections of the sayings of the wise to explain the gathering of sayings together in early Christianity. D Still others have used structures, patterns, and genres in Hellenistic and Roman biography to explore the composition and function of the gospels in early Christianity. E Only a few have attempted, however, to employ rhetorical literature, either ancient or modern, to explain the inner logic, development, and function of stories and sayings about Jesus in earliest Christianity.

1. Martin Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann

If an interpreter contemplates the use of rhetoric for analysis of the synoptic tradition, a few issues in previous research call for special discussion. Among these issues is the function of the stories and sayings in the articulation of the Christian message during the first century.

1.1 Martin Dibelius

Dibelius presupposed that the stories and sayings functioned within a larger rhetorical unit, namely, the early Christian sermon. His understanding of the sermon was similar to the ancient rhetoricians' understanding of the speech. Taking his cues from the reference to "eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" in Luke 1:2, the repetition of content in the speeches in Acts, and the formulaic structure of 1 Cor 15:3–5, Dibelius proposed that Christian preachers and missionaries regularly delivered sermons containing an established, traditional content within a four-part structure:

1. introduction;
2. kerygma or message;
3. scriptural proof;
4. exhortation to repentance.

Dibelius intended this proposal to be a model for understanding the transmission of stories and sayings in early Christian tradition. He claimed simply to be following the logic of the material in 1 Corinthians and Luke-Acts. But a close reading of his analysis reveals his awareness of the basic parts of the speech as taught by the ancient rhetoricians. According to their analysis, the standard speech has four essential parts:

1. introduction (προοίμιον, exordium);
2. statement of the case (διαγνώσις, narratio);
3. proof or argument (πρὸς, argumentatio);
4. conclusion (ἐνδοξος, peroratio).

The formal similarity between the two patterns, and Dibelius's comments on each part of the early Christian sermon, suggest the influence of standard rhetorical theory on his analysis. In rhetorical theory, the four-part pattern of the speech had emerged as the most appropriate format to use in the courtroom and the political assembly. In each instance, the speaker asked the hearers to make a decision on the basis of his statement of the facts, his arguments about the nature of past or future events, and the participation of certain people in those events. In Dibelius's application, the kerygma—that is, the account of the death and resurrection of Jesus—presented the facts of the case. In turn, the argument was based on scriptural proof. With this structure, the sermon, according to Dibelius, functioned as a vehicle of persuasive communication during the first century, winning converts to the newly formed

group and nurturing believers who had already committed themselves to this new way of life.10

In this schema, the stories about Jesus before the passion events and the sayings of Jesus which did not quote Old Testament scripture were incidental to the central message of Christianity.11 The incidental stories, according to Dibelius, included legends, tales, and paradigms. Legends, revealing personal interest in individual people, were truly peripheral to the tradition.12 They had the form of "religious" stories as they were known and loved in the world.13 This kind of story arises in every group of religious people, and it was inevitable that it should emerge in early Christianity. Tales, in contrast to legends, were not quite so inevitable. Even though they contain detailed description that reflects worldly interests, they were essential forms for the narrative content of the synoptics.14 Surely storytellers and teachers transmitted them among the early Christians.15 But we cannot describe the setting for their transmission, since "the sources have nothing to say of tellers of tales."16 The most important narrative forms in the synoptic tradition, according to Dibelius, were the paradigms, since they functioned as examples that supported the main argument of the early Christian sermon.17 Their place, however, was still subsidiary to scriptural proof.

Because Dibelius viewed the paradigms as subsidiary to scriptural proof in the argumentation of early Christians, he had little interest in the rhetoric internal to the stories themselves. His interests focused entirely on characteristics of the paradigms that accompanied their function in the sermon. Accordingly, he described five attributes of the paradigm:

1. "rounding off" at the beginning and ending of the paradigm as the preacher made a transition from the sermon to the story and back again to the sermon;18
2. "brevity" within the paradigm that "makes the material subject to the purpose of the preacher, hinders wandering, and silences the unessential";19
3. "religious (i.e., realistic unworldly) coloring of the narrative" that edifies rather than entertains;20

12. Dibelius, From Tradition to Gospel, 133.
13. Dibelius, From Tradition to Gospel, 104.
14. Dibelius, From Tradition to Gospel, 133.
15. Dibelius, From Tradition to Gospel, 70.
16. Dibelius, From Tradition to Gospel, 70.
19. Dibelius, From Tradition to Gospel, 53.

(4) "a word of Jesus" in which the paradigm reaches its point and comes to a conclusion;21
(5) "a thought at the end useful for preaching purposes."22

Among these attributes, only the assertions about rounding off, brevity, and the presence of a word of Jesus at or near the end are truly rhetorical observations. Rounding off points to the inner completeness of the story, brevity indicates a lack of rhetorical elaboration, and the presence of a word of Jesus at or near the end suggests a rhetorical goal toward which the story moves. The comments about religious coloring and a thought at the end useful for preaching indicate Dibelius's interest in the compatibility of the stories with a Christian sermon. But religious coloring points to subject matter rather than rhetorical form, and a thought at the end useful for preaching is a feature external to the story itself.

Even though Dibelius identified three rhetorical attributes of the paradigm, he did not present a thorough analysis of any story to test his theory. He cited various items and their parallels to discuss external rounding off, brevity, religious coloring, the concluding word of Jesus, and an ending that is useful for preaching.23 His theory runs into difficulty, however, when actually applied to the stories. First, the paradigms are rounded off at the beginning and end simply because this is a characteristic of popular stories. This attribute is not evidence for their function in a sermon. Secondly, comparison of synoptic paradigms with forms outside the gospels shows that the synoptic stories are not as brief as Dibelius asserted. Almost all the synoptic paradigms are moderately elaborated forms, and the elaboration points to a function outside the setting of a sermon. Thirdly, Dibelius's emphasis on the word of Jesus at or near the end of paradigms led him away from the interrelation of setting, action, and speech within the paradigms. In contrast to Dibelius's conclusion that the settings and actions are incidental to the halakic, didactic, or edificatory speech of Jesus in the paradigms, the detailed features in the stories transmit the authority and role of Jesus on their own terms. But Dibelius analyzed details only as an aid in identifying stories that presently or previously existed in the form of a paradigm. These stories are reliable, and thus important for the interpreter, he suggested, but they remain incidental to the central message of Christianity.

