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Rhetography: A New Way of Seeing the Familiar Text

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The process of writing this essay has reminded me that “There is nothing new under the sun.”¹ It also has renewed my conviction that all things humans perceive to be new are reconfigurations of that which is old and commonplace. The topic of this essay is “rhetography,” a term of importance for scholars investigating the Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity.² Rhetography refers to the graphic images people create in their minds as a result of the visual texture of a text.³ Rhetography communicates a context of meaning to a hearer or reader. A speaker or writer composes, intentionally or unintentionally, a context of communication through statements or signs that conjure

¹ Ecclesiastes 1:9. I am grateful in particular to my Emory colleagues Gordon D. Newby, Devin Stewart, Laurie L. Patton, John D. Dunne, Robert von Thaden, Bart B. Bruehler, Juan Hernandez, and William K. Gilders; and my Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity colleagues L. Gregory Bloomquist, Roy R. Jeal, Duane F. Watson, David A. deSilva, Fred J. Long, Priscilla Geisterfer, and Robert L. Webb for contributing to specific aspects of this essay. In addition, I am deeply indebted to our son Rick A. Robbins, a figurative abstract and color field artist in the area of neo-abstract expressionism, whose efforts to bring art into words has informed my attempt to describe how words evoke images in the mind; see his “Statement” at <http://home.comcast.net/~rick1216/>.

² See <http://www.deopublishing.com/rhetoricofreligiousantiquity.htm>. A search on Google for the word rhetography, after a basic search with more conventional scholarly tools produced no findings, led to an announcement of the section of the SBL in November 2006 for which this paper was written; my May 1, 2004, essay on “Beginnings and Developments in Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation”; my paper entitled “Conceptual Blending and Early Christian Imagination” for the 2005 conference in Helsinki on “Body, Mind, and Society in Early Christianity”; and an essay by my Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity colleague Roy R. Jeal on “Clothes Make the (Wo)man,” at www.ars-rhetorica.net/Queen/VolumeSpecialIssue5/Articles/Jeal.pdf. Also, see Vernon K. Robbins, “Enthymeme and Picture in the *Gospel of Thomas*,” in *Thomasine Traditions in Antiquity: The Social and Cultural World of the Gospel of Thomas* (ed. J. M. Asgeirsson, A.D. DeConick, and R. Uro; NHMS 59; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), 175 [175-207]; Roy R. Jeal, “Blending Two Arts: Rhetorical Words, Rhetorical Pictures and Social Formation in the Letter to Philemon,” at <http://rhetjournal.net/Jeal.pdf>.

³ Visual texture is an aspect of sensory-aesthetic texture, which exhibits the range of senses the text evokes or embodies (thought, emotion, sight, sound, touch, smell): Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1996), 29-36; idem, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London/New York: Routledge, 1996), 64-65, 89-91. Roy R. Jeal describes these senses as visual, oral, aural, olfactory, tactile, gustatory, textual, prosaic, poetic, and intellectual: “Writing Socio-Rhetorical Commentary: Colossians 1:15-20,” paper presented at the SBL RRA Seminar, Washington, D.C., November 17, 2006, 12.

visual images in the mind which, in turn, evoke “familiar” contexts that provide meaning for a hearer or reader.

The term rhetography emerges from blending of both the linguistic and the pictorial turns that is occurring at the beginning of the twenty-first century.⁴ The term has an important relation to the ancient progymnastic rhetorical exercise of ekphrasis or ecphrasis (*ekphrasis*) in ancient Greek literature, which is “descriptive language, bringing what is shown clearly before the eyes.”⁵ It has a direct relation to Erwin Panofsky’s “Iconography and Iconology” and his dialogue with Karl Mannheim on interpretation.⁶ In addition, Roland Barthes’s “The Imagination of the Sign” and “Literature and Signification” are important for understanding this essay.⁷ W. J. T. Mitchell’s *Picture Theory*, appearing in 1994, was a landmark moment in the discussion, and the three chapters in the section entitled “Textual Pictures” have a special relation to this essay.⁸ In this broader context, this essay emerges at the interface of “icon” and “logos,”⁹ namely in a discussion of the interactive relation of rhetography (pictorial narration)¹⁰ and

⁴ For the linguistic turn in New Testament studies, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 117-39; idem, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992). For the pictorial turn in the study of literature and art, see W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), esp. 11-34. After using the term rhetography, I discovered a reference to “theography” in Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 12; see my reference to it in Robbins, “Enthymeme and Picture,” 175, n. 2. See now the extensive use of the term theography alongside of theology on the internet.

⁵ Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata* [46 Spengel/37-38 Rabe], see George A. Kennedy, *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Writings from the Greco-Roman World 10; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), 117. Also see Douglas J. Stewart, “On Ekphrasis: A Communication,” *Arion* 5 (1966): 554-56; W. J. T. Mitchell, “Ekphrasis and the Other,” in Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 151-81.

⁶ Erwin Panofsky, “Iconography and Iconology,” in *Studies in Iconology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939); Karl Mannheim, “Erwin Panofsky and Karl Mannheim: A Dialogue on Interpretation,” *Critical Inquiry* 19:3 (Spring 1993): 534-66; see Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 16-34.

⁷ Roland Barthes, *Critical Essays* (trans. Richard Howard; Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 205-11, 261-79.

⁸ Mitchell, *Picture Theory*: “Visible Language: Blake’s Art of Writing” (111-50); “Ekphrasis and the Other” (151-80); and “Narrative, Memory, and Slavery” (183-207).

⁹ Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 24.

¹⁰ In Mitchell’s words, the “iconology of the text”: *Picture Theory*, 112.

rhetology (argumentative narration) in discourse.¹¹ In the study of religion, this essay is especially informed by Harvey Whitehouse's work on arguments and icons,¹² the work of Robert N. McCauley and E. Thomas Lawson on "bringing ritual to mind,"¹³ and Laurie L. Patton's work on the history of images in the religious literature of early India that people used for the attainment of mental and verbal ability.¹⁴

The importance of rhetography in rhetorical analysis has emerged as a result of extended socio-rhetorical analysis of classical rhetoric and its function in interpretation of texts. Classical rhetoric developed its rhetorical system by picturing the rhetorical dynamics in three locations in the city-state: court room (judicial or forensic); political assembly (deliberative or symbouleutic [advisory]); and civil ceremony (epideictic or demonstrative). Classical rhetoric understands the purposes, goals, and procedures of each kind of rhetoric by picturing in the mind the speaker (*ēthos*), speech (*logos*), and audience (*pathos*) in these three different locations.

