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Abortion, Infanticide, and the Social Rhetoric of the Apocalypse of Peter

PATRICK GRAY

The apocryphal *Apocalypse of Peter* is the earliest Christian description of hell. Among its Dantesque images there appears in chapter eight a brief but gruesome depiction of those guilty of infanticide and abortion. By virtue of the author's participation in the linguistic, social, and ideological worlds of second-century Christianity, the text is a complex one, just as contemporary debates about abortion are complex. *Apoc. Pet.* 8 is not simply "about" abortion or hell. This essay employs the insights of socio-rhetorical criticism as a heuristic device for sorting out the various threads of discourse about abortion and infanticide in this early Christian text. Focus upon the scene's inner argumentative texture, intertexture, and social-cultural texture reveals a dynamic interplay between this text and the Greco-Roman milieu of which it is a part.

The *Philogelos*, a Greek collection of jokes compiled sometime in late antiquity, tells of a man who has fathered a son by a slave girl. To his father's advice that he expose the infant he replies, "First, you kill your own children, then you can talk about me killing mine."¹ Aside from the occasional political cartoon, abortion and infanticide are not considered appropriate topics for comedy in contemporary western culture. Few issues are better predictors of one's place in the recent American "culture wars" than abortion, and neither side considers it a laughing matter.²

1. *Philogelos* 57. The translation is Barry Baldwin's: *The Philogelos or Laughter-Lover* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1983).

2. For a comprehensive treatment, see J. D. Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991); and, from a different perspective, Alan Wolfe, *One Nation, After All* (New York: Viking, 1998).

When abortion is under debate, the medical and the moral are only two of the questions to be considered. Abortion activates a number of different kinds of discourse, ranging from the ethical to the judicial, the religious, the psychological, the ecological, the sociological, and the semantic. These various kinds of discourse intersect with one another and with other kinds of discourse that are, on the surface, only tangential to the abortion issue. Put another way, ancient and modern discussions about abortion are never “about” simply abortion. Consciously or not, there is always more under negotiation than the participants articulate.

Quite literally, the abortion debate has created much sound and more than a little fury, but incendiary rhetoric on the topic is not a peculiarly modern phenomenon. The author of the apocryphal *Apocalypse of Peter* groups “those who have caused their children to be born untimely and have corrupted the work of God who created them” together with those guilty of infanticide, placing both of them in hell.³ The women are buried up to their necks in a pit of excrement near a great flame while the aborted children sit nearby crying to God, with flashes of lightning going out from the children and piercing their mothers’ eyes. As for parents guilty of infanticide, they are subjected to eternal torment by beasts formed from the congealed breast milk of the mothers. Like the modern debates about abortion, texts like *Apoc. Pet.* are neither read nor written in a linguistic, social, cultural, or ideological vacuum. Various “threads” run into and out of the discourse in *Apoc. Pet.* 8. It is not simply “about” abortion or hell, and by virtue of the author’s participation in the linguistic, social, cultural, and ideological “worlds” of second-century Christianity, the text is an exceptionally complex one. This passage provides valuable evidence for illuminating a developing Christian culture, but it is evidence which must be cross-examined in order for its full import to be assessed. Since the literary artifact is all that remains, interpreters do not have the luxury of questioning the author of *Apoc. Pet.* to gain a more textured appreciation of the composition. The task of this essay is to employ the insights of sociorhetorical criticism as a heuristic device for

3. *Apoc. Pet.* 8. Unless otherwise noted, versification and quotations appearing here are taken from the translation of the Ethiopic text published in J. K. Elliott, ed., *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 593–615. The most recent edition of the Ethiopic text is that of Dennis D. Buchholz, *Your Eyes Will Be Opened: A Study of the Greek (Ethiopic) Apocalypse of Peter*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 97 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988). Substantive variations between Elliott’s and Buchholz’s translations are indicated below. References to the Akhmim (Greek) text are taken from Erich Klostermann, *Apocrypha*, Kleine Texte 3 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1933), 1:8–12.

sorting out and following the various threads of the discourse about abortion and infanticide in *Apoc. Pet.* 8.⁴