Dibelius's identification of a significant number of stories in the synoptic tradition as paradigms depended on the explanation of details that, according to his theory, should not be in them. He noticed that some paradigms describe individual people and situations. The story of
the rich young man (Mark 10:17–22), for instance, is too long and contains too much detail in its present form to be a paradigm. Yet in its original form, he reasoned, it existed as a paradigm. A general concern about rich people in the Kingdom of Heaven (Mark 10:25) led to its expansion rather than a personal interest in the people in the story. Likewise, the stories of the Sons of Zebedee (Mark 10:35–40) and the blind man at Jericho (Mark 10:46–52) contain too many details. The expansion, however, occurred as the result of religious interests rather than interest in personal lore. The actual length and nature of the stories in the synoptic gospels, therefore, do not conform to Dibelius’s theory as well as he thought. His proposal for their function within early Christian communication, however, was generally convincing in the absence of a better explanation.

1.2 Rudolf Bultmann

While Dibelius wrestled with the function of stories and sayings in the early Christian sermon, Rudolf Bultmann probed the relation of stories to sayings. Committing his analysis to the synoptic tradition in and of itself, rather than a theory about a larger rhetorical form in which the stories and sayings had functioned, Bultmann introduced a type of literary-historical research that has since dominated both friend and foe of form criticism. In order to explain the origin and transmission of the synoptic tradition, Bultmann claimed, the interpreter must make literary and historical judgments at the same time. He or she must determine not only if individual features in a saying or story are original or added. The interpreter must also determine if a saying or story is genuine, formulated by analogy to another saying or story, or imported in an adapted form from Jewish or Greek tradition. As Bultmann carried out this program of analysis, he introduced a long list of formal designations to describe the variety within the synoptic tradition. The forms included conflict saying, didactic saying, prophetic saying, apocalyptic saying, legal saying, “I” saying, biographical apophthegm, controversy dialogue, scholastic dialogue, similitude, parable, healing miracle, nature miracle, Easter narrative, and infancy narrative. With these formal designations, Bultmann bequeathed nomenclature that guided New Testament research as it advanced and flourished during the second and third quarters of this century. But the nomenclature was only part of his contribution. As he discussed each form, he distinguished between early, primary units and later, secondary additions. Whereas Dibelius only pointed to certain instances of expansion in units, Bultmann distinguished between “primary” and “secondary” features in every unit, and between entire units that were “primary” (that is, original) or “secondary” (formed by analogy to other units in the tradition). For him, the verses in a unit that contain a “unitary conception” (that is, all of them are part of a consistent, coherent presentation) are the earliest form of the unit. Thus, in unit after unit he looked for verses that appear to be complementary parts of a unified presentation and then decided whether the unit itself was primary or secondary.

The frontispiece of Bultmann’s analysis of the sayings and stories in the synoptic tradition was the apophthegm. Defining the apophthegms as “sayings of Jesus set in a brief context,” Bultmann began to determine if the saying in a literary unit originally existed as an isolated saying (γρωμή or sententia) or an “organic ἀπόφθεγμα.” The apophthegms are especially pertinent to his analysis, since they contain both narrative and speech, and his approach to the apophthegm established the model for his analysis of the other forms. For Bultmann, the saying is the primary phenomenon in the apophthegm. Any information in the narrative is a subsidiary to the saying. Thus, a saying in an apophthegm may originate with Jesus, or it may be a secondary saying that someone later developed from another saying in the tradition. In either case, however, the narrative depends on the saying. If the narrative is essential for understanding the saying, the saying and the narrative are an organic apophthegm that presents early tradition about the life of Jesus. A narrative may not be essential for understanding the saying, however. In this instance, someone probably artificially constructed the narrative to provide a setting for the saying. This procedure pervades the entire program of interpretation. Only sayings have a natural potential for being primary. Actions, if necessary in the setting of the saying, may be genuine. Otherwise, actions are contrived or derived.

Bultmann’s choice of the term apophthegm was important for subsequent analysis. Various people used the term in antiquity to refer to brief units that attribute a saying to some person in the past. But the ancient rhetoricians did not give the term ἀπόφθεγμα a prominent place in their discussions of units featuring the speech and action of famous people. For this reason, Bultmann was free to analyze the apophthegms in the synoptic tradition without reference to classical rhetorical theory. He could make the rules as he himself applied his analysis. But there is another matter of importance also. An apophthegm is a brief unit.

24. Dibelius, From Tradition to Gospel, 50.
27. Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, 11.
29. In the second edition of his History of the Synoptic Tradition, 11, Bultmann
Calling synoptic stories apophthegms predetermined the existence of a unitary conception within or behind the synoptic unit. Neither a rhetorician nor a literary critic would naturally think of a moderately lengthy apophthegm as an original form. Bultmann's terminology exhibits its inadequacy in some of the moves he made during his analysis. Chief among them is his use of rabbinc tradition but not Hellenistic tradition as a source for analogies to the synoptic units. This move was natural, after he had decided to limit his interest in Hellenistic tradition to brief apophthegms rather than more elaborated forms. But this decision led him away from Hellenistic literature, resulting in a comparative approach concerned only with rabbinc tradition. Also, this decision led Bultmann away from Hellenistic rhetoric, so that he rarely described rhetorical characteristics of synoptic units or identified the features in the primary units that called forth the secondary features. It was natural, from his perspective, not to include this kind of discussion, since he was not trying to suggest that the origin and transmission of the synoptic tradition were integrally linked with its rhetorical characteristics.

The closest Bultmann came to a rhetorical analysis emerged as he compared the synoptic controversy dialogues with rabbinc controversies. Without reference either to rhetorical theory or to kinds of rhetorical discourse, he observed some of the techniques in the controversy dialogues that rhetoricians in antiquity had associated with judicial rhetoric. In a judicial situation, the issue is whether a certain action has left a person guilty or not guilty before the law. The most typical form of interchange occurs when the act stands in the past, and the point of contention is whether the act deserves punishment or chastisement of some sort. As Bultmann described the controversy dialogues, he called forth the judicial situation:

The starting-point of a controversy dialogue lies in some action or attitude which is seized on by the opponent and used in an attack by accusation or by question. Clearly the typical character of a controversy dialogue is most marked when a single action like plucking corn or healing on the Sabbath constitutes the starting-point rather than when the opponent merely fastens on some general attitude of the person he criticizes. This fact also explains why an effort is made to describe some particular action, even when it is obvious that only a general attitude is under discussion.

Here Bultmann described the kind of situation the rhetoricians considered judicial. After introductory comments, someone states a case
cited Gemoll, Das Apophthegma, and criticized his "lack of conceptual clarity." Bultmann considered himself to be the one providing the clarity to the discussion of the apophthegm.