Traditional interpretation influenced by classical rhetoric has placed primary emphasis on speech, *logos*, in texts. From the perspective of socio-rhetorical interpretation, this approach has given primary attention to rhetology at the expense of rhetography in literature. In NT studies, the emphasis on "rhetology" has produced extensive investigation of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew,¹⁵ substantive analysis of the speeches of Stephen, Peter, and Paul in the Acts of the Apostles,¹⁶ and many other

¹¹ A central feature of argumentative rhetorical reasoning is the "enthymeme": see George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill/London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 16-17, 49-61 *et passim*; cf. V. K. Robbins, "From Enthymeme to Theology in Luke 11:1-13," in *Literary Studies in Luke-Acts: A Collection of Essays in Honor of Joseph B. Tyson* (ed. R. P. Thompson and T. E. Phillips; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1998), 191-214. Online: <http://www.religion.emory.edu/faculty/robbins/Theology/theology191.html>.

¹² Harvey Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹³ E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley, *Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Robert N. McCauley and E. Thomas Lawson, *Bringing Ritual to Mind: Psychological Foundations of Cultural Forms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁴ Laurie L. Patton, "A History of the Quest for Mental Power," in Laurie L. Patton, *Bringing the Gods to Mind: Mantra and Ritual in Early Indian Sacrifice* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2005), 142-51.

¹⁵ Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1995).

¹⁶ See, e.g., the bibliography in Todd Penner, *In Praise of Christian Origins: Stephen and the Hellenists in Lukan Apologetic Historiography* (ESEC 10; New York/London: T. & T. Clark International, 2004) and

insightful studies of other portions of narrative and speech in the Gospels and Acts.¹⁷ It also has focused on epistles as speeches or conversations.¹⁸ The absence of attention to “rhetography” has left a gap in rhetorical interpretation, namely a widespread consensus that it is not possible to formulate a systematic rhetorical approach to narrative portions of the Gospels and Acts, apocalyptic portions of early Christian literature, and other aspects of early Christian rhetoric in which rhetography plays a major role in the rhetoric. In private conversations with some well-known NT scholars, I have been informed that: (1) the Revelation to John contains no rhetorical argumentation; (2) classical rhetoric never analyzed stories; and (3) it is not possible to perform rhetorical analysis of all the writings in the NT. A major reason for these assertions by otherwise well-informed people has been a rhetorical focus on the rhetology of texts, which is a natural heritage from classical rhetorical interpretation, rather than a focus on the blending of rhetology and rhetography in texts.

A doorway into rhetography in texts, and subsequently into analysis and interpretation of the rhetoric of rhetography in texts, begins to open when one focuses on the speakers, who evoke *ēthos*, and the audiences, who respond with *pathos*, in classical rhetoric. In the context of composing or analyzing a speech (*logos*), a speaker/writer or interpreter is asked to envision attributes of the speakers and characteristics of the audiences where a speech occurs. This “envisioning” introduces dynamics of rhetography into classical rhetoric. Cognitive picturing of the context for the speaker and the audience guides writers, speakers, and interpreters in understanding the meaning of the communication. Classical rhetoricians distinguished three major types of rhetoric by differentiating between the role of: (1) prosecutors and defenders in the context of judges and juries; (2) political leaders in the context of a political assembly; and (3) a civil orator in the context of a funeral, the dedication of a harbor or ship, the founding of a city, or the

Duane F. Watson, “Paul’s Speech to the Ephesian Elders (Acts 20.17-38): Epideictic Rhetoric of Farewell,” in *Persuasive Artistry: Studies in New Testament Rhetoric in Honor of George A. Kennedy* (ed. D. F. Watson; JSNTSup 50; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 184-208.

¹⁷ Duane F. Watson, *The Rhetoric of the New Testament: A Bibliographic Survey* (Tools for Biblical Study 8; Blandford Forum, UK: Deo Publishing, 2006), 93-120.

¹⁸ Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979); Calvin J. Roetzel, *The Letters of Paul: Conversations in Context* (4th ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998); Watson, *The Rhetoric of the New Testament*, 121-80.

like. By picturing three different kinds of speakers and audiences, classical rhetoricians described three different kinds of rhetoric. As the tradition of classical rhetoric has unfolded throughout subsequent centuries, rhetorical interpreters have decontextualized judicial, deliberative, and epideictic rhetoric from the classical city-state, namely they have placed the rhetography of the three modes of rhetoric so far in the background as to effectively remove it. The result has been the development of more and more abstract forms of rhetorical interpretation in the tradition of classical rhetoric that focus attention so completely on the “rhetology” of the discourse that it ignores substantive sequences and movements in the “rhetography” of the discourse.

The focus in the present essay is on the work of George A. Kennedy, because he observed a blending of what he called “worldly” rhetoric in NT texts, which from our perspective is guided by a focus on the rhetology of NT texts, and what he called “radical” rhetoric, which our investigation has found to be rhetoric in which the rhetography of NT discourse presupposes contexts in God’s created and uncreated world, rather than contexts in the classical city-state. The approach in the present essay is to show how “radical” rhetography in the midst of texts Kennedy analyzes from the perspective of “worldly” rhetology creates rhetorical modes of discourse that require terminology beyond deliberative, judicial, and epideictic. Our argument is that Kennedy’s systematic rhetorical analysis of NT texts produces data that supports the socio-rhetorical view that first century Christians produced at least six rhetorical modes of discourse that blend worldly and radical rhetoric: prophetic, apocalyptic, miracle, wisdom, precreation, and priestly. Our goal is to show that Kennedy’s work should not be taken as a final statement about the nature of NT rhetoric in relation to classical rhetoric but as an investigation that exhibits blends of worldly and radical rhetorics that NT rhetorical interpreters need to analyze and interpret carefully and systematically within a conceptual framework that moves beyond the categories of deliberative, judicial, and epideictic rhetoric.

Early Christian Discourse as a Blend of Radical and Worldly Rhetoric

The present essay exhibits how current socio-rhetorical interpretation is building on George A. Kennedy’s investigation during the 1980s of rhetoric in the New Testament. Of special importance for socio-rhetorical interpretation is Kennedy’s

conclusion that early Christian discourse contains a mixture of worldly and radical rhetoric. In his words:

A striking result of the present study is recognition of the extent to which forms of logical argument are used in the New Testament. Though sacred language stands behind this, inherent in many of the utterances of Jesus, and though a tradition of radical, nonlogical discourse survived in the Church and still exists in modern existentialism and fundamentalism, even in the first century a process was underway of recasting expressions in enthymematic form, thus making sacred language into premises which are supported, at least in a formal sense, by human reasoning. The workings of the human mind significantly changed in the centuries preceding the Christian era because of the conceptualization of thought in Greece and the spread of Greek culture throughout the East. The New Testament lies not only at the cusp of Judaism and Hellenism, but at a cusp in Jewish and Hellenic culture where thought in myths confronts thought in logical forms. Some modern philosophers, or antiphilosophers, regard logical analysis and exegesis as a negative factor in civilization which has vitiated human efforts to comprehend reality. But “those things which can be learned from men should be learned without pride,” Augustine argues in the Prologue to *On Christian Doctrine*. “The condition of man would be lowered if God had not wished to have men supply his word to men.” It is rhetoric that supplies word to men, as Augustine well knew, and it is conceptualized rhetoric that describes that process.¹⁹

Kennedy observes that NT writings contain a mixture of worldly rhetoric (rational argumentation) and radical rhetoric (sacred rhetoric of authority). In his investigation of New Testament literature, Kennedy defined worldly rhetoric as “an understanding of the forms of logical argument and refutation, ... deliberate arrangement of material, and ... careful choice and composition of words.”²⁰ A beginning point for Kennedy was an assertion that most New Testament writings contain enthymemes, which are “*forms of*

¹⁹ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 159.

