

Semeia

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SEMEIA 50

PARAENESIS: ACT AND FORM

Guest Editors:

Leo G. Perdue and John G. Gammie

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A SOCIO-RHETORICAL RESPONSE: CONTEXTS OF INTERACTION AND FORMS OF EXHORTATION

Vernon K. Robbins

ABSTRACT

While the first essay raises the possibility for social-anthropological analysis of paraenetic literature, the second essay introduces grammatical-syntactical form analysis that virtually defies social analysis. Klaus Berger's taxonomy of forms based on topics and persuasive figures could have aided the authors of the succeeding essays in the volume.

Williams' essay introduces a creative moment when it talks about the Sermon on the Mount as sacrifice transformed into a rhetoric of excess, but the analysis is weakened by an absence of heuristic rhetorical categories oriented toward social situations and an ambiguous use of the phrase "a rhetoric of excess." Levine's essay could have probed more extensively the possible role of women in the environment of Q tradition if deliberative, epideictic, and judicial rhetoric had been available as heuristic socio-rhetorical categories. If Quinn's essay had used rhetorical categories for analysis, the social implications of the judicially-charged language about women may have come into view. Attridge's essay uses the classical rhetorical categories in a highly advantageous manner to explore social dynamics of the environment of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

During the opening moments of this volume, the reader is tantalized by the possibility of seeing social-anthropological analyses of paraenetic literature in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Perdue's use of Turner's anthropological approach sets the stage for an exciting discussion, but the literary analysis does not carry the project as far as one might have hoped. Some good moments arise in the succeeding essays as Perdue himself and others take aspects of the first essay into their discussion, and Claudia Camp has explored many of the strengths and weaknesses of this aspect of the volume. Therefore, I shall not replay this theme. I shall turn directly to the taxonomy of forms Gammie introduces in the second essay and give some attention to the essays concerned with New Testament literature.

One of the biggest hurdles interpreters must overcome, if they wish to explore the social character of biblical literature, is a rich and powerful inheritance of taxonomies of forms based on grammar and syntax. Gammie hammers down as securely as he can the golden spike of grammatical-syntactical form analysis in his first essay, virtually defying

anyone to touch these forms with social analysis. The most natural way to build on this positivistic taxonomy would be to use an anthropological system grounded in conceptual logic—perhaps one that could work with polar oppositions, mediations, and a logical square.

But Gammie's essay opens the door for a moment, so let us see if there is room enough to put a toe in it. Gammie merges terminology from Ancient Near Eastern literature, including the Hebrew Bible, with terminology from Greco-Roman literature to establish his taxonomy. Therefore, at the beginning he opens the door for "Instructions," a term from Egyptian literature, and for "Paraenesis" and "Protreptic," terms from Greek literature. Moreover, Gammie introduces the three types of rhetoric based on social situations in the Greek city-state—forensic or judicial (law court), deliberative or symbouleutic (political assembly), and epideictic (civil ceremony). Thus, we seem to be on our way towards a comprehensive taxonomy of Paraenetic Literature in the Mediterranean World based on conventional social situations.

Then, however, Gammie closes the door. Instead of developing a taxonomy oriented toward social situations, he gleans his list of forms from literary-historical criticism grounded in grammatical and syntactical analysis. There is no evidence in the essays that Gammie is aware of Klaus Berger's comprehensive taxonomy of *Gattungen* in the New Testament, which uses rhetorical categories and terminology that exhibit social contexts (1984a; 1984b). Instead, Gammie nails boards on a wall of defense against aspects of the social analysis of Stanley Stowers, Benjamin Fiore, and others with grammatical and syntactical observations—the solid data on which he thinks "formal" characteristics must be based (see, e.g., 3.2)

If Gammie would have introduced Klaus Berger's work, the reader (and the authors of the subsequent essays) might have encountered a taxonomy concerned with "topics" and "persuasive figures" rather than grammar and syntax. Topics are the places people look for something to say about their subject (Kennedy: 20), and persuasive figures are expressions, phrases, and sequences of thought and assertion that have some kind of argumentative quality (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca: 167–79). The arenas of life from which people glean topics and figures they use to persuade others are social phenomena. Thus, Berger bases his taxonomy of paraenetic forms in the New Testament on topics and figures in various kinds of social situations. And he concludes that paraenesis is deliberative (symbouleutic or advisory) rhetoric. Paraenesis functions like advice in a political assembly rather than accusation or defense in a law court (judicial or forensic rhetoric) or praise and blame in a civil ceremony (epideictic rhetoric). Within this framework, Berger finds the following categories:

- (a) general social duties (concerned with *Gesellschaft*, if we use Perdue's essay)
- (b) inner community social duties (concerned with *Gemeinschaft*)
- (c) community paraenesis concerning "one another" and "unity" (*Gemeinschaft*)
- (d) property and sexual ethic
- (e) self-subordination
 - (1) for wives (to husbands)
 - (2) for Christians (to civil authorities)
 - (3) for slaves (to masters)
 - (4) for Christians (to community leaders)
 - (5) for Christians (to one another)
- (f) renunciation of retaliation, payment, opposition and judicial procedures in this age
- (g) metaphorical paraenesis about watchfulness and temperateness
- (h) postconversion admonition
- (i) *Haustafel* and duty list
- (j) epistolary paraenetic conclusion
- (k) heresy conclusion
- (l) warning about false teachers
- (m) martyrdom paraenesis (Berger 1984a: 121–48).

This taxonomy is guided by topics and figures, not by grammar and syntax. For this reason, the *Gattungen* reach provocatively toward arenas of life constituted by order, conflict, transition, ritual, liminality, *Gesellschaft*, *Gemeinschaft*, and other good social and anthropological categories that call forth rich discussion and debate.

If *Gattungen* like Berger's had been introduced into the discussion, the authors of the subsequent essays could have taken their analysis much further into social and anthropological issues. And the reader also may have acquired a richer framework for evaluating various discussions in the volume. For example, there is a creative moment in Williams' essay where he argues that the Sermon on the Mount is sacrifice transformed into a rhetoric of excess. How did Williams draw this conclusion? What moves does his presentation hide from the reader? How can we judge if the rhetoric in the Sermon on the Mount is a rhetoric of excess? How can we judge if Williams' argument itself is a rhetoric of excess or a rhetoric grounded in some kind of reasonableness? Since Williams, like Gammie, abandons the categories of judicial, deliberative, and epideictic rhetoric, these categories function in a hidden manner, and without clarity, in his analysis. If he would keep them in view as heuristic social categories, greater clarity could accompany his analysis.

Williams, building on observations by Kermode, proposes that a rhetoric of excess is constitutive to the contrasts in Matthew 5:21-48 between the old Torah and the new commandments (3.2). Thus, the shift from killing to anger, adultery to lustfulness, etc. is a rhetoric of excess. In his words, as he comments on 5:38-42:

To take this style of rhetoric literally would be just as foolish as trying to obey the teaching on adultery by engaging in self-mutilation (5:27-30). If someone hits me am I to say, "Now hit me again"? If I were to lose \$1,000 in a lawsuit, should I offer the winning party another one thousand on Christian principles? (3.2)

What the reader never sees, because Williams does not bring heuristic social categories into view, is that the antitheses have changed judicial (forensic) rhetoric into deliberative rhetoric. In other words, commandments that could be perceived as laws triable in a law court are transformed into guidelines that function as advice for maintaining honor in a political arena where citizens assemble to make decisions about group action. The "new" commandments function like advice in a political assembly: members (*politai*) who do not follow the advice will bring dishonor upon themselves and find themselves removed from positions of power and influence in the community, because the majority has decided to act on the basis of the advice.

The shift from judicial to deliberative rhetoric appears to be accompanied by a shift from a social context in the *Gesellschaft* to a social context in the *Gemeinschaft*. Within first century Jewish institutions, i.e., the *Gesellschaft*, the ten commandments have legal status. The teaching in the Sermon on the Mount transforms the commandments into advice which provides the means to acquire and maintain honor among people who identify themselves as Christians, i.e., in the *Gemeinschaft*. Where will judgment occur for the one who looks at a woman lustfully? Not in a law court where a verdict on adultery could be sought. Rather, people in the community will disapprove of or publicly denounce the man who looks at a woman lustfully. Thus, to preserve his honor in the community, the man will not look at a woman lustfully, since his socially formed knowledge informs him that this is a matter of committing adultery with her in his heart. The concern about divorce, then, is not about what is legal, but about what is shameful: it is a guideline nurtured among the members of the community (5:32). The new commandment makes any action concerning divorce in an official law court incidental to the real issue: personal indictment among associates in the community. This means that divorce has been moved from a judicial social setting in a dominant form of culture (*Gesellschaft*) to a political social setting in a localized community

(*Gemeinschaft*), a setting of interaction and power where the majority of the members have decided to act according to a certain kind of advice.