30. Lausberg, Handbuch, par. 61,1.

34. Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, 41.
35. Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, 42.
37. Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, 44-45.
38. Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, 45.
40. Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, 54-55.
41. Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, 54.
5, but not with a view to taking the questioner ad absurdum. Bultmann noticed a similarity between controversy dialogues and scholastic dialogues, but he did not suggest that a shift had occurred from judicial rhetoric to deliberative rhetoric, where the goal is to give advice about future action. If he had employed insights from ancient rhetorical treatises, he might have shown how the scholastic dialogues contain rhetorical procedures that the rhetoricians considered part of a rhetorical situation quite different from one containing judicial accusation and refutation. Instead, he simply distinguished two major features in the dialogues—the presence or absence of *argumentatio ad absurdum* and the presence of a question or action at the beginning. In neither instance, however, did he use ancient rhetorical descriptions of discourse and argumentation that occur in different kinds of rhetorical situations.

1.3 Dibelius, Bultmann, and Ancient Rhetoric

In conclusion, both Dibelius and Bultmann used some principles of rhetoric in their analysis of the synoptic tradition. Dibelius used his rhetorical understanding to describe the early Christian sermon and to find a place for the development and use of paradigms in the tradition. Bultmann, on the other hand, described some of the judicial dynamics in controversy dialogues. Neither Dibelius nor Bultmann emphasized their use of rhetorical principles, however, because of their interest in the transmission of Christian traditions among common folk in the Mediterranean world. In this vein, Dibelius referred explicitly to “the lowly folk” who used a style “independent of the individual personality” and recommended that the interpreter put aside “all evaluations derived from literature proper, and certainly everything from the classics.” Bultmann’s disclaimers resided primarily in footnotes—for example, his criticism of Gemell’s “lack of conceptual clarity” as he analyzed the apophthegm.

Dibelius’s and Bultmann’s analyses, therefore, systematically guided interpreters away from ancient rhetorical discussions as they immersed themselves in the details of the synoptic tradition. Dibelius’s approach suggested that rhetorical discussions applied only to speeches in early Christian literature and made it most natural to carry rhetorical analysis further with the speeches in Acts. Bultmann, on the other hand, created a detailed system of classification with no reference to standard rhetorical analysis.

2. Chreiai and Synoptic Units

In spite of Dibelius’s and Bultmann’s particular applications of rhetorical principles, the belated discovery of Hellenistic rhetoric as a resource for interpreting the synoptic tradition is something of an anomaly. A few well-placed studies have been available to synoptic researchers for many years, and these studies even pointed the interpreter in the direction that probably is the most productive to follow. Martin Dibelius himself pointed the way in the second edition of *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums* (1933), and it is the purpose of the studies in this volume to follow this lead. In a chapter devoted to analogies to synoptic forms in rabbinic and Greek literature, Dibelius cited a number of synoptic units that contain close affinities with the rhetorical chreia. A chreia, according to the ancient rhetorician Aelius Theon, is:

σύντομος ἀπόφασις ἢ πράξις μετ’ εὐστοχίας ἀναφορομένη εἰς τι ὁρισμένον πρόσωπον ἢ ἀναλογίαν προσώπο

A brief statement or action with pointedness attributed to a definite person or something analogous to a person.

Among the chreiai Dibelius quoted in his discussion are three from Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* and two from Philostratus’ *Lives of the Sophists*:

To the question how the educated differ from the uneducated, he (Aristippus) replied, “Like a tamed from an untamed horse.” (Diogenes Laertius 2.68)

To one who boasted that he belonged to a great city his (Aristotle’s) reply was, “That is not the point to consider, but who it is that is worthy of a great country.” (Diogenes Laertius 5.19)

49. All references to Theon in this volume are to the Greek text edition of Walz, *Rhetores Graeci*. For an English translation of Theon’s chreia chapter, see Hock and O’Neil, *Chreia in Ancient Rhetoric*. The most recent critical edition of Theon’s *Proygymasmata* is Butts, “Proygymasmata of Theon,” which also contains an English translation of the entire work and a commentary. All references to Aphthonius are to the Greek text edition of Rabe, *Aphthonii Proygymasmata*. The most recent English translation of Aphthonius’ chreia chapter is Butts and Hock, “Chreia Discussion of Aphthonius.”
When someone expressed astonishment at the votive offerings in Samothrace, his (Diogenes') comment was, "There would have been far more, if those who were not saved had set up offerings." (Diogenes Laertius 6.59)²²

And he (Lucius) saw some slaves at a well that was in the house, washing radishes, and asked them for whose dinner they were intended. They replied that they were preparing them for Herodes. At this Lucius remarked: "Herodes insults Regilla by eating white radishes in a black house." This was reported indoors to Herodes, and when he heard it he removed the signs of mourning from his house, for fear he should become the laughing-stock of wise men. (Philostratus, Lives of the Sophists 2.1)³³

The Emperor Marcus was greatly interested in Sextus the Boeotian philosopher, attending his classes and going to his very door. Lucius had just arrived in Rome, and asked the Emperor, whom he met going out, where he was going and for what purpose. Marcus answered: "It is a good thing even for one who is growing old to acquire knowledge. I am going to Sextus the philosopher to learn what I do not yet know." At this Lucius raised his hand to heaven, and exclaimed: "O Zeus! The Emperor of the Romans is already growing old, but he hangs a tablet round his neck and goes to school, while my Emperor Alexander died at thirty-two!" (Philostratus, Lives of the Sophists 2.1)³⁴

With these examples, Dibelius exhibited rhetorical units in Greek tradition that are highly analogous to synoptic units. Some examples are brief, while others are only moderately brief. The longer ones contain a series of independent clauses connected with ἔν or καί, and participial clauses enrich the main clauses by describing the circumstances of the action and the speech. The close analogy is evident from the following examples Dibelius cited from the synoptic tradition:

Now when Jesus saw great crowds around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. And a scribe came up and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matt 8:18–20)

Another of the disciples said to him (Jesus), "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead." (Matt 8:21–22)

John said to him (Jesus), "Teacher, we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him: for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us. For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ, will by no means lose his reward." (Mark 9:38–40)

The Pharisees came and began to argue with him (Jesus), seeking from him a sign from heaven, to test him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation." (Mark 8:11–13)

In these examples from the synoptic tradition, there is a similar approach to composition and a similar approach to the portrayal of speech and action. Also, the units vary in length from brief to only moderately brief.