²⁰ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 96.

logical argument, but the *validity* of their arguments is entirely dependent on their assumptions, which cannot be logically and objectively proved.”²¹

Accepting Kennedy’s focus on enthymemes as important for understanding the rhetorical nature of NT discourse, I introduced the word “rhetórolect” (emphasis on the antepenult) in 1994 to describe multiple enthymematic kinds of reasoning in first century Christian discourse.²² The essay describes a rhetorolect as “a form of language variety or discourse identifiable on the basis of a distinctive configuration of themes, topics, reasonings, and argumentations.”²³ The presupposition underlying the definition was twofold: (1) early Christians spoke in ways that were significantly “understandable” among Greek speaking people in the Mediterranean world; and (2) even though their discourse was in many ways understandable, it was highly unusual, in the manner in which a dialect is unusual. The essay displays enthymematic reasoning in the form of a thesis followed by a rationale and sometimes a summarizing conclusion for six rhetorolects: wisdom, miracle, apocalyptic, opposition, death-resurrection, and cosmic.²⁴ The implication of the essay, from the perspective of Kennedy’s analysis, was that early Christian rhetoric contained at least six modes of rhetoric that used “worldly” reasoning in their argumentation, not simply three: deliberative, judicial, and epideictic.

An essay for the Lund Rhetoric Conference in 2000 entitled “Argumentative Textures in Socio-Rhetorical Argumentation”²⁵ provided an opportunity to analyze larger portions of NT literature to show how each of the six early Christian rhetorolects

²¹ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 17-18.

²² Vernon K. Robbins, “The Dialectical Nature of Early Christian Discourse,” *Scriptura* 59 (1996): 353-62; <http://www.religion.emory.edu/faculty/robbins/dialect/dialect353.html>. The linguist Benjamin H. Hary, Emory University, encouraged me to contract the two words “rhetorical dialect” into “rhetorolect” by analogy to his use of the term “sociolect” in his research: Benjamin H. Hary, *Multiglossia in Judeo-Arabic* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992); idem, “Judeo-Arabic in Its Sociolinguistic Setting,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 15 (1995): 73-99; idem, “Adaptations of Hebrew Script,” in *The World’s Writing Systems* (ed. P. T. Daniels and W. Bright; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 727-34, 741-42.

²³ Robbins, “The Dialectical Nature of Early Christian Discourse,” 356.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 357-61. In the ensuing years, three of the names for the rhetorolects stayed the same (wisdom, miracle, apocalyptic) and three of them changed (opposition to prophetic, death-resurrection to priestly, and cosmic to precreation).

²⁵ Vernon K. Robbins, “Argumentative Textures in Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation,” in *Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts: Essays from the Lund 2000 Conference* (ed. A. Eriksson, T. H. Olbricht, and W. Übelacker, Emory Studies in Early Christianity; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002: 27-65). Online: <http://www.religion.emory.edu/faculty/robbins/Pdfs/LundArgument.pdf>.

produced enthymematic rhetorical elaborations.²⁶ This was an exercise in moving beyond exploration of enthymemes in the six rhetorolects into the “deliberate arrangement of material” in the “worldly” rhetoric in the rhetorolects.²⁷ The analysis was not limited to speeches and letters in the New Testament, but it focused on the twenty-seven books in the New Testament in their broader context. Then in research on the Coptic Gospel of Thomas after 2000, I became aware that pictorial narration was essential to early Christian rhetoric and therefore central to enthymematic argumentation.²⁸ Analysis of pictorial narration, namely the rhetography of each rhetorolect, gradually led to a delineation of the social-cultural-ideological location that gave each first century Christian rhetorolect its contextual meaning in Mediterranean antiquity. After the “worldly” rhetorical nature of each of the six major early Christian rhetorolects had come into view, a careful review of George A. Kennedy’s rhetorical investigation of New Testament literature called attention to the distinctive blending of “radical” rhetoric with “worldly” rhetoric in each of the rhetorolects. This meant that the challenge must be to develop a “conceptualized rhetoric”²⁹ that reflects the manner in which “thought in myth” (radical rhetoric) confronts “thought in logical forms” (worldly rhetoric) in early Christian discourse. The result was an awareness that what Kennedy called radical rhetoric emerged from the rhetography of early Christian discourse in the context of the rhetology of the discourse, which Kennedy called worldly rhetoric.

George A. Kennedy’s Conclusions and Rhetography in Early Christian Discourse

Kennedy’s definition of “radical rhetoric”³⁰ as “a form of ‘sacred language’ characterized by assertion and absolute claims of authoritative truth without evidence or logical argument”³¹ provided a beginning point for socio-rhetorical exploration of the contexts of meaning in early Christian discourse that Kennedy himself did not explore.

²⁶ In Robbins, “Argumentative Textures,” 31-63, the six rhetorolects were called wisdom, miracle, prophetic, suffering-death, apocalyptic, and pre-creation.

²⁷ Cf. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 96.

²⁸ Vernon K. Robbins, “Enthymeme and Picture in the Gospel of Thomas,” in *Thomasine Traditions in Antiquity: The Social and Cultural World of the Gospel of Thomas* (ed. Jon Ma. Asgeirsson, April D. DeConick, and Risto Uro; Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 59; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 175-207.

²⁹ Kennedy’s term in *New Testament Interpretation*, 159.

³⁰ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 7, 93, 96, 104-106, 113, 159.

³¹ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 104.

These contexts, available to us through the rhetography of the discourse, provide the cultural frames for understanding and negotiating the meanings in early Christian argumentation. In other words, every form of Christian rhetoric contains a radical dimension, namely a sacred rhetoric of authority, but every form also contains a worldly dimension, namely a kind of rational argumentation. These blends of worldly and radical rhetoric result from the multiple contexts of meaning in God's created and uncreated world that early Christians embedded in the rhetography of their discourse, instead of the primary contexts of meaning in the classical city-state that first century Hellenistic-Roman rhetoricians embedded in the rhetography of their discourse.