Text-critical questions have dominated scholarly attention devoted to *Apoc. Pet.*, and not without good reason.⁵ Its textual history is extraordinarily complicated.⁶ Tradition history and the history of *Apoc. Pet.*'s subsequent influence down to the time of Dante have also received a fair share of attention.⁷ Its popularity among early Christians is apparent from its use in other Christian apocalypses such as the *Apocalypse of Paul* and from its inclusion in the Muratorian Canon. Sociorhetorical methods complement this valuable historical research by providing a critical framework for describing the emergent Christian culture of the second century, of which *Apoc. Pet.* was an important part.⁸

In addition to its apparent popularity and its value as one of the earliest Christian writings not to be retained in the NT canon, *Apoc. Pet.* is important because it is the earliest Christian writing to contain a description of hell.⁹ The NT mentions Hades or Gehenna in a number of places, but, with the possible exception of the parable of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16.19–31, these do not amount to anything more than passing allusions.¹⁰

4. The general guidelines followed here are found in V. K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996); and idem, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society, and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996). Essays by R. Alan Culpepper, Margaret E. Dean, and Gordon Newby (published together in *JSNT* 70 [1998]: 69–115) consider the potential and the limitations of a sociorhetorical approach to early Christian literature.

5. Cf. R. J. Bauckham, "The Apocalypse of Peter: An Account of Research," *ANRW* II.25.6 (1988): 4712–50.

6. The original language of *Apoc. Pet.* was most likely Greek, but only a few fragments of the Greek have survived. Most scholars agree that the extant Ethiopic text is the closest to the original text of the apocalypse. See Buchholz, *Your Eyes Will Be Opened*, 376–430; and R. J. Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead: Studies in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, *Novum Testamentum Supplements* 93 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 162–65.

7. Cf. especially A. Dieterich, *Nekiya: Beiträge zur Erklärung der neuentdeckten Petrusapokalypse* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1893); A. von Harnack, *Bruchstücke des Evangeliums und der Apokalypse des Petrus*, 2d ed., *TU* 9.2 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1893), 80–87; and Martha Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell: An Apocryphal Form in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

8. Robbins, *Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse*, 13–14, 40–42.

9. Bauckham, *Fate of the Dead*, 176–94, dates it during the Bar Kokhba rebellion of 132–35.

10. Matt 5.22–29; 10.28; 11.23; 16.18; 18.9; 23.15, 33; Mark 9.43–47; Luke 10.15; 12.5; Acts 2.27–31; Jas 3.6; 2 Pet 2.4; Rev 1.18; 6.8; 20.13–14.

The most memorable scenes are the vivid descriptions of the punishments inflicted in *Apoc. Pet.* 7–12, but as spectacular as these may be, many of the elements are not unique. *Apoc. Pet.* appears to draw ideas and imagery from the same pool as do earlier Jewish, Near Eastern, and Greco-Roman writings which describe the fate of the dead in the underworld.¹¹ But not even apocalypses are simply the sums of their sources.¹² The author has appropriated this imagery in a distinctive way for new purposes: that the topic of abortion arises in the context of a description of hell is intriguing because the NT makes no direct references to abortion. Slightly later than the NT and roughly contemporaneous with *Apoc. Pet.* are the explicit references to abortion (φθορά) in the *Didache* (2.2) and the *Epistle of Barnabas* (19.5), where the practice is prohibited.¹³ A little later Athenagoras defends Christianity against outrageous charges of cannibalism by pointing out that the church even deems women who induce abortions—a much less heinous offense than cannibalism—to be guilty of murder.¹⁴ *Apoc. Pet.* 8, then, represents an intensification and elaboration of antipathy towards abortion already present in the Christian communities for whom these texts carried authority.

The contours of Christian antipathy can be seen through *Apoc. Pet.*'s various “textures”—inner texture, intertexture, and social-cultural texture.¹⁵

11. Dieterich, *Nekiya*, for example, places a heavy emphasis on the Orphic-Pythagorean parallels—which he explains by postulating the conversion of Orphic communities in Egypt to Christianity—while C. Bigg claims that the author has read Virgil's *Aeneid* (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1901], 207–9). For Orphic ideas about unborn children, see J. H. Waszink, “Abtreibung,” *RAC* 1:55–56; and A. Cameron, “The Exposure of Children and Greek Ethics,” *CR* 46 (1932): 109–14; and on punishments in the Orphic afterlife for abortion and infanticide, Robert Turcan, “La catabase orphique du papyrus de Bologne,” *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 150 (1956): 149–55. For affinities with Jewish literature, see A. Marmorstein, “Jüdische Parallelen zur Petrusapokalypse,” *ZNW* 10 (1909): 297–300, though none of the texts he studies definitely predates *Apoc. Pet.*

12. For a critique of exclusively genetic approaches to apocalyptic language and imagery, see J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 16–17.