Dibelius's discussion of the chreia has not influenced many interpreters of the gospels, and an innocent observer may wonder why. Undoubtedly there are many reasons, but two are important to observe here. First, Dibelius did not discuss the rhetorical chreia until the second edition of Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums in 1933. As a result, his insights had not influenced his original analysis in 1919, and he never revised the analysis on the basis of his later insights. Second, Dibelius's understanding was not based on the discussions of the chreia in the progymnasmata—the handbooks containing the "preliminary exercises" that the rhetoricians wrote for teachers to use during the final stage of grammar school. As a result, his discussion subtly misconstrued both the nature of the saying and the significance of the action in a chreia. Even though Dibelius quoted the definition of a chreia in Theon's Progymnasmata in a footnote, in his own discourse he defined the chreia as

the reproduction of a short pointed saying of general significance, originating in a definite person and arising out of a definite situation.⁵⁶

With this definition, Dibelius limited the statement in a chreia to a saying "of general significance." In contrast, Theon's definition does not limit the statement to a saying of a particular kind. When Dibelius described the statement as a pointed saying of general significance, he limited chreia to stories containing sayings that could function as independently circulating maxims (γράμματα). In fact, chreia may contain sayings of general significance or short remarks understandable only in the situation in which they occur. Also, Dibelius limited chreia to units containing sayings, while Theon asserted that a chreia could contain either "a brief statement" or "an action" or both a statement and an action (Theon 202.18–206.8). Rhetoricians like Theon, therefore, discussed action-chreia as well as sayings-chreia. Since actions are either active or passive, depending on one's point of view as the action occurs,

52. Cited by Dibelius in From Tradition to Gospel, 153.
53. Cited by Dibelius in From Tradition to Gospel, 154.
54. Cited by Dibelius in From Tradition to Gospel, 155.
55. See Dibelius, From Tradition to Gospel, 152, note 1.
56. Dibelius, From Tradition to Gospel, 152.
there are active and passive action-chreiai. The following are active action-chreiai:

Diogenes the Cynic philosopher, on seeing a boy eating delicacies, struck the paiadagouos with his staff. (Theon 205,22–24)

Diogenes the Cynic philosopher used to seek a man with a lighted lamp during the day. (Diomedes 310,22–23, Walz; cf. Diogenes Laertius 6.41)

In both instances, the action in the chreia points the reader's thinking in a particular direction and encourages the reader to reflect on the meaning of the action. In the light of such chreiai, interpreters must give more attention to Jesus' action in a unit like Mark 9:33–37 and parallels, where Jesus places a child before the disciples as part of the answer to a question about greatness. Even though the sayings vary in the parallel units, Jesus' action of placing a child before the disciples is common to all three versions. Moreover, Jesus' action provides the essential answer to the question about greatness, whereas the sayings provide alternative explanations of the action. In this instance, then, an action-chreia may represent the primary form of the unit, while the units containing sayings represent particular interpretive uses of the unit.57

In contrast to active action-chreiai like the units cited above, the following unit is a passive action-chreia:

Didymon the flute-player, on being caught in adultery, was hanged by his namesake. (Theon 205,24–206,1)

Passive actions also exist in units in the synoptic tradition, as exhibited by Luke 3:21–23:

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, 'Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.' 58

The descent of the Holy Spirit as a dove is an action upon Jesus, and the saying from heaven is a laudatory supplement. The interpreter will give a proper interpretation of this unit only if he or she explains the significance of both the action and the saying.

In the above-cited synoptic units containing an action, both an action and a saying are present. The ancient rhetoricians called such a unit a mixed-chreia (cf. Theon 206,1–207,5; Aphthonius 4,8). It was common practice for a narrator to interpret the meaning of the action in a chreia, as this chreia about Pythagoras shows:

Pythagoras the philosopher, on being asked how long the life of men is, went up to his bedroom and looked back out for a short time, showing thereby its brevity. (Theon 206,3–6)

In this chreia, an editorial comment explains that the action showed the brevity of a man's life. It is also informative to compare a chreia Theon cites about a Laconian and his spear with three versions of the tradition in Plutarch:

A Laconian, when someone asked him where the Lacedaimonians had the boundaries of their country, showed his spear. (Theon 206,6–8)

Being asked once how far the boundaries of Laconia extended, he (Agesilaus) said, with a flourish of his spear, "As far as this can reach." (Moralia 210E,28)59

Being asked how much land the Spartans controlled, he (Archidamus, son of Agesilaus) said, "As much as they can reach with the spear." (Moralia 218F,2)

Is it that Romulus placed no boundary-stones for his country, so that Romans might go forth, seize land, and regard all as theirs, as the Spartans said, "which their spears could reach?" (Moralia 267C,15)

Only Theon's chreia and the first version in Plutarch contain an action by the Laconian with his spear. The other two versions contain only a saying about a spear, with no reference to an action with it. On the basis of these traditions, it would seem as plausible to suggest that an action was primary and produced the saying as to suggest that the saying is primary and produced the action. The last version, which uses a truncated form in a discussion about Romulus, shows how the saying may dominate over the action once the saying is part of the tradition. A mixed-chreia, then, contains both action and speech. The interpreter should be on the alert for the possibility that the action in such a unit is primary and the saying is a supplementary, explanatory feature in the unit.

Dibelius's discussion of the chreia therefore identified a rhetorical unit that is analogous to many units in the synoptic tradition. He limited the reader's perspective of the form and function of the chreia, however, not only through a definition that limited the chreia to units containing sayings, but also through a predisposition for units containing sayings "of general significance." When Dibelius supported his view with units he construed to be chreiai in Xenophon's Memorabilia, Lucian's Demonax, Philostratus' Lives of the Sophists, and Philogelos,60 rather than with units the rhetoricians cited as chreiai in their proorgymnasmata, he gave the

57. The complete analysis of these synoptic texts appears in Robbins, "Pronouncement Stories," 43–74.
59. All references to and translations of Plutarch's Moralía are from the Loeb Classical Library editions.
60. See Dibelius, From Tradition to Gospel, 153–57.
reader little hint of the range of rhetorical features and the type of flexibility within the chreia. A close reading suggests that Dibelius’s discussion of the chreia was influenced by Bultmann’s discussion of the apophthegm. As a result, subsequent interpreters continually have returned to Bultmann’s analysis of synoptic units as ἀποφθέγματα, after reading Dibelius’s discussion of the chreia, rather than turning to the analyses of the chreia by the rhetoricians. In the discussions by the rhetoricians, the interpreter discovers that ἀποφθέγματα often provided material for chreiai, but the chreia was not limited in all the ways Dibelius assumed.