To view the emergence of six major early Christian rhetorolects from the perspective of classical rhetoric, it is helpful to begin with the rhetography in the three classical forms of rhetoric as Kennedy analyzed them in NT texts: deliberative, judicial, and epideictic rhetoric. Kennedy's analysis reveals that early Christian discourse blended deliberative rhetoric from the political assembly in the city-state with assemblies in which prophets confronted leaders and participants in the kingdom of God on earth (prophetic rhetoric). Also, it blended judicial rhetoric from the court room in the city-state with a future imperial apocalyptic court over which either God in heaven or the Son of Man on earth would preside (apocalyptic rhetoric). In addition, it blended epideictic rhetoric from civil ceremonies in the city-state with public events featuring miraculous renewal of human bodies (miracle rhetoric).

It is important to recognize that the "radical" rhetorics of first century Christianity blended the "worldly" rhetorics of the first century Mediterranean world into their rhetorics, rather than simply developing new forms of rhetoric. The process produced not only prophetic, apocalyptic, and miracle discourse through the use of rhetorics of reasoning and argumentation associated with the contexts of earthly kingdom, imperial court, and body, but also the family household (wisdom rhetoric), imperial household (precreation rhetoric), and sacrificial temple (priestly rhetoric). Then by the fourth century, when Christian leaders began to enjoy alliances with Roman emperors, they used the context of the imperially sanctioned city council to produce creedal (doctrinal) rhetoric.

The thesis underlying this essay, then, is that first century Christians created at least six forms of radicalized worldly rhetoric – apocalyptic, prophetic, miracle, wisdom, precreation, and priestly – and by the fourth century they successfully launched creedal rhetoric, which became an even more distinctive form of radicalized worldly rhetoric in Western culture. This thesis is so large that it will take a generation of scholarship to work out its implications. The present essay is a mid-point of exploration and refinement of the thesis through deeper engagement with Kennedy’s rhetorical analysis of NT writings. Since the socio-rhetorical thesis was launched in its initial form in 1996,³² partially modified and more fully developed in 2000,³³ and is undergoing fuller explication at present,³⁴ this essay is not designed to persuade the reader of the underlying thesis. Rather, in the midst of an ongoing process of socio-rhetorical testing and refinement of the thesis, the present essay explores the relation of the six first century “rhetorolectic” forms of Christian discourse to George A. Kennedy’s investigation of “mixtures” of worldly rhetoric and radical rhetoric in the New Testament.

Prophetic Discourse and the Rhetography of God’s Earthly Kingdom

First, in Kennedy’s chapter on deliberative rhetoric, he analyzed the Sermon on the Mount, Sermon on the Plain, and some additional sayings of Jesus that exhibit deliberative rhetoric.³⁵ Then in a later context he analyzed 1 Thessalonians and Galatians as instances of deliberative rhetoric.³⁶ Kennedy’s analysis is, as one would expect, deeply informed by his knowledge of classical rhetoric and highly instructive for NT interpreters. It will only be possible briefly to discuss aspects of his interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew in this essay.

It is noticeable in Kennedy’s discussion of the Sermon on the Mount that he never mentions the reconfiguration of the rhetography of the speaker, speech, and audience in these texts from a political assembly, like one found in the city-

³² Robbins, “The Dialectical Nature of Early Christian Discourse.”

³³ Robbins, “Argumentative Textures.”

³⁴ Vernon K. Robbins, *The Invention of Christian Discourse. Vol. 1: Wisdom, Prophetic, and Apocalyptic* (Blandford Forum: Deo Publishing, 2008).

³⁵ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 39-72.

³⁶ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 141-52.

state, to an assembly where people are being informed about the earthly kingdom of God.³⁷ Instead of reference to benefit for a particular city-state, Kennedy refers to “self-interest and the expedient” as an abstract “focus of argument in deliberative rhetoric.”³⁸ There are eight references to the kingdom of heaven in the Sermon on the Mount, and four references to prophets.³⁹ Kennedy observes that “radical” rhetoric comes into play in the logic of the verses that refer to the kingdom, but he does not correlate the reconfiguration of the context in the rhetography of the discourse with the “radical” reasoning in the rhetoric. In his excellent analysis of the beatitudes as enthymemes, he observes that the value of the minor premises (“The poor in spirit will obtain the kingdom of heaven,” and so forth) to Jesus’ audience “is dependent on all three factors in the speech situation: speaker, speech, and audience. Jesus speaks with external authority, based on the miracles he has performed, strengthened by his general reputation, his role as rabbi and perhaps Messiah, and the support of his disciples.”⁴⁰

Most of all, perhaps, it is noticeable that Kennedy does not mention the prophetic nature of Jesus’ speech in the context of the multiple references to prophets in the Sermon on the Mount. The context of Jesus’ speech is not that of a leader in a city-state appealing to his fellow citizens to act in an expedient manner. Rather, the rhetography of the discourse shows that Jesus functions with the external authority of a prophet who knows the inner nature and responsibilities of living in God’s kingdom on earth. In other words, the rhetorical context of the speaker, speech, and audience evokes the dynamics of the conventional call and activities of a prophet in the context of an earthly kingdom over which God rules. In an unexpected context, God confronts a person, calls the person to a prophetic task, and provides the person with a “word of God” that must be pronounced before the king, groups of official leaders, and assemblies of the people in the kingdom. Kennedy actually shows an awareness of this in his assertion toward the end of the analysis that “Few orators could have delivered the sermon

³⁷ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 39-63.

³⁸ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 46.

³⁹ Kingdom: Matt 5:3, 10, 19(2), 20; 6:10, 13, 33; 7:21; prophets: Matt 5:12, 17; 7:12, 15.

⁴⁰ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 50.

successfully, but the warnings of the Hebrew prophets did constitute some precedent for Jesus, and his teaching therefore did not fall into a genre with which his audience was entirely unfamiliar.”⁴¹ What Kennedy does not then do is correlate his observations about the mixture of worldly and radical rhetoric in the Sermon on the Mount with a reconfiguration in the rhetography of the discourse from a leader in a political assembly in a city-state to a prophetic speaker engaged in deliberative rhetoric with people who are already blessed in God’s kingdom on earth and aspire to inherit the kingdom of heaven. Thus, an explication of the nature of the blending of “worldly” deliberative rhetoric and “radical” prophetic rhetoric in the Sermon on the Mount remains for socio-rhetorical interpreters to achieve.

The rhetography of prophetic rhetoric evokes a picture of God calling and sending a prophet to perform a specific set of tasks associated with a kingdom over which God rules both on earth and in heaven. Biblical prophetic discourse evokes the context of a kingdom of God with specific boundaries on earth. God chose a special region of land, arranged for anointed kings to rule over it, and called prophets to confront the leaders and the people when they were not living according to God’s covenantal guidelines.⁴² In early Christian speech and writing, the regional boundaries of God’s kingdom expand beyond the land of Israel to an area that spans from Rome (Acts 28:16) to Ethiopia (Acts 8:27-39), with a plan of expanding from Rome to Spain (Rom 15:24, 28). In this context, early Christian prophetic rhetoric reconfigures God’s promise of land to God’s promise of “an inheritance” (*klēronomos*).⁴³ The power of early Christian prophetic argumentation resides as fully in the authoritative picture it evokes of God’s calling of the speaker as it does in the deliberative reasons, rationales, analogies, precedents, and arguments from contraries and opposites in the discourse itself.