13. Postpartum infanticide, as distinct from abortion, is also mentioned in these passages, as well as in *Did.* 5.2 and *Barn.* 20.2.

14. Athenagoras, *Leg.* 35. On Christian attitudes towards abortion in the third through the fifth centuries, a topic beyond the scope of this essay, see Michael Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1982), 53–73. John Boswell examines various problems posed by the patristic evidence concerning exposure (*The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* [London: Penguin, 1988], 138–79).

15. Cf. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 7–94.

INNER TEXTURE

The population of hell, according to *Apoc. Pet.* 6, is segregated according to sins committed. Jesus describes for Peter the punishments for abortion and infanticide in *Apoc. Pet.* 8, after the punishments for fornication and murder. Repetition of “torment” (Buchholz: “judgment”; “punishment”) in this brief scene sets a “hellish” tone that is perhaps not remarkable after centuries of Christian history, but which must not be taken for granted, since *Apoc. Pet.* is the earliest developed description of the Christian hell. “God” occurs five times, always in some connection with the torment: interference with God’s creation and disobedience to divine commands are the torment’s ultimate cause, the cries of “children” (repeated six times) to God call for it, and God actively wills it. The repeated use of demonstrative pronouns also makes it possible to introduce spoken commentary, by Jesus or by the children, in a propositional form that gives the background for what is narrated.¹⁶ A number of characters appear in this passage, but, with the exception of the brief speech attributed to the second group of children, the narrational texture consists entirely of direct speech by Jesus.¹⁷ Unlike the fornicators and murderers in *Apoc. Pet.* 7, those punished here have no voice. Aspects of sensory-aesthetic texture accentuate their former activeness and their present passiveness. The guilty are described in terms of the body zone of purposeful action.¹⁸ They “caused” abortions, “corrupted” (Buchholz: “wipe out”) God’s creation, “transgressed” and “forsook” divine law, and “slew” and “delivered over” their children. When, in the past, they acted in the zone of self-expressive speech, the effect was similarly destructive: they “despised” and “cursed.” Now, buried up to their throats, they have no

16. These “demonstrative explanations” are key in Himmelfarb’s distinction between “tours of Hell” in Jewish and Christian tradition and their Greco-Roman counterparts (*Tours of Hell*, 41 ff.).

17. In Elliott’s edition, the quotation marks at the close of the children’s speech in *Apoc. Pet.* 8 have been inadvertently deleted. Their speech should end with the words “. . . and begrudged us the light which you have given to all creatures,” after which the personal pronouns shift from first to third person plural.

18. For the taxonomy of body zones employed here, see B. J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 60–68. Focusing on NT texts, Malina classifies descriptions of human behavior in terms of the body metaphors used by the author. The three “body zones” he identifies are the zones of “emotion-fused thought,” “self-expressive speech,” and “purposeful action.” The body zone of purposeful action typically appears in the form of metaphors involving the hands, feet, arms, legs, and the external actions associated with these body parts.

means for self-expression. Even their eyes, the seat of emotion-fused thought, are pierced by fire shooting out from their children. In contrast, the children are able to “sigh,” to “cry,” and to employ speech effectively. As a result, they are “delivered” to a caretaking angel while their parents are “devoured” and “tormented.”