In 1946, R. O. P. Taylor expanded and corrected the discussion of the chreia for use as a guide in interpreting the gospels. On the basis of his research, he considered it strange that form critics had not used the careful studies of literary form available to them in theprogymnasmata. Observing that the rhetoricians gave priority of place in the exercises to the chreia, he presented an accurate translation of Theon’s definition of a chreia as

a concise and pointed account of something said or done, attributed to some particular person,

and asserted that

the definition exactly fits the detachable little stories, of which so much of Mark consists.

Then Taylor pursued the significance of the chreia in the Hellenistic educational system. He noted the difference between the chreia, which is attributed to a particular person, and a maxim (γνώμη), which gives a general statement. The Hellenistic teachers considered the chreia to be of central importance within education as a means of persuading and giving guidance for conduct. And, he suggested, perhaps our view of the chreia versus the maxim is the reverse of what their view was:

We view a maxim as if it had an existence and authority of its own, apart from its author. If we approve of it, we may be interested to find who was its author, and willing to value him for its sake. But, to them, the maxim, however impressive, had to come from an accredited person to carry the greatest weight. In short, the maxim was required to be a dictum.

I have quoted this statement in its entirety, since it identifies a major problem in the approach of Dibelius and Bultmann, and, as a result, in gospel research. An essential rhetorical attribute of the paradigm for Dibelius was the saying at or near the end, and for Bultmann the primary element in an apophthegm was a saying that may have existed independently or may have been part of a tradition that included action in the setting. But for both Dibelius and Bultmann, most sayings could serve their purpose outside of stories, since the saying provided the halakic, didactic, or edificatory matter of significance. Dibelius and Bultmann were confronting, of course, literary units that presented speech in settings characterized by actions. But these details were embarrassing to Dibelius, because they occurred in paradigms in which there should be no detail. In turn, the details simply presented a challenge for Bultmann to find the primary form underlying all the secondary additions.

Taylor saw that the details of setting and action, the “secondary” features in Bultmann’s analysis, contain a central concern of the Hellenistic teachers and represent a matter that interpreters should investigate from an angle different from Dibelius’s and Bultmann’s approaches. If an integral relation exists between speech and action in the tradition, possibly both the longer and the shorter forms result more from rhetorical usage than from the existence of primary or secondary items in the tradition. For this reason, a tradition may be articulated in a longer or shorter form without clearly presenting “secondary” features in the longer form. In other words, the presence of longer and shorter forms may show quite a different process at work than Dibelius and Bultmann presupposed. Theon’s Progymnasmata shows that the ability of a person to present a chreia in a long and short form was one of the fundamental skills a person learned prior to rhetorical training. In his discussion of the basic compositional exercises with the chreia, Theon used a tradition about Epameinondas. First, he exhibited a short form of the chreia:

'Επαμεινώνας, ἤτεκνος ἀποθήκης, Ὄλες τοῖς φίλοις, δύο υγιατέρας ἀπέλι- ποι, τήν τε περί λειτουργίαν νίκην, καὶ τήν περί Μαντίνεων

Epameinondas, as he was dying childless, said to his friends: ‘I have left two daughters—the victory at Leuctra and the one at Mantinea.’ (Theon 213.14–17)

Here the chreia is presented in one sentence containing a nominative participial clause and a saying in direct quotation. Then he presented a longer form of the chreia as follows:

'Επαμεινώνας, οι τῶν Θεμιστικῶν στρατηγός, ἦν μὲν ἄρα καὶ παρὰ τῇ εἰρήνῃ ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός, συνετάτως δε τῇ πατρίδι πολέμοι πρὸς Λακεδαιμονίους, πολλὰ καὶ λαμπρα ἢργα τῆς μεγαλοψυχίας ἐπεδιείσατο· Βοωωρχίων μὲν περί Λεκτρα ἔνια τοὺς πολέμους, στρατευόμενος δὲ ἐπὶ τῇ πατρίδος καὶ ἀγωνίζομενος

61. See Dibelius, From Tradition to Gospel, 156.
63. Taylor, Goundwork of the Gospels, 75.
64. Taylor, Goundwork of the Gospels, 76.
those governed by accusation and defense (judicial rhetoric) or by advice and exhortation (deliberative rhetoric). These two versions of a tradition about Epameinondas evoke the rhetorical situation of a funeral oration. In such an oration, the speaker revives and strengthens the beliefs, attitudes, and values of the assembled mourners through a rehearsal of the past activities of the dead person governed by a strategy of praise and censure. The nature of a chreia is that the narrator may move toward the rhetorical goal in both the narrative and the speech, rather than simply through narrative or through speech. In the shorter version, the tradition is told with no enriching details in the narrative and with as few words as possible in the saying. A speaker would probably use such a version in the setting of an overarching rhetorical form in which this unit played a small role. The longer version, in contrast, mentions titles of honor, attributes of character, past events, emotions, and circumstantial actions in the narrative, and it features exhortation, personal address, descriptive adjectives, and comparison (on the basis of age) in the saying. It functions much more like a complete rhetorical form with its own introduction, statement, and conclusion. An analysis of primary and secondary features in the two units, therefore, may not be as informative for understanding the transmission of this kind of tradition as an analysis of the rhetorical dynamics governing the composition of each version. The constraints on the composition operate out of rhetorical dynamics internal to the situation as well as recitations of the tradition external to the composition. Primarily, the author pursues his own rhetorical goals. His degree of submission to an oral or written version available to him depends on many factors, including his own personal inclinations. He develops or alters the rhetorical dynamics of the story and imposes his own style and length on the unit as these dimensions further his rhetorical goals. To the extent that an earlier version fits his purposes, he may use it in that form. But he will not hesitate to compose it according to his own style and rhetorical interests.

We find a similar process at work among the synoptic authors. These authors appear to have composed units as they wished to compose them. In some instances, they only slightly revised a version that existed in another written document, a practice followed by many authors outside the biblical tradition. In other instances, they presented the unit in quite a different form, either following the lead of another written or oral form of the tradition or composing it differently for their own rhetorical purposes. For example, when Mark decided to begin Jesus’ Galilean ministry with a summary of Jesus’ teaching, he composed a unit in one, paratactically-constructed sentence containing double components in both the narrative and the saying (Mark 1:14–15):
After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God and saying,

"The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

When Matthew, in contrast, decided to present Jesus’ Galilean ministry as a fulfillment of a prophecy of Isaiah, he composed a unit which is integrated through repetition of key words (Matt 4:12-17):

Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth he went and dwelt in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned."