⁴¹ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 62.

⁴² For an excellent example of analysis of biblical prophetic discourse that provides rich data for understanding the nature of early Christian prophetic rhetoric, see Mark Roncace, *Jeremiah, Zedekiah, and the Fall of Jerusalem* (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies [JSOTSup] 423; New York/London: T. & T. Clark, 2005), esp. 5-25, 146-73.

⁴³ E.g., 1 Cor 6:9-10; 15:50; Gal 3:18, 29; 4:1, 7, 30; 5:21; Rom 4:13, 14; 8:17.

Apocalyptic Discourse and the Rhetography of Imperial Divine Courtroom

Second, Kennedy's discussion of judicial rhetoric in 2 Corinthians illustrates work that needs yet to be done to blend "worldly" judicial rhetoric with the "radical" imperial court room rhetoric of apocalyptic in the NT. Kennedy considers 2 Corinthians to provide "the most extended piece of judicial rhetoric in the New Testament."⁴⁴ Again, his analysis is excellent and very important for NT interpreters. There is, however, once again an absence of interpretation of the rhetography in the discourse that exhibits the "radical" reconfiguration of its context of argumentation. In short, Paul makes clear that his defense is before the imperial courtroom of God, rather than before a courtroom of humans, but Kennedy does not discuss this aspect of the rhetoric. As a result, Kennedy only partially exhibits to the reader the blend of radical and worldly rhetoric in 2 Corinthians.

Kennedy skillfully observes that 2 Cor 1:3-8 is a proem that introduces a narration in 1:8-2:13. Then, after the narration there is a proposition followed by a partition in 2:14-17 containing three headings that will provide the proof: (A) as men of sincerity; (B) as commissioned by God; (C) in the sight of God we speak in Christ.⁴⁵ In the analysis and interpretation that follows, Kennedy adroitly interprets the headings "as men of sincerity" and "as commissioned by God."⁴⁶ When interpreting the third heading, however, he drops the "in sight of God," interpreting only "we speak in Christ."⁴⁷ This results in an omission of the "radical" role of first century Christian imperial apocalyptic rhetorolect that is blended into the "worldly" judicial rhetoric in 2 Corinthians.

Kennedy's omission begins with no mention of Paul's assertion in the narration that the Corinthians will be able to be proud of Paul and his companions and they will be able to be proud of them "on the day of the Lord Jesus" (1:14). Paul's addition of reference to the apocalyptic day of the Lord Jesus in the rhetography of the discourse already reconfigures the judicial context from a courtroom in the city-state to an imperial heavenly courtroom on the Day of judgment. This external appeal introduces a radical dimension, which Kennedy does not discuss, into the worldly judicial rhetoric. After

⁴⁴ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 86.

⁴⁵ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 87-88.

⁴⁶ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 89-90.

⁴⁷ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 90-96.

Paul's reference to the day of the Lord Jesus, he continues the topic of the Day of judgment first through the phrase "in the presence of Christ" in 2:10 and then the phrase "in the sight of God" in the partition in 2:17. Paul's defense of himself in 2 Corinthians, then, is before the imperial courtroom of Christ and God, not really before the Corinthians as judge and jury in a particular city on earth.

As Kennedy's excellent discussion of the sections on "as men of sincerity" and "as commissioned by God" in 2 Cor 3:4-5:10 unfolds,⁴⁸ he fails to observe that Paul concludes the section with an explicit and detailed reference to the imperial divine courtroom of apocalyptic rhetoric: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body" (5:10). Kennedy's failure to notice this leads to an interpretation of the worldly rhetoric in the last section without including the radical apocalyptic rhetography of the imperial divine courtroom as Paul starts the elaboration of the third heading: "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men; but what we are is known to God, and I hope it is know also to your conscience" (5:11). Here the fear of the Lord, known to God, concerns God and the Lord Jesus as judges of guilt or innocence on the day of the Lord. Kennedy's failure to observe this causes him to drop the phrase "in the sight of God" in the final heading, referring to it only as "we speak in Christ" as he begins an interpretation of the final section.⁴⁹ This leads, in turn, to Kennedy's omission of Paul's reference to "the sight of God" in Paul's recapitulation of his defense in 7:12 and to Paul's summary of the context of his defense in 12:19. When Paul summarizes the judicial context for his defense, the radical rhetography of the discourse is explicitly clear: "Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves before you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved" (12:19). Here the blending of Paul's "worldly" judicial defense with the rhetography of Paul's "radical" imperial apocalyptic context of interpretation is fully evident. In the context of Kennedy's skillful explication of the worldly judicial rhetoric in Paul's argumentation, then, there is an absence of a full explication of the blending of the radical judicial rhetoric in the rhetography that moves the contextual

⁴⁸ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 88-90.

⁴⁹ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 90.

picture beyond a courtroom in a city-state to the imperial divine courtroom of apocalyptic rhetoric. Once again, the stage for interpretation of the blending of worldly and radical in judicial rhetoric in early Christian discourse has been skillfully set by Kennedy, but careful analysis and interpretation awaits the tools and strategies of the socio-rhetorical interpreter who works carefully with the rhetography of the discourse.

Miracle Discourse and the Rhetography of Body

Third, when Kennedy discusses epideictic rhetoric in Chapter Three, he refers to various NT texts but analyzes and interprets only the “topical” configuration of John 13-17.⁵⁰ While this is an informative discussion in the context of the expansion of epideictic rhetoric by the time of Menander Rhetor in 300 C.E., it bypasses the “praise” orientation that lies at the basis of epideictic rhetoric. As Kennedy himself observes, the initial focus of epideictic rhetoric was on praise in panegyrics and funeral orations.⁵¹ One of the most central epideictic features of first century Christian epideictic rhetoric is its miracle discourse. Kennedy discusses at a number of points the “radical” nature of miraculous healing in the NT, but nowhere does he pursue the epideictic nature of this rhetoric. This aspect of Kennedy’s analysis and interpretation will require some of the most serious socio-rhetorical reformulations of the function of first century Christian epideictic rhetoric in the future.⁵² Various places in Kennedy’s book, however, represent an important inroad into the epideictic nature of miracle discourse in the NT. For example, Kennedy identifies the importance of miracle discourse in the Gospel of Mark as he talks about the “radicality” of its rhetoric:

“Immediately” is one of Mark’s favorite words and gives a forward movement to his account. The truth is immediately and intuitively apprehended because it is true. Some see it, others do not, but there is no point in trying to persuade the latter. This is the most radical form of Christian rhetoric. When Jesus performs his first miracle, the witnesses

⁵⁰ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 73-85.