Embedded in this inner texture is a rich inner argumentative texture. This deliberative aspect is sometimes overlooked in apocalyptic discourse. Typically, discussion of the “logic” of hell in *Apoc. Pet.* is limited to the eschatological *ius talionis*.¹⁹ To be sure, the author is clear that Jesus will dispense justice to “every man according to his deeds” (1, 6, 13). The principle of “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” is, of course, also present in the OT (Exod 21.24; Lev 24.20). This emphasis is striking and, perhaps, surprising in light of the author’s almost certain knowledge and use of Matthew’s gospel, in which Jesus abrogates the OT *lex talionis*.²⁰ Several scholars have also noted that the closest the OT comes to a discussion of abortion is in the LXX rendering of Exod 21.22–23.²¹ While in the MT, when two men in an altercation injure a pregnant woman, the crime seems to consist in the harm done to the woman, the LXX is clear in understanding that the problem is in the harm done to the fetus.²² The following verse (21.24) stipulates the death penalty in the event of a miscarriage. For an early Christian text (composed originally in Greek) condemning abortion, such as *Apoc. Pet.*, it is important to note that, in the LXX, the classic Jewish formulation of the *lex talionis* is illustrated with abortion, albeit unintentionally induced, as the primary example.

The first half of *Apoc. Pet.* 8 deals with abortion (children “caused to be born untimely”) and the second half deals with cases of infanticide by exposure (those who “slew their children”). Women committing abortion

19. Cf. D. D. Fiensy, “*Lex Talionis* in the *Apocalypse of Peter*,” *HTR* 76 (1983): 255–58.

20. Matt 5.38. Cf. E. Massaux, *Influence de l’Evangile de saint Matthieu sur la littérature chrétienne avant saint Irénée* (Louvain: Universitaires de Louvain, 1950), 247–58.

21. Cf. D. Sinclair, “The Legal Basis for the Prohibition of Abortion in Jewish Law,” *Israel Law Review* 15 (1980): 109–30; and B. S. Jackson, “The Problem of Ex 21:22–25,” *Vetus Testamentum* 27 (1977): 352–60.

22. A similar incident appears in Herodotus (3.32) and, contemporaneous with *Apoc. Pet.*, in a second-century papyrus describing an altercation between two (probably Jewish) women (*P. Tebt.* 800). Philo (*Spec. leg.* 3.108–19) has the same view as the LXX that a “fully formed” fetus is equivalent to a human being, thus to cause its death is a violation of the commandment “Thou shalt not kill.” Basil is aware of this debate but rejects distinctions between “formed” and “unformed” as casuistry of the worst sort (*ep.* 188 [PG 32:672]).

have done so “for fornication’s sake.” In aborting their children, they have “corrupted the work of God who created them.” Punishment for this first group takes two forms: torment in a deep pit of excrement and flashes of lightning from the children striking them in the eyes. The argument is an inductive one:

Case:	Many women commit fornication.
Result 1:	[Many of these women conceive illegitimate children.]
Result 2:	[“For fornication’s sake”] they “cause their destruction [through abortion].”
Result 3:	They are “tormented with great pain.”
Unexpressed Rule:	[Abortion is an evil which will be punished in hell.]

Apoc. Pet. regards fornication as a punishable offense, but the author has dealt with this sin previously. Here, it is not the fornication that is the issue but rather one of its consequences.²³ Though many women committed fornication, presumably not all of them conceived. Of those who did conceive, not all of them aborted the fetus. The legal provisions associated with illegitimacy and the relative lack of stigma attached to it in Roman society are sufficient to establish that many women carried such children to term; but to recognize that adultery was common, as the various accommodations for illegitimate children suggest, is not to say that it was deemed acceptable.²⁴ It was generally condemned (however hypocritically) and was punishable under a number of laws, especially after the time of Augustus. Though unevenly enforced, the *lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis* prescribed exile and the confiscation of property for women convicted of adultery, and fathers and husbands were sometimes permitted to kill a man caught in the act with a daughter or a wife.²⁵

23. Clement of Alexandria (*Ped.* 2.10 [PG 8:512–13]) cites the concealment of adultery as a motive for abortion, as do Tacitus (*Ann.* 14.63.1) and Plutarch (*Lacaenarum apophthegmata* 26 [Mor. 242c]), who also mentions women who abort “for the sake of the enjoyment of conceiving again” (*De tuenda sanitate* 22 [Mor. 134f]). Juvenal (6.366–68) mentions women who consort with eunuchs so that abortifacient drugs will not be necessary. On the Jewish side, see *Sib. Or.* 2.279–82; 3.764–66.

24. For the details of Roman law, see Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Family* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 124–25.

25. Paulus (*Sent.* 2.26.1–17) lists the various scenarios and the corresponding provisions under Roman law contemporaneous with *Apoc. Pet.*

Clearly, then, there were compelling reasons that a woman might “for fornication’s sake” abort a child conceived out of wedlock. For the author of *Apoc. Pet.*, what may have been so according to Roman law was true *a fortiori* in the Christian hell: harsh consequences follow from certain sinful actions.