Only one of the new commandments maintains judicial language: the antithesis about killing (5: 21-26), which refers to "legal liability" and a "council." But where is the council that will judge a person who is angry with a brother or insults a brother? This is not a law court in the *Gesellschaft*. At most, this is a council set up by the community. And what will the punishment be? The person will be liable to the fire of Gehenna (5:22). This council appears not to proceed in the usual manner with punishments! The issue is honor and shame among other members of the community. Who will associate with someone who is liable to the fire of Gehenna? That person will be pushed to the periphery and not be given a position of leadership. Other people who act according to the advice in the new commandments will acquire and maintain honor in the community and receive positions of leadership and influence. And the worst kind of shame will come to those who do something liable in a law court in the *Gesellschaft* (5:25-26). That person has taken himself or herself outside the domain of the new commandments which concern actions that members try to persuade other members to follow. That person simply will have to suffer the punishments meted out by the civil court (5: 26).

Now let us return to Williams' statement about turning the other cheek and giving an additional \$1,000 to a person who has won a lawsuit against us. How are we to evaluate Williams' statement: "If someone hits me am I to say, 'Now hit me again'" (3.2)? Williams appears to presuppose a situation outside a community governed by social pressures of honor and shame. Can Williams not imagine that these actions would work in the setting of a church community? If not, he should try it. Who hits a person in a church setting, and what happens if someone does? I can testify that hitting happens at church camps. And the person who says, "Now hit me again," wins the respect of everyone while the one who hit is brought to shame. Thus, the issue is the social dynamics functioning in the setting.

Social anthropologists tell us that Mediterranean society during the rise of early Christianity was dominated by dynamics of honor and shame (Gilmore), and the Sermon on the Mount exhibits these dynamics. We see this kind of culture nurtured today in families, ethnic communities, and social and religious groups of various kinds. Thus at church camp, where the dynamics of honor and shame function very well, a person can say, "Now hit me again," and it will work very effectively. In later centuries in Western culture, and certainly in the context of the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation, guilt culture was becoming dominant in European society. Many of us are heirs of

this well-developed guilt culture. Within these dynamics, if we hit back we indict ourselves. We ask, "Why did I not control myself? I wonder if I can be forgiven and if I can forgive myself." But now a major portion of our society appears to function in the dynamics of a "rights" culture, and Williams exhibits the presuppositions of a "rights" culture in his essay. The norms of this kind of culture suggest that everyone has the right either to resist the person who hits on the cheek or to hit the person back. Why? This appears to be presupposed by basic American mythology: even Matt Dillon hit "when he had to," and so does Rambo, Dirty Harry, and Ronald Reagan (see Jewett and Lawrence). Moreover, everyone has the right to "their own" money. This is "personal property," if it was acquired within the "rights" of the *Gesellschaft*. Thus, a person would be foolish, Williams says, to "offer the winning party another one thousand on Christian principles?" So where have "Christian principles" gone? From communities governed by honor and shame during the first century to modern or post-modern society governed by individual rights. The point in the Sermon on the Mount is that the person who has been invited to hit the other cheek has been shamed, and the shame of being naked when a person has given all one's clothes to the person who sued would be completely overcome by the honor attained by the action. But Williams has found no way to let the dynamics of an honor and shame culture influence the presuppositions of his rights culture.

So, is the rhetoric in the Sermon on the Mount a rhetoric of excess? When it talks about plucking out one's own eye or cutting off one's hand, the social situations in which we live and in which most early Christians lived suggest that this is hyperbole—exaggerated, excessive assertion. But those situations which Tannehill analyzed as "focal instances" are at work daily in communities throughout the world. There are people who regularly turn the other cheek, give the shirt off their back, go a second mile, and give to everyone who asks. The question is the social context, and we should distinguish among social contexts and seek to understand the differences among them. It would be informative to have a taxonomy that exhibits the range of social settings and dynamics presupposed by paraenetic literature in the Bible. Berger's list is a good start. If we expanded and refined his taxonomy, we could begin to engage in significantly new conversations about social environments exhibited by biblical texts.

Is there any substance to Williams' assertion that the Sermon on the Mount has transformed sacrifice into a rhetoric of excess? Perhaps the major issue is the meaning of the term "excess," since it has acquired special meanings in post-modern analysis. Among other things, we would need to clarify the relation of Kermode's use of the term to the use of the

term in theories about violence and eroticism (Bataille 40–48). But this is not, I think, the appropriate place to pursue this matter. I would like to think that Williams has opened the door for a quite new discussion of the Sermon on the Mount as "sacrificial rhetoric." With the provocative studies of sacrifice by Girard, Burkert, and others as a resource (Hamerton-Kelly), we may acquire significantly new understandings of the social function of actions like turning the other cheek, going the extra mile, and giving the shirt off our back. In fact, my colleague Thee Smith has found evidence that in certain social situations black people have enacted "focal instances" that have called forth mimetic desire in their white overlords that caused them to free their slaves or engage in other activities motivated by self-sacrifice. Moreover, the demonstrations led by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. suggest the possibility for the success of related actions in a national arena, again following the leads in Perdue's essay that distinguish between *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* as places of human activity. Thus, perhaps the issue is "sacrificial" rhetoric, and we need to have a careful look at the meanings of the term "excess" before we will have clarity as we use it in relation to the Sermon on the Mount.