⁵¹ Kennedy summarizes the initial focus on praise in *New Testament Interpretation*, 73-75, but moves away from this emphasis to the third-fourth century C.E. handbooks on epideictic rhetoric on pp. 75-77 to establish the context for interpreting John 13-17.

⁵² A major start on socio-rhetorical interpretation of miracle discourse in the NT will appear in *The Role of Miracle Discourse in the Argumentation of the New Testament* (ed. D. F. Watson; Symposium; Atlanta: SBL and Leiden: Brill), forthcoming.

are “amazed” (1:27); they recognize truth but do not comprehend it rationally. The miracle is a sign of authority, as the crowd at once admits.⁵³

To understand how miracle discourse functions as radical epideictic rhetoric in Mark, one needs to analyze how the narration depicts Jesus repeatedly performing miracles in Mark 1-10 in a manner that brings forth praise from public audiences. As Aristotle says in *Rhet.* 1:32: “Since praise is based on actions and to act in accordance with deliberate purpose is characteristic of a worthy person, one should try to show him acting in accordance with deliberate purpose. It is useful for him to be seen to have so acted often.”⁵⁴ While miraculous healing of the body regularly leads to sanctuaries of healing in the Mediterranean world, in early Christian discourse it presupposes interaction between Jesus’ body and the malfunctioning body of an ill, diseased, or otherwise afflicted person that evokes praise and amazement in public contexts. In other words, in early Christian discourse a major context for understanding the function of praise emerges from miraculous recoveries of illness, ailment, or death in the body itself. The geophysical context for early Christian miracle discourse is the body itself in relation to the body of the healer. An excellent example is the healing story just after the verse to which Kennedy refers:

30 Now Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. 31 He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up.

Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. (Mark 1:30-31)

With this act, Jesus’ deeds of healing begin to become commonplace in Markan characterization of Jesus. At sunset, Jesus heals all kinds of ill people, with “the whole city gathered around the door” (1:33). Then Jesus heals a leper, a paralyzed man, and a man with a withered hand in the ensuing narration, leading to a summary of Jesus’ healings and exorcisms, which cause the unclean spirits to shout out, “You are the Son of God” (3:11). This is first century Christian epideictic miracle narration, so central to early Christian discourse that it occurs repetitively in all the NT Gospels and Acts.

⁵³ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 105.

⁵⁴ George A. Kennedy, *Aristotle of Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 84.

Once Kennedy has observed the radical function of miracle rhetoric in the Gospel of Mark, he does not show the reader how to analyze it as early Christian epideictic rhetoric. The important thing is the presence of Jesus' body in relation to the body of those who are ill. In early Christian discourse, the hand of the healer is often central, but it need not be. The essential context for the discourse is a relationship between the body of the healer and the body of the person who is ill or otherwise afflicted. The healing can occur in a house, alongside a road, by the sea, on a mountain, or anywhere. Early Christian epideictic miracle rhetoric regularly occurs in the form of a story that features an extraordinary transformation of a malfunctioning person into a healthy and well-ordered social being or in a summary of Jesus' healing of a large number of people. This is radical rhetoric containing epideictic dimensions, which is well-understood through the actions of Elijah and Elisha in biblical tradition and through the healings of Asklepios in Mediterranean tradition.⁵⁵ First century Christians gave it a prominent place in their epideictic discourse. Since its rhetography, rather than its rhetolgy, is so central to its epideictic rhetorical function, it remains for socio-rhetorical interpreters to show the blends of worldly and radical rhetoric that make it a prominent aspect of early Christian discourse in the Mediterranean world.

Wisdom Discourse and the Rhetography of Family Household

Fourth, Kennedy observes argumentation that evokes radical worldly wisdom discourse. Early Christian wisdom rhetoric naturally unfolds according to patterns and principles Kennedy assigned to rationally oriented, worldly rhetoric in his study of New Testament literature. The rhetography in this rhetoric blends the household and its members with God's created world and the vegetative productivity in it. As a result, virtually everything in a household and in God's created world function by analogy in relation to one another. God the Father of the created world is like the father in a household and people in the world are children of God, like the little people in a household are children of the parents. In addition, people may be like animals (sheep, wolves, doves, serpents) or like trees that bear good or bad fruit. This is a primary form

⁵⁵ Vernon K. Robbins, "Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Miracle Discourse in the Synoptic Gospels," in *The Role of Miracle Discourse*.

of deliberative rhetoric in early Christian discourse. Nevertheless, much of this, as Kennedy says, is radical rhetoric.

In the context of the strategies of worldly rhetoric, as Kennedy calls it, careful investigation of early Christian wisdom discourse reveals that imagery of the family household lies at the base. The ideal teacher is a father figure who teaches his children how to live, because he cares for them. This imagery blends with a concept of God as Father over the created world, making it into a household where God provides food, shelter, and clothing for all who live in it, like a father provides for the needs of his family. In early Christian discourse, the function of God as father finds its beginnings in God's creation of the universe and provision of light as a means for productivity in it. In this conceptual domain, the light of God is God's wisdom, which guides people to live generously and harmoniously with their neighbors. Luke 11:33-36 is a very interesting passage in this regard, evoking many aspects of the picturing central to early Christian wisdom discourse:

33 No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar, but on the lampstand so that those who enter may see the light. ³⁴Your eye is the lamp of your body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light; but if it is not healthy, your body is full of darkness. ³⁵Therefore consider whether the light in you is not darkness. ³⁶If then your whole body is full of light, with no part of it in darkness, it will be as full of light as when a lamp gives you light with its rays. (Luke 11:33-36)

This wisdom discourse evokes the context of a family household. The imagery of the lighting of a lamp and the placing of the lamp in the household brings to mind the location where parents teach their children wisdom in the context of caring for their bodies from early childhood. The goal is to bring the light of God's wisdom into their bodies, so they may function like the good, productive world God created at the beginning of time. This is didactic, rather than political, deliberative rhetoric. The eye is the special vehicle for the knowledge that will lead the hearer or reader to the right decision and action. Learning to see in the visible world the light of God's goodness and learning allows the eye to shine this light into the body and create a person who is able to

produce goodness and righteousness in the world.⁵⁶ This is radical wisdom discourse that functions internally in most of the “worldly” rhetoric in the NT. A basic challenge for socio-rhetorical interpreters is to identify, analyze, and describe how this “radical” worldly rhetoric pervades most of early Christian discourse and exhibits inner reasonings of wisdom that make it immediately accessible to the understanding of the hearers and readers.