How the punishment demonstrates the *lex talionis* is not immediately clear. The sentiment that abortion and infanticide should be punished according to the *lex talionis* finds expression in Ovid, who states that whoever first thought of abortion should die by her own weapons.²⁶ Buchholz suggests that the “flow” described in *Apoc. Pet.* 8 can include any bodily discharge, such as menstrual fluid, and here includes the aborted fetus and related substances.²⁷ Unwanted children were frequently abandoned at a local dung hill (κοπρία) or trash heap; consequently foundlings rescued from such straits were referred to as κοπριαίρετοι.²⁸ Soaking in various types of baths was also recommended for women wishing to miscarry, hence the possibility that being buried under such a flow would be seen as poetic justice of a sort.²⁹ The attested custom of drowning newborn infants would likewise fit with such a punishment.³⁰ In light of such practices one can see how burial under “all manner of torment, foulness, and excrement” might fit the crime, but the flashes of lightning that strike the parents in the eye remain unexplained according to the *lex talionis*. A possible explanation is related to the surgical instruments used in performing abortions. It was sometimes necessary to extract a fetus from the womb by using a metal hook that was inserted into its ear or eye socket.³¹

26. Cf. Ovid, *Am.* 2.14.35–40.

27. Buchholz, *Your Eyes Will Be Opened*, 316–17. Soranus (*Gyn.* 1.59) provides a graphic description of such discharges. The Akhmim fragment translates using the terms ἰχὼρ and δυσωδία. The former usually refers to pus or to a bloody discharge (LXX Job 2.8; 7.5; Philo *Spec. leg.* 4.119; Josephus, *Ant.* 2.296; Diogenes Laertius 8.28). The latter emphasizes filth and foul odor (*T. Benj.* 8.3; Philo, *Vita Mos.* 1.100; 2.262).

28. Cf. Emil Eyben, “Family Planning in Greco-Roman Antiquity,” *Ancient Society* 11–12 (1980–1981): 25 n. 72. Their origin was often reflected in the names these children were given, such as Kopreus and its variants (cf. Naphtali Lewis, *Life in Egypt Under Roman Rule* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1983], 54; and Sarah Pomeroy, “Copronyms and the Exposure of Infants in Egypt,” *Studies in Roman Law: In Memory of A. Arthur Schiller*, ed. R. Bagnall and W. Harris [Leiden: Brill, 1986], 147–62).

29. Soranus, *Gyn.* 1.64–65.

30. Philo, *Spec. leg.* 3.114; Livy 27.37.6; Seneca, *De ira* 1.15.2; Tertullian, *Ap.* 9.7.

31. Celsus, *Med.* 7.29. According to Buchholz, the Ethiopic clearly suggests a drill boring a hole in their eyes (*Your Eyes Will Be Opened*, 205, 318).

Alongside this argument based on the *lex talionis* the author makes an argument from nature. God created the children who now “sit alive and cry to God,” and by aborting the children the parents have “corrupted the work” of this God. Corrupting God’s creative work is anathema in this text, as is already apparent from Peter’s initial reaction to the vision of hell in *Apoc. Pet.* 3. When Jesus reveals the eschatological punishments to be meted out, Peter responds with the words Jesus directs at Judas in Matt 26.24 (= Mark 14.21): “It were better for them if they had not been created.” Jesus then rebukes Peter for the questioning of God’s providence and mercy that this remark implies. God “has created them and brought them forth out of not-being,” Jesus says, and in so doing has performed an act of mercy. Anything that reverses this creative act is sinful. The women who have had abortions in *Apoc. Pet.* 8 have done the very thing condemned here by Jesus.³²

The circumlocution for abortion the author employs here—causing “to be born untimely”—emphasizes that it contravenes the ordinary course of nature.³³ The Greek rendering in the Akhmim fragment makes this more explicit than in the Ethiopic: ἄωροι ἐτ[ί]κτοντο.³⁴ That the children sit “alive,” crying to God, suggests that the effects of “corruption” have been reversed. Although it is not explicitly stated, the leap made in the argument is that the evil is in the interruption of a natural process.³⁵ It is

32. Elliott and Buchholz translate the same term in *Apoc. Pet.* 3 respectively as “his image” and “his formation.” Buchholz’s rendering makes for a clearer link between this passage and the first part of *Apoc. Pet.* 8 (“the work of God who created them”; Buchholz: “the work of God which he had formed”) since the noun and the verb come from the same root (Buchholz, *Your Eyes Will Be Opened*, 317).