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

In both instances, the authors have composed units according to their compositional style and rhetorical interests. For Mark, an interest in formulating a rich, poignant summary of Jesus’ preaching, defined as the “gospel of God,” provided the strategy for the composition. For Matthew, in contrast, the desire to ground Jesus’ Galilean ministry in a substantive scripture quotation provided the strategy for the composition. Only a brief exhortation to repent, with the imminence of the kingdom of heaven as a rationale for the exhortation, was necessary, since Matthew was setting the stage for an elaborate account of Jesus’ message about the kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount (see Matt 5:3).

The compositional strategy exhibited in Luke indicates an interest noticeably different from Mark’s and Matthew’s interests. Luke also used a scripture quotation from Isaiah. But his strategy was to open Jesus’ entire ministry in his home town of Nazareth. Jesus’ entry into Galilee, therefore, is simply a preparation for his dramatic reading of the Isaiah passage in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:18-19). For this purpose, Luke composed a summary of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee in the following manner (Luke 4:14-15):

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, and a report concerning him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

This unit contains no speech by Jesus, because it is a summary statement leading to the scene in Nazareth where Jesus reads a passage from Isaiah (Luke 4:18-19), comments on the passage (4:21), and presents a series of statements after the people respond to his initial statement (4:23-27).

Luke’s rhetorical goals govern his version of Jesus’ entry into Galilee (4:14-15), therefore, as fully as Mark’s and Matthew’s govern their versions. In Luke’s case, his composition produces units about both Jesus and John the Baptist that do not contain a pointed announcement, “Repent, for the kingdom of God (heaven) is at hand.” Luke approached both John the Baptist’s ministry (3:1-20) and Jesus’ ministry (4:14-30) by featuring a lengthy scripture quotation that grounded their ministries in ancient testimony (3:4-6; 4:18-19). After the composition had fulfilled this interest, Luke presented a sequence of sayings by both John the Baptist and Jesus that criticized the conventional thought and behavior of the audience as it presented central dimensions of the speaker’s attributes and role (3:7-17; 4:21-27). After presenting the teaching, Luke composed a brief series of clauses which told about a sharp conflict that arose as a result of the speaker’s activity (3:18-20; 4:28-30). This compositional procedural produced a gradual elaboration of thoughts and actions in a setting of extended composition that does not emphasize exact repetition of previous words or phrases.

In contrast, Matthew’s compositional procedure emphasized continuity through exact or nearly exact repetition of words and phrases. We noted above how Matthew’s introduction to the Isaiah passage contains key words that appear in the quotation itself, producing the following repetitive chain: Galilee (4:12); sea (4:13); Zebulun and Naphtali (4:13); Zebulun and Naphtali (4:15); sea (4:15); Galilee (4:15). This pattern is supported by the parallelismus membrorum in the last part of the scripture quotation that repeats “those who sit in” (ὁ καθίσταις . . . τοῖς καθήσεταις) and “light” (φῶς). Matthew established similar continuity in his account of John the Baptist by referring to the Baptist’s preaching “in the wilderness” (3:1) prior to its exact repetition in the quotation (3:3). Matthew followed a similar pattern of repetition to establish continuity between the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus. Instead of varying the statement that introduces the Isaiah quotation as Luke does (3:4; 4:17), Matthew referred in each instance “that which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet saying” (3:3; 4:14). But Matthew’s interest in continuity goes much deeper, influencing his actual formulation of the speech of John the Baptist and Jesus. Following his rhetorical technique of repetition, he produced exact summaries of the teaching of John the
Baptist and Jesus: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (3:2; 4:17). Matthew's rhetorical interests, therefore, imposed themselves on the direct speech of John the Baptist and Jesus, just as Luke's rhetorical interests influenced his presentation of the speech of John the Baptist and Jesus.

Mark's rhetorical procedures produced yet a third way of presenting the accounts of John the Baptist and Jesus. Using words and phrases he introduced from the beginning verse of his composition — gospel (1:1); Jesus (1:1); God (1:1); John (1:4); preaching (1:4); repentance (1:4); he preached saying (1:7); Jesus came . . . Galilee . . . into (1:9) — he composed a unit that gathered these themes together and produced a rich, succinct summary of Jesus' teaching:

After the arrest of John, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God and saying: "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:14–15)

Using a compositional technique that integrates previous words and phrases into a new account, Mark introduced new themes (the arrest, the fulfillment of time, the imminence of the kingdom, and belief) in a setting of familiar words, phrases, and actions. The end result is significant, because Mark's rhetorical procedures influenced his formulation of the speech of Jesus, making it different both from Matthew's version and from Luke's version.

3. Inaugurating a New Approach

During the past thirty years interpreters have explored many items observed above using redaction criticism and composition criticism. The question is whether it might be possible, using an approach informed by Hellenistic rhetoric, to explore the inner dynamics and logic of such abbreviation, expansion, and elaboration. The authors of this volume think such a possibility is on the horizon. The research recounted above as well as other more recent studies have set the stage. One of these more recent studies appeared in 1962, when William R. Farmer explored five sections in Luke and one in Matthew containing a sequence of units that have a close relation to one another. Much of our discussion above concerned a process of internal expansion or abbreviation of units. The pioneering dimension of Farmer's study lay in its identification of external elaboration in which the addition of related units supplemented, complemented, or extended the thought and action in an initial unit. His knowledge of exercises performed with the chreia in Hellenistic education enriched and guided his study. As he analyzed Luke 15 and 13:6–9, he observed that both sections contain an introductory unit followed by two relatively short sayings that are closely parallel in structure and highly similar if not identical in meaning. These sayings begin with a rhetorical question, end with a pronouncement introduced by λέγω ἦνω ('I say to you'), and are connected by the conjunction if ('or'). The third unit is a story that illustrates the point made in the first two sayings.70

As Farmer sought an explanation for this structuring of the material, he posited a pre-Lukan source. This document must have been "created to meet the needs of the catechetical and homiletical needs of some early Christian community,"71 he reasoned, since the final story was meant to "be viewed in the light of the situation set forth in the introduction to the literary unit, and in the light of the two parallel sayings of Jesus which follow the introduction and precede the story."72 In an attempt to explain how such a procedure may have developed in the Christian community, Farmer cited the Hellenistic practice of quoting, paraphrasing, illustrating, and expounding chreiai, a practice that included the use of parables at the end of units to illustrate chreiai.73 But, Farmer asserted, the practice of using a parable to illustrate a chreia is also evident in Matt 18:21–35 and Luke 12:13–21, and possibly Luke 16:14–15, 19–31.74 Possibly, therefore, this activity was not limited to one source alone in early Christianity. This exploratory study stands as a promising beginning for further analysis. Even though very little work has built upon this exploratory study, other analyses have produced results that support the fruitfulness of such an approach.