Precreation Discourse and the Rhetography of Imperial Household

Fifth, Kennedy makes statements that lead an interpreter to the nature of precreation rhetoric in early Christian discourse:

John’s Gospel is radical Christian rhetoric in its demand for immediate and direct response to the truth, but John makes far more demands than Mark on his readers in approaching the truth they are to perceive. He uses the forms of logical argument not so much as proof, as does Matthew, but as ways of turning and reiterating the topics which are at the core of his message.⁵⁷

Kennedy’s insights lead a person to precreation rhetoric, a kind of radical epideictic rhetoric that presupposes that Jesus’ knowledge is in Jesus as a result of the intimate relation he, as the only begotten Son of God, has had with God since before creation. The experiential base of this was knowledge about the imperial household, which for most early Christians was far away and never seen by them. Blending the imperial household with the household of God, the Gospel of John evokes an imperial primordial household outside of time and space with an intimate relation between the emperor Father and his son. The Father sends his son out into his empire to distribute the benefits of his eternal wealth to those who profess unconditional loyalty and friendship to the son.

⁵⁶ John H. Elliott, “The Evil Eye and the Sermon on the Mount: Contours of a Pervasive Belief in Social Scientific Perspective,” *BibInt* 2 (1994): 51-84; John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina (eds.), *Handbook of Biblical Social Values* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 68-72.

⁵⁷ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 113.

By this means, friendship with the son enacts a relationship with the father that yields benefits from the realm of eternal peace, salvation, and life.⁵⁸

The Gospel of John, then, evokes the context of an imperial realm with a son of the emperor who goes throughout the empire to distribute primordial benefits that only an emperor can bestow. Everything Jesus does and says is primordial wisdom and action. God's creation of the world only made God's wisdom partially visible to human beings. Jesus' action and speech present the unfathomable wisdom of God to humans in terms that are comprehensible only with truly exceptional insight into the nature of God. In this instance, then, the radical rhetoric evokes a picture of Jesus with God before the creation of the world. Jesus, as the only begotten Son who listened carefully to everything God the Father said to him, and who watched carefully everything his Father did, uses extraordinary images and arguments, regularly in the form of logical argument, to communicate the extraordinary knowledge available to him from God's primordial sphere. When God sends Jesus to earth to speak to people, Jesus uses unusual images and performs extraordinary signs among them. In early Christian discourse, this is epideictic precreation wisdom that gains plausibility for the hearer through blending with the scope of divine powers and benefits inherent in the emperor and his household.

Priestly Discourse and the Rhetography of Sacrificial Temple

Kennedy leads us incidentally to a sixth major kind of radical rhetoric in early Christian discourse when he discusses "topics," *topoi* or *loci*, which are "the 'places' where [the speaker] looks for something to say about his subject."⁵⁹ He presents the following example of "past fact leading to the topic of degree":

"While we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the

⁵⁸ For an initial exploration of the imperial nature of the discourse in the Gospel of John, see Gerhard van den Heever, "Finding Data in Unexpected Places (Or: From Text Linguistics to Socio-Rhetoric): A Socio-Rhetorical Reading of John's Gospel," *SBL Seminar Papers, 1998* (2 vols.; SBLSP 37; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 2:649-76.

⁵⁹ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 20.

wrath of God” (Rom. 5:8-9). This type of *a fortiori* argument is commonly known as “the more and the less.”⁶⁰

With this example, Kennedy incidentally introduces early Christian priestly rhetoric blended with apocalyptic rhetoric. The statement about being justified by Christ’s blood when he died evokes epideictic priestly reasoning associated with a temple containing a sacrificial altar. Then the statement about being saved from the wrath of God evokes apocalyptic reasoning associated with the power of an emperor to destroy rebellious, “impure” people with legions of his imperial army. In this conceptual domain, the impurity of the people is regularly a result of an unwillingness to participate in ritual worship of the emperor and the emissaries the emperor sends out to perform certain tasks in his empire.

The picturesque nature of early Christian priestly discourse reaches its fullest form in a passage like Heb 9:11-12:

11 But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation),¹² he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. (Heb 9:11-12)

This discourse evokes the context of a sacrificial temple and blends this context with the conceptual realm of God in the heavens. Jesus is the high priest in God’s temple in the heavens who offers himself as the perfect sacrifice. This is radical reasoning, but it is reasoning based on Mediterranean understanding of the process and benefits of offerings on an altar in a temple designed for sacrificial ritual.⁶¹ The image of the context in the mind of the hearer enacts a conceptual domain in which the assertions can be understood as reasonable. The blend of radicality and reasonableness in it again is a rhetorical characteristic Kennedy identified both appropriately and skillfully.

⁶⁰ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 20.

⁶¹ For an excellent analysis of biblical priestly discourse that provides rich data for analysis of early Christian priestly rhetoric, see William K. Gilders, *Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible: Meaning and Power* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

Conclusion

From the perspective of socio-rhetorical interpretation, Kennedy's approach to radical rhetoric is a key for understanding the nature of the rhetoric in the NT writings. Kennedy's approach does not move us fully into rhetorical analysis of early Christian rhetoric, however, because it brings a system of "rational rhetoric" to the NT writings and describes the "nonrational rhetorical" aspects of the NT in terms that are oppositional to "real rhetoric," which he calls worldly rhetoric. In contrast to an approach that uses worldly rhetoric as a normative standard for real rhetoric, the goal of a rhetorical interpreter must be to use the insight that the New Testament writings blend rational and nonrational rhetoric, worldly and radical rhetoric, rhetology and rhetography, together. Careful analysis of the relation of the rhetography to the rhetology in the discourse can lead us to the multiple kinds of rhetoric in early Christian discourse.

Since 2002, the theories of critical spatiality⁶² and conceptual blending⁶³ have provided a means to identify the inner nature and boundaries of each rhetorlect more clearly. A special result has been an awareness of the rhetography characteristic of each rhetorlect and the relation of that rhetography to its argumentative texture. In the present understanding of socio-rhetorical interpreters, now influenced by conceptual integration (blending) and critical spatiality theory, a rhetorlect is an idealized cognitive model.⁶⁴ This means there are four aspects to a rhetorlect: (1) argumentative-enthymematic patterning (rhetology); (2) image-descriptive patterning (rhetography); (3) metaphoric mappings; and (4) metonymic mappings.⁶⁵ The present essay has focused on the image-descriptive patterning, namely the rhetography, in six basic rhetorlects in early Christian discourse. Focusing on the rhetography leads us to rhetorlects as cultural frames that contain an argumentative texture that blends rhetography and rhetology in a manner that evokes a conventional context of understanding for negotiating its reasonings

⁶² David M. Gunn and Paula M. McNutt, eds., *'Imagining' Biblical Worlds: Studies in Spatial, Social and Historical Constructs in Honor of James W. Flanagan* (JSOTSup 359; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

⁶³ Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

⁶⁴ George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 68-76.