33. Though their knowledge of physiology was frequently mistaken, ancient Greeks and Romans were conscious of a distinction between abortion and contraception (Soranus, *Gyn.* 1.60–61); because of the imprecision of ancient medicine, however, the two were sometimes confused both in theory and in practice (K. Hopkins, “Contraception in the Roman Empire,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 8 [1965]: 136–42).

34. Other occurrences of the related verb ἐκτιρώσκειν and its cognates, such as ἔκτρομος, also accentuate the element of prematurity. Cf. Aristotle, *Gen. an.* 773b; Diodorus Siculus 3.64.4; 4.2.3; LXX Job 3.16; Eccl 16.3; 1 Cor 15.8 (in a figurative sense).

35. Clement (*Ped.* 2.10.96.1 [PG 8:512–13]) says explicitly that abortion is not “in accordance with nature.” For the same sentiment, see Pliny, *HN* 10.83.172; Philo *Spec. leg.* 3.112; Plutarch, *De amore prolis* 5 (*Mor.* 497d–e). Euripides (*Ion* 958) and Heliodorus (*Aeth.* 2.31.2) cite the reluctance of mothers to expose a child as evidence of its unnaturalness. The argument from nature, however, can work in different directions. Plutarch cites the example of Cretan goats who are clever enough to seek out and consume abortifacient herbs (*De sollertia animalium* 20 [*Mor.* 974d]). A strict vegetarian, Plutarch wants to demonstrate that animals are rational and

intriguing to note that it is the killing³⁶ of the fetus that is punished and not the fornication. Whether or not adultery is contrary to nature in the author's view is not clear; it nevertheless has its own punishment with its own rationale in *Apoc. Pet.* 7.³⁷ Fornication leads to the "destruction" of children, not to the particular punishment described here. The implication is that a woman who fornicates, so long as she does not abort the illegitimate child in her womb, will be spared the torment detailed in *Apoc. Pet.* 8. As Bauckham notes, most of the sinners in hell are guilty of more than one kind of sin, even though individuals in *Apoc. Pet.* are not said to undergo successive or simultaneous punishments.³⁸ Those guilty of abortion, committed "for fornication's sake," are technically liable to the hanging punishment in 7, but the discourse is not an *ad hominem* argument against certain women guilty of both offenses. This would be to read the account too literally. Rather, the point is a behavioral one. The exhortative result of the argument is, "Don't have an abortion, even if it is

therefore worthy of the same respect as humans. Because animals are like humans, eating meat is akin to cannibalism and thus unnatural. The ability of some animals to procure abortions is evidence that they are in one respect closer to corrupted humanity than to pure nature.

36. For abortion as "killing" a fetus or a child, see *Did.* 2.2 where the author writes, "Thou shalt not kill by abortion" (οὐ φονεύσεις τέκνον ἐν φθορᾷ). Abortion is only one method of murder. Many early Christians had this view, though it was not shared by all of their pagan neighbors. Cf. Tertullian, *Ap.* 9.6–8; Athenagoras, *Leg.* 35. On the semantics of language describing exposure, see M. Golden, "Demography and the Exposure of Girls at Athens," *Phoenix* 35 (1981): 330–31; and Boswell, *Kindness of Strangers*, 24–26. Cynthia B. Patterson discusses the conditions influencing which term is used in the ancient sources ("'Not Worth the Rearing': The Causes of Infant Exposure in Ancient Greece," *TAPA* 115 [1985]: 103–7). Cognates of ἐκτίθημι, ἀποτίθημι, and ἐκβάλλω are typically used for newborn infants, while more explicit terms like παιδοκτονέω and παιδοφόνος are usually reserved for the killing of older children.

37. Many of the statements in the passage in Pseudo-Phocylides dealing with sexual matters (175–206) emphasize the evil in deviating from "nature." As does *Apoc. Pet.*, Pseudo-Phocylides links abortion with sexual irregularities (cf. 184–85).