David E. Aune, for example, while describing the characteristics of units in Plutarch's "Banquet of the Seven Sages," identified and discussed units which he called "wisdom stories" in a manner that encourages further analysis along the lines we have been discussing.75 A wisdom story, according to Aune's definition, contains two basic parts. The first part presents a problem, question, or problematic situation, and the second part contains a solution presented by a sage.76 These stories may contain two additional elements, a false solution (before the real solution) and an acclamation. Among the wisdom stories in Plutarch's treatise concerning the seven sages, Aune identified three distinct types:

68. See Robbins, Jesus the Teacher, 29–30.
69. Farmer, "Notes on a Literary and Form-Critical Analysis of".
70. Farmer, "Notes on a Literary and Form-Critical Analysis of".
71. Farmer, "Notes on a Literary and Form-Critical Analysis of".
72. Farmer, "Notes on a Literary and Form-Critical Analysis of".
73. Farmer, "Notes on a Literary and Form-Critical Analysis of".
74. Farmer, "Notes on a Literary and Form-Critical Analysis of".
75. Aune, "Septem Sapientium Convivium.
76. Aune, "Septem Sapientium Convivium."
(1) the gnomic wisdom story, (2) the agonistic wisdom story, and (3) the paradigmatic wisdom story. The two following stories present what Aune called "gnomic wisdom stories." Both stories feature the solicitation of an opinion by a friendly and admiring interlocutor and an instantaneous response by the sage. The first story was composed according to the principle of abbreviation:

For example, he was told that, when you (Thales) were asked by Molpagoras the Ionian what was the most paradoxical thing you had ever seen, you replied, "A despot that lived to be old." (Moralia 147B)

Another story was composed in an elaborated form:

When this discussion had come to an end, I said that it seemed to me to be only fair that these men should tell us how a house should be managed. "For," said I, "but few persons are in control of kingdoms and states, whereas we all have to do with a hearth and home."

Aesop laughed and said, "Not all, if you include also Anacharsis in our number; for not only has he no home, but he takes an immense pride in being homeless and in using a wagon, after the manner in which they say the sun makes his rounds in a chariot, occupying now one place and now another in the heavens."

"And that, I would have you know," said Anacharsis, "is precisely the reason why he solely or pre-eminently of all the gods is free and independent, and rules over all and is ruled by none, but is king, and holds the reins.

"Only you seem to have no conception of his chariot, how surpassing it is in beauty, and wondrous in size; else you would not, even in jest, have humorously compared it to ours."

"It seems to me, Aesop, that your idea of a home is limited to these protective coverings made of mortar, wood, and tiles, just as if you were to regard a snail’s shell, and not the creature itself, as a snail."

"Quite naturally, then, Solon gave you occasion to laugh, because, when he had looked over Croesus’s house with its costly furnishings, he did not instantly declare that the owner led a happy and blessed existence therein, for the good reason that he wished to have a look at the good within Croesus rather than at his good surroundings."

"But you, apparently, do not remember your own fox. For the fox, having entered into a contest with the leopard to determine which was the more ingenuously coloured, insisted it was but fair that the judge should note carefully what was within her, for there she said she should show herself more ingenious."

"But you go about, inspecting the works of carpenters and stonemasons, and regarding them as a home, and not the inward and personal possessions of each man, his children, his partner in marriage, his friends, and servants; and though it be in an ant-hill or a bird’s nest, yet if these are possessed of sense and discretion, and the head of the family shares with them all his worldly goods, he dwells in a goodly and a happy home."

"This then," said he, "is my answer to Aesop’s insinuation, and my contribution to Diocles." (Moralia 154F–155C)

These stories vary decisively in length. Yet, as Aune properly saw, they are related to one another. The first unit features one poignant statement in response to a question. The second unit expands the response of Anacharsis into a sequence of units that present and argue a point of view. The unit could have ended after the initial statement by Anacharsis. Instead, like many synoptic units (e.g., Plutking Grain or Beelzebul Controversy), the initial response begins a sequence of sayings that produce an extended argument. Aune offered no analysis of the rhetorical features in these units beyond the observation of the two essential parts, the possibility of a false solution and an acclamation. But his observation of a similar “gnomic” quality in each unit opens the door for detailed rhetorical analysis of the inner dynamics and logic at work in the story.

Aune also identified stories which he called “agonistic.” These stories feature a special test in the first part that is met successfully by the sage in the second part. There is a similar variation in length among these units. Also, in relation to our discussion above, two of the shorter ones contain the ingredients of action-chreia, as follows:

"The king," said he, "sent to Bias an animal for sacrifice, with instructions to take out and send back to him the worst and best portion of the meat. And our friend’s neat and clever solution was, to take out the tongue and send it to him, with the result that he is now manifestly in high repute and esteem." (Moralia 146F)

"In your case (Thales), for instance, the king finds much to admire in you, and in particular he was immensely pleased with your method of measuring the pyramid because, without making any ado or asking for any instrument, you simply set your walking-stick upright at the edge of the shadow which the pyramid cast, and two triangles being formed by the intercepting of the sun’s rays, you demonstrated that the height of the pyramid bore the same relation to the length of the stick as the one shadow to the other." (Moralia 147A)

These stories, exhibiting a sage’s successful response to a test, are only two of the five agonistic stories Aune identified in Plutarch’s treatise on the seven sages (cf. Moralia 150ff.; 152E–153E; 153E–154C). In addition, he found one story which he called “paradigmatic” because the sage exemplifies his theoretical wisdom through practical action or conduct (Moralia 148E–149B). This story is quite long, much like the second example of gnomic wisdom stories cited above. Without quoting it here, perhaps we have discussed Aune’s analysis sufficiently to show that he

was interpreting units similar to those found in the synoptic gospels. Also, we should see that Aune found, in a treatise composed close to the
time of the composition of the gospels, both abbreviated units and units
in which the response is expanded into a sequence of statements by the
sage.