⁶⁵ Cf. Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, 68.

and meanings. The argumentative texture of each rhetorlect is a result of the interaction of its particular rhetography with its particular rhetology. This means that an early Christian rhetorlect is a network of significations and meanings associated with social-cultural-ideological places and spaces familiar to people in a certain geophysical region. In terms that combine insights from Kennedy's analysis and from Fauconnier's and Turner's conceptual integration theory, a rhetorlect is a blending of radical and worldly rhetoric in a cultural frame that functions as an environment of emergent structure.⁶⁶ Rhetography is an essential ingredient in a rhetorlect, since rhetography is the means by which people envision a speaker and audience as a context that gives meaning to its rhetoric.

An early Christian rhetorlect achieves its status as a cultural frame that functions as an environment of emergent structure by means of a blending of what Kennedy calls worldly and radical rhetoric. In other words, every rhetorlect is radical from the perspective of worldly rhetoric, yet every major type of radical rhetoric in early Christian discourse has actual or imitative worldly rhetoric in it. Identifying the central cultural rhetography in a rhetorlect and correlating it with its particular cultural rhetology enables an interpreter to establish and interpret both the inner rhetorical workings and the boundaries of a particular rhetorlect. The reasoning in a rhetorlect emerges from social-cultural-ideological experiences in specific geophysical locations. Therefore the rhetography provides the primary cultural clue to the logic of the discourse.

The rhetography in a rhetorlect, in other words the pervasive pictorial narration in it, evokes the conventional context of meaning for the texture of its argumentation. Picturing a kingdom of God in which God calls, authorizes, informs, and commands prophets to confront the leaders and people in the kingdom to enact God's principles of justice and righteousness in the region evokes the reasoning internal to early Christian deliberative prophetic rhetorlect. Picturing an empire with an emperor who rules through an imperial court evokes judicial reasoning about divine action that judges and destroys evil to create contexts of peace and salvation internal to early Christian

⁶⁶ The definition has been refined especially through insights from Robert von Thaden, "The Wisdom of Fleeing *Porneia*: Conceptual Blending in 1 Corinthians 6:12-7:7" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 2006) and the Ph.D. work of Priscilla Geisterfer at St. Paul University, Ottawa. Also, see the discussion of framing in Patton, *Bringing the Gods to Mind*, 46-47.

apocalyptic rhetorlect. Picturing a malfunctioning body miraculously healed through the presence of the body of a healer evokes epideictic reasoning internal to early Christian miracle rhetorlect. Picturing a household where parents teach their children wisdom, then employ teachers outside the family to take them further into adult wisdom, evokes deliberative logics internal to early Christian wisdom rhetorlect. Picturing an emperor who has an intimate relation with his son outside of time evokes epideictic reasoning about the sending of a special son to distribute the benefits of special divine resources to the loyal subjects of his empire internal to precreation rhetorlect. Picturing a priest at an altar evokes epideictic reasoning about the actions and results described and asserted in early Christian priestly rhetorlect.

After the attributes of the six major rhetorlects that emerged by 100 C.E. have been more fully explored and explained,⁶⁷ the next challenge will be to explore the rhetorlects that participate in the movement of Christian discourse beyond its first century rhetorical modes into the creedal rhetorlect that became central to it during the fourth century. By the fourth century C.E., fully developed creedal rhetorlect emerged that was based on the imperial political structures that convened Church Councils in particular cities in the Roman Empire. The beginnings of this seventh rhetorlect lie in those parts of New Testament literature Kennedy has described as: “When a doctrine is purely proclaimed and not couched in enthymemes.”⁶⁸

While the six basic first century Christian rhetorlects had their beginnings prior to earliest Christianity, creedal rhetorlect had its decisive beginnings in the interfaces among Jewish, Christian, and Hellenistic-Roman discourse during the first and second centuries C.E. Lewis Ayres’s *Nicaea and its Legacy*⁶⁹ skillfully describes the dynamics that created the context for creedal rhetorlect to emerge as a major force within fourth century Christian discourse. One of the major strengths of his account lies in its preservation of the multiplicities, tensions, counter-valences and unresolved issues as pro-Nicene forces gained a stronghold over a large sector of the Christian church.

⁶⁷ V. K. Robbins, *The Invention of Christian Discourse* (2 vols.; Blandford Forum: Deo Publishing, forthcoming).

⁶⁸ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 7.

⁶⁹ L. Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

At the center of the Christian creedal rhetorlect that emerged during the fourth century stands the Nicene-Cosmopolitan creed.⁷⁰ Within an overall frame that blends Christian wisdom and priestly rhetorlect, this creed features God as Father, Jesus as the only Son, the Holy Spirit as “worshipped and glorified like the Father and the Son,” and Mary as the mother of Jesus. In this context, the creed foregrounds precreation and apocalyptic rhetorlect, rather than elaborating priestly imagery that would make Christ an atoning, substitutionary, or expiational sacrifice. In addition, the creed pushes prophetic and miracle rhetorlect almost entirely into the background. Philosophical debate reconfigures the “authority, power, and illumination” of prophetic rhetorlect into a reference to the Holy Spirit, “who spoke through the prophets.” In turn, it redirects the “amazement” of miracle rhetorlect into creedal conviction in the amazing story of “the one Lord Jesus Christ” who came down from heaven, was incarnate, became human, rose on the third day, ascended to heaven, sits on the right hand of the Father, and will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead. In other words, the overall Christographical story-line becomes the miracle rhetorlect in the context of the creedal rhetorlect. The result was creedal rhetorlect that asserted

that God was one power, nature, and activity; that there could be no degrees in divinity; that the divine persons were irreducible although all share in the divine being without any ontological hierarchy; that human beings would always fail to comprehend God and that one could only make progress towards knowledge and love of God through entering a discipline and practice that would reshape the imagination.⁷¹

Philosophy, mystery, and institutional structure blended together in Christian creedal rhetorlect, providing a cultural frame that has functioned as an emergent structure for sixteen centuries. At a time when Christianity faces a special need to enter into productive conversation with Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus, some scholars are calling for Christian theology to return to a more creedal base of discourse. In turn, other scholars are calling for Christian theology to renew itself by discovering and reclaiming

⁷⁰ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London/New York/Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1952), 344-67; cf. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why It Matters* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 32-38.

⁷¹ Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 434.

the inner dynamics of its multiple discourses in contexts of interaction with the discourses of other religions in the world. Perhaps an awareness of the rhetoric in NT discourse that leads to six major first century Christian rhetorolects can help to create more healthy and productive interaction not only among biblical interpreters but also between biblical interpreters and interpreters of sacred texts in other religious traditions.⁷²

⁷² E.g., Bart B. Bruehler, "Karma Yoga and Christian Ethics: Reading Bhagavad Gita 3 in Light of Ephesians 4-6," in *Song Divine: Christian Commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita* (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2006), 23-48.