This brings us naturally to Amy-Jill Levine's essay, where the theme is that women may be present where we cannot see them. Levine's essay could have been aided by a taxonomy of paraenetic literature oriented toward social situations. She observes that women are not present in Q1, and when they appear in Q2 they are in a subordinate role. Then she asks: since women are not mentioned among the medicants but among the supporting network when they appear in the second stage, could women actually have had greater power among the support network at an earlier stage?

Using categories we have introduced previously, we could make the following observations. In Q1, deliberative rhetoric is dominant and epideictic rhetoric is generalized. The deliberative rhetoric tells people how to act in general and specific terms: love your enemies and pray for those who mistreat you (Q 6:27–28); turn the other cheek when hit and give your cloak as well as your tunic (Q 6:29); give to everyone who begs (Q 6:30); do to people as you wish them to do to you (Q 6:31); go out carrying no money or knapsack nor wearing sandals (Q 10:4); accept hospitality only in one house in a village (Q 10:10); do not be anxious about what to say when you are delivered up to courts (Q 12:11); do not worry about body, food, and clothes (Q 12:22–31); etc. The advice, i.e., deliberative rhetoric, in Q1 provides guidelines whereby a group can acquire its identity by engaging in common actions. The epideictic rhetoric which accompanies the deliberative rhetoric is directed toward

the source of the advice and toward broad groups of people who do or do not respond to the advice: praise to the Father who has revealed hidden things to the Son (Q 10:21–22); blessed are the poor (Q 6:20–21); blessed are the eyes that see and the ears that hear (Q 10:23–24); woe to Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, which are worse than Tyre and Sidon, for not repenting (Q 10:13–15); woe to Jerusalem for killing the prophets and stoning its messengers (Q 13: 34). In Q1, then, praise and blame, i.e., the ingredients of epideictic rhetoric, are directed towards entire cities and general groups who respond or do not respond.

The deliberative and epideictic rhetoric in Q1 calls for people to make the attitudes, precepts, and actions in the sayings public: the person who hears you hears me (Q 10:16); whatever is whispered in the dark or in secret rooms is to be made known (Q 12:2–3); every one who acknowledges the author of these sayings in public will be acknowledged by God and everyone who denies will be denied (Q 12:8–9). Thus, the public arena is the testing ground for group identity. And, as Levine argues, the people of Q1 are asked to become “more” marginal to fulfill their public role. Is it presupposed that women will have power in the household and that men must play “the public role” of mendicant marginality? In Q1, is the marginality of women based more on association with “publicly marginal” men than with a role of maintaining a household? Do we see here a manner in which men established the primary identity of the group by their public actions? The problem, as Levine states, is that women are not mentioned in Q1. Could their public action be as important as men’s public action for the identity of the group? Of special interest may be the things whispered in secret rooms that are made public (Q 12:2–3), since older women often participate in the dispersal of information about “secret things” in traditional societies (Campbell: 313–314). Perhaps here we see a major “public” activity of women alongside the public activity of men. The women’s “support” role may not be limited to maintaining households: they may be major communicators of the “secret things” in the public sphere and, thus, they may be active participants in “acknowledging in public” the one who speaks the sayings. Unfortunately, as Levine reminds us, these hunches have to be reconstructed from silence in the sayings.

In Q2, where women are mentioned, they are, as Levine observes, “in a support role.” Men, through their public role, are becoming more and more dominant in this group. This, of course, is encouraged by the broader social structures, which are patriarchal in nature and form. Men appear now to have a political view of their role, as exhibited in Q 22:28–30: “You are those who will sit with me on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” In the setting of these male political aspirations,