During the same period of time in which Aune was writing his study
of Plutarch’s “Banquet of the Seven Sages,” the Pronouncement Story
Group, under the leadership of Robert C. Tannehill, was gathering units
of tradition analogous to those studied by Aune.78 Using Vincent Taylor’s term “pronouncement story,”79 Tannehill defined a pronouncement story as:

a brief narrative in which the climactic (and often final) element is a pronouncement which is presented as a particular person’s response to something said or observed on a particular occasion of the past. There are two main parts of a pronouncement story: the pronouncement and its setting, i.e., the response and the situation provoking that response. The movement from the one to the other is the main development in these brief stories.80

This definition is highly similar to Aune’s definition of a wisdom story, except for the special emphasis on the movement from the situation to the response. Building on this special emphasis, Tannehill developed a typology of stories based on the rhetorical feature that appeared to be central for the movement from the first to the second part of the story. Without claiming that his typology was comprehensive for all Mediterranean literature during the Hellenistic period, he described six types of stories: description, inquiry, correction, objection, commendation, and quest.81 The movement in the description is based on initiative by the sage to describe a situation or person, whereas the inquiry features a solicitation of the sage’s response by a question. In neither instance does the response evaluate or present a critique of a person or situation. Rather, the response is simply striking, witty, or apt. The correction features a critique of a person or situation, whereas the commendation features a positive response to a situation or person. The objection story features initiative against the sage in the situation, whereas the quest gives a prominent role to a secondary character who seeks from the sage, either successfully or unsuccessfully, an answer or solution important for his well-being in life.

This approach, as well as Aune’s, gleaned longer and shorter stories
from literature and approached them in an informative manner. The

78. Tannehill, Pronouncement Stories.

avowed goal of the approach was a rhetorical description of the stories. It produced good initial results82 and was an important stimulus for the approach in this book.83

Now that these others have made these beginnings, the question is
whether interpreters can take the analysis to another level of precision. Even more pressing is the issue of whether it is possible to develop a
systematic method for analyzing both short and long units containing
narrative and speech in Mediterranean literature. The studies in this
volume attempt to move toward a systematic approach through a special
insight into rhetorical composition that Burton L. Mack observed and
developed in the context of the Chreia Project at the Institute for
Antiquity and Christianity at Claremont. While analyzing the chreia
sections in the rhetorical manuals entitled progymnasmata, he noticed
references to an elaboration exercise (epygrafia) in addition to the set of exercises that included abbreviation and expansion referred to above. After initial exploration, he produced a detailed analysis of Hermogenes’ illustration of the elaboration exercise and applied it to Philo’s De Sacrificis.84 In order to use these observations for analysis of synoptic tradition, Mack explains this exercise in chapter two and suggests its importance for analysis of literature during the Hellenistic period.

Chapter two exhibits the strategy of the authors in interpreting sayings and brief stories in the synoptic gospels. Using insights especially from the Rhetorica ad Herenium and Hermogenes’ Progymnasmata, the authors have in view a rhetorical scenario in which a writer or speaker launches an argument with an introduction (which usually is a description of a situation); a chreia (which presents a proposition, thesis, or statement of the case); and a rationale or reason (usually in the form of an authoritative saying). When an introduction, chreia, and rationale are present, the initial ingredients are present for an argument. An additional rhetorical figure or topic must be present, however, for a complete argument to occur.

According to this scenario, gleaned from the ancient rhetoricians, once the initial ingredients for an argument are present, a complete argument may occur by using a combination of one or more of the following: a contrary statement (which clarifies or restates the initial proposition, thesis, or statement of the case); an analogy (which introduces another sphere of human life or nature); an example (which introduces an authoritative person as a paradigm or model); a judgment (which is an authoritative saying or principle gleaned from written documents or well-known sayings) and a conclusion (which intensifies

82. For a fuller appreciative response to Tannehill’s approach, see Schneider, “Jesu Überraschende Antworten,” 322.
83. See Robbins, “Classifying” and “Pronouncement Stories.”
84. Mack, “Decoding the Scriptures.”
and focuses emotions and thoughts through summary, exhortation, and other techniques. The ancient rhetoricians insist, and analysis in this volume shows, that the sequence, as well as the presence or absence, of rhetorical figures may vary. There appears to be a consensus among the rhetoricians, however, that a speaker or writer must use one or more of these figures in order for a complete argument to occur (cf. Rhet. ad Her. II.xix.28–30).

Since most of this is new to the field of New Testament interpretation, it may be appropriate to make some additional comments about the ingredients necessary for the occurrence of a complete argument. Perhaps the most important observation is that every discrete move in an argumentative discourse may combine internally a multiple number of rhetorical figures and topics. For example, a contrary argument may use analogy to make its point and present the decisive rationale. Since the goal is to exhibit aspects of internal argumentation in synoptic units, the interpreter should keep an eye on multiple rhetorical features in a unit and maintain an openness and regard for multiple nuances in the argumentation.

In addition, something must be said about analogy (παραβολή; simile) and example (παράδειγμα; exemplum). An analogy may come from outside the human sphere, for example, from the animal kingdom; or it may be found in arenas of human life and culture, like a "kingdom" or a "house." But an analogy may present a type of person, like a farmer, a shepherd, or a woman who does basic work in a household. When an analogy refers to a type of person, it is a "social example." The social example is not what the rhetoricians meant by example; rather a social example is an analogy. The term example as the rhetoricians used it is meant to refer to a specific person like Demosthenes, Socrates, or Alexander. There is in the synoptic gospels, however, the general example—"whoever," "anyone who," or "the one who." Since sayings that introduce specific examples are rare in the synoptic gospels, but sayings that introduce general examples are numerous, the authors of this volume have had to reflect on the relation of the general example to the specific example in the argumentative discourse of the members of the early Jesus movements. Our studies will explore this circumstance and make some suggestions at the end why this may have occurred.

One additional feature the reader will encounter in the scenario of the complete argument is the judgment (κεκριμένος; κρίσις; iudicatio). In a legal environment, a judgment is a decision by a judge or jury, and this decision introduces a principle to which people could appeal in the future. In philosophical, educational, or ethical environments of thought, however, judgments can have a much wider reference. A line or two from well-known literature (usually poetry) or a well-known saying in the culture may function as a judgment about some aspect of life and its challenges. Some early Christian literature uses quotations or allusions from scripture as judgments, but we will see that sayings of Jesus appear to be the primary resource for judgments about life and its responsibilities in the synoptic tradition. The authors of this volume have reflected on this issue also, and they will make suggestions in the studies concerning the dynamics in the Jesus movements that may have accompanied this phenomenon.

In subsequent chapters the authors analyze various synoptic units from a perspective guided by the major rhetorical phenomena in a complete argument as rhetoricians discuss it. The authors offer these studies as a supplement or complement to other forms of analysis now being pursued in biblical studies. It is inevitable that this approach will challenge some conclusions within the discipline, but it also may help some interpreters to pursue with greater precision and detail some aspects of the synoptic tradition in which they have been interested for some time.