38. Bauckham, *Fate of the Dead*, 211–12. In a letter to Eustochium warning of threats to her purity in Rome, Jerome says that girls who become pregnant sometimes apply abortifacient potions which on occasion end up causing their own deaths as well (*ep.* 22.13 [PL 22:401–2]). These, he says, go to judgment guilty of three crimes—fornication, murder of a child, and suicide. John Chrysostom likewise preaches against married men fornicating with prostitutes who then encourage them to have abortions. They "do not allow a harlot to remain only a harlot but make her into a murderess also" ("nam meretricem non meretricem solum manere sinis, sed etiam homicidam facis"; *Hom.* 24 in *ep. ad Rom.* [PG 60:626]). Thus were Christians able to distinguish between separate but related sins.

motivated by the desire to conceal adultery.”³⁹ Later church discipline affirmed this notion.⁴⁰

In the second half of *Apoc. Pet.* 8, fathers as well as mothers are implicated in the sin of infanticide. “Because of their parents,” children who have died as the result of exposure cry out to God from “a place of delight.” Exposure was a common method of *ex post facto* birth control in the Greco-Roman world.⁴¹ Complicity between husband and wife in exposing infants is seen in an Egyptian papyrus from 1 B.C.E. where a man instructs his wife to expose her offspring if it is a female.⁴² *Patria potestas*, since the time of the Twelve Tables, allowed a father to expose female and deformed infants without incurring any penalty.⁴³ In *Apoc. Pet.*, both husband and wife are involved in the decision and consequently share in the same punishment.

Verbal markers clarify the logic of the scene. The children cry to God “because of their parents.” Beasts formed from mothers’ milk devour the parents’ flesh “because they forsook the commandments of God and slew their children.” Their torment continues eternally, “for God wills it so.” The act that appears to constitute the forsaking of God’s commandments is the parents’ slaying of their children. In the brief speech attributed to the children, the nature of the parents’ sin is elaborated:

These are they who despised and cursed and transgressed your commandments and delivered us to death: they have cursed the angel that formed us and have hanged us up and begrudged us the light which you have given to all creatures.

39. However hypocritical it may seem, Ovid shared this view. He had multiple mistresses and conceived children with them, yet he reproached them for having abortions (*Am.* 2.13).

40. The Council of Elvira in 305 called for the excommunication of women committing abortion after adultery and declared that they were not to be readmitted even on their deathbeds. The Council of Ancyra in 314, however, reduced to ten years the imposed period of penance for procuring an abortion. Cf. John T. Noonan, Jr., “An Almost Absolute Value in History,” *The Morality of Abortion: Legal and Historical Perspectives*, ed. J. T. Noonan, Jr. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 14.

41. Cameron, “Exposure of Children and Greek Ethics,” 105–14; H. Bennett, “The Exposure of Infants in Ancient Rome,” *CJ* 18 (1922–23): 341–51. According to Tacitus, Jews and Germans were atypical in not practicing exposure (*Germ.* 19.5; *Hist.* 5.5). From the perspective of a (later) Christian, this view is confirmed in *Diogn.* 5.6.

42. *P. Oxy.* 744. Contrast the parents of Moses (in Philo, *Vita Mos* 1.10) who “expose” (ἐκτιθέασι) him and later reproach themselves as “childkillers” (τεκνοκτόνους).

43. Bennett, “Exposure of Infants in Ancient Rome,” 342.

It makes the most sense to see each of these actions as different aspects of the same deed, namely, slaying the children, instead of as discrete actions performed in succession (e.g., first despising, second cursing, and so forth). These acts, reported by the children, lead to the torment one sees depicted, since the acts are essentially equated with the killing that is explicitly said to be the reason for the parents' punishment. All of the active verbs predicated of the parents (except for "standing") describe the behavior that is said to elicit the torment they now experience.