there is very little new deliberative rhetoric. The noticeable characteristic of Q2 is the highly charged epideictic rhetoric. The sayings envision crowds of Jewish people addressed as a “brood of vipers” (Q 3:7), John the Baptist accused of possessing a demon and Jesus referred to as a glutton, drunk, and friend of tax collectors and sinners (Q 7:33–34). The sayings direct woes toward Pharisees, calling them blind fools (Q 11:39–41) and whitewashed tombs or unmarked graves (Q 11:44), and accuses them of loading people with heavy burdens (Q 11:46), loving front seats in synagogues and salutations in market places (Q 11:43), taking away the key to knowledge (Q 11:51), neglecting justice (Q 11:42), and being full of extortion and rapacity (Q 11:39). The epideictic rhetoric in sayings attributed to John the Baptist and Jesus attacks a specific group of Jewish leaders, namely Pharisees, and their power in synagogues and marketplaces. In this setting, most directives appear in negative form: do not neglect justice (Q 11:42) and do not overload people with heavy burdens of religious law (Q 11:46). Also, in this setting the issue of purity laws, washing of cups and plates, appears (Q 11: 39–40). Therefore, in Q2 the group is engaging in a public power play against Pharisees who are perceived to be dominating the religious domain. Undoubtedly this is perceived to be “men’s” work. The men in the Q group have now moved beyond more generalized work in cities, accompanied by a mode of “staying in one house for a while.” They have targeted a group of people who have influence in the synagogues and marketplaces.

Only in this stage of the Q tradition, as Levine observes, do women appear in a few sayings, and they appear in a support role, as mothers and workers in the household. If women had some kind of public role during the stage of Q1, it is now being replaced by the importance of men’s attack on other men in the public sphere. During this stage there is reference to Woman Wisdom (Q 7:35), but she appears in a context that privileges men as wisdom comes from the Father to the Son (Q 10:21–22) to the disciple of the teacher (Q 6:40). In other words, I agree with Levine that Sophia’s “direct association with Jesus may be less a ‘feminizing’ of the teacher than a ‘masculinizing’ of the mythical source of that teaching” (5.6). And we should observe where the masculinizing occurs: among children playing in the market place (Q 7:31–35). The negative personal attacks are located in the market place and the exemplary action is found in the faithful steward in the household (12:42b–46), the centurion who has authority and built the synagogue (7:1–10), and the strong man’s house (11:14–28). The rhetoric is becoming domesticated: the images and locations exhibit power plays among established groups in cities rather than generalized attacks from mendicants who only stay awhile. In this more settled environment, men are playing the key public role *and* run-

ning the households. Women play a strictly supportive role even in the household.

In Jerome Quinn's essay, we see a later stage of Christianity where men's dominance both in public and in the household is given explicit organizational and ritual form. Quinn's essay does not say, as it should, that 1 Tim 2:11-15 is moving from deliberative rhetoric toward judicial rhetoric. The assertions are like legal statements:

- (1) Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness.
- (2) I *permit* no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

This is the introduction of a law with a rationale supported by an internal argument from the contrary. The assertion with the rationale forms a syllogistic argument (enthymeme), which is a strong way to formulate a law and defend it, and the argument from the contrary clarifies the law articulated in the enthymeme (see Mack and Robbins: 54-59, 120-21). The language has moved away from honor and shame to "what is permitted." *Gemeinschaft* is acquiring characteristics of *Gesellschaft*. Instead of a deliberative environment, this environment is highly judicial—non-compliance will be considered an infraction of what is permitted rather than simply an action that brings dishonor and moves a person from a position of power to a peripheral location in the community. Women now must submit to judicially-charged paraenesis or they will face consequences in an environment where people are told what is and is not permitted.

In contrast to the essays discussed above, the essay by Attridge probes the Epistle to the Hebrews with the heuristic social categories of judicial, deliberative, and epideictic rhetoric. At the beginning of the essay, he articulates the difficulty of using Gammie's essay, since New Testament literature is significantly absent within the horizons of Gammie's interests and the three types of rhetoric in the Hellenistic world are pushed out of sight. Thus, Attridge has to create his own way into a discussion of Hebrews with social and rhetorical categories, and he does this in an admirable way using the term "homily" or *logos parakleseos*.

Attridge shows us a context in early Christianity where the rhetoric is not primarily deliberative since the community has already been constructed, and not primarily judicial or filled with negative epideictic since any threat to the community appears not to come from an outside or inside attack on the symbol system of the community. Instead, Hebrews contains the kind of epideictic rhetoric enriched with deliberative images and exposition that "reinforce the identity of a social sub-

group in such a way as not to isolate it from its environment." Whether or not all would agree with this analysis, it works with rhetorical categories and taxonomies in a manner that opens the door to social contexts in early Christianity.

Thus, the essays on first century literature in this volume contain openings toward new analysis of paraenesis in social contexts. Unfortunately, the grammatical and syntactical impulse at work in the taxonomy in the second essay created an obstacle that limited the possibilities in the succeeding essays.

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