Here again, the *lex talionis* appears to operate in response to perceived subversion of natural processes. Lactation begins after birth for the purpose of nourishing the child—another clue that infanticide and not abortion is the subject here. Soranus, a second-century physician, says that breastfeeding causes the mother to become "more sympathetic towards the offspring, and it is more natural to be fed from the mother after parturition just as before parturition."⁴⁴ In this view, infanticide is not conducive to or consistent with the producing of sympathy towards one's child. Aulus Gellius offers a stinging rebuke of women who hire wet nurses:

For what kind of unnatural, imperfect and half-motherhood is it to bear a child and at once send it away from her? to have nourished in her womb with her own blood something which she could not see, and not to feed with her own milk what she sees, now alive, now human, now calling for a mother's care? Or do you too perhaps think . . . that nature gave women nipples as a kind of beauty-spot, not for the purpose of nourishing their children, but as an adornment of the breast?⁴⁵

Just as women, together with their husbands, pervert nature by destroying the offspring for which their bodies produce milk, animals are formed from this "wasted" milk, contrary to the normal course of nature, to become instruments of their destruction. Furthermore, children left exposed in secluded locations must have been vulnerable to wild, hungry animals. *Pseudo-Phocylides*, 184–85, assumes this to be the case: "Do not let a woman destroy the unborn babe in her belly, nor after its birth

44. *Gyn.* 1.19. Cf. also Isa 49.15 and Lam 4.3, where breastfeeding one's children is a "natural" virtue even among beasts.

45. Aulus Gellius 12.1.6–7 (cf. also [Plutarch], *De liberis educandis* 5 [Mor. 3c–d]). He goes on to liken their attitude to that of women who have abortions (12.1.8). On the other hand, one could argue that, due to the natural contraceptive effect of lactation, women wanting to conceive again soon after childbirth should employ a wet nurse (Keith R. Bradley, "Wet-Nursing at Rome: A Study in Social Relations," *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives*, ed. B. Rawson [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986], 212).

throw it before the dogs and the vultures as a prey.”⁴⁶ For subjecting their children to this fate, parents in *Apoc. Pet.* 8 are rewarded in kind. The good luck of Romulus and Remus, who were exposed but suckled by a she-wolf until they were found by Faustulus and his wife, was the exception and not the rule.⁴⁷

If the deeds of the parents lead to torment, and if these same deeds cause the children to cry out, one might draw the inductive (though not logically necessary) conclusion that their cries lead to their parents’ torment. Confirmation would appear to come through the progression of the passage. The torment of the parents begins immediately after their accusation; thus one could make the following inductive argument:

Case:	“Because of their parents” [i.e., their despising, cursing, slaying, etc.], children stand and cry out.
Result:	The parents receive eternal torment.
Unexpressed Rule:	[God hears their cries and responds by willing their parents’ torment.]

This conclusion fits with the logic of *Apoc. Pet.*, though it would be overstating the case to say that the cries of the children are coextensive with the will of God. God’s will is not coextensive with their cries since the children could conceivably cry for other things not in accordance with God’s will, and God could will things quite apart from their cries. Although pleas for punishment are not actually recorded, the content of their speech functions to articulate and intensify the grounds for God’s willing of their parents’ punishment.

INTERTEXTURE

Apoc. Pet. 8 features little oral-scribal intertexture. The only other “texts” mentioned are the cries of the aborted children, the cursing of God’s commandments and of the angel by the parents, and the commandments themselves. None of these texts are recited verbatim. The nonspecificity

46. Cf. also Herodotus 1.110; Euripides, *Ion* 951; Ovid, *Her.* 11; Seneca, *Controv.* 10.4.21; Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 3.115; Pausanias 1.46; *Apoc. Paul* 40 (probably dependent upon *Apoc. Pet.*); Tertullian, *Apol* 9.7; Lactantius, *Div. inst.* 6.20.21 (PL 6:708).

47. Livy 1.3.10ff.; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. Rom.* 1.76.1ff.; Plutarch, *Rom.* 3ff. The motif of an animal suckling an exposed child usually involves a deity. Donald B. Redford (“The Literary Motif of the Exposed Child,” *Numen* 14 [1967]: 211–14, 225) cites examples of children being nursed by birds, leopards, cows, horses, dogs, deer, and bears.

of most of the passage also means that there is little cultural intertexture.⁴⁸ God, God's commandments, and the angel Temlakos are the only specific elements of cultural knowledge presupposed. By using "God" in the singular, as a proper name, the author (through the figure of Jesus) distinguishes this God from those in the polytheistic pantheon outside the Judeo-Christian symbolic world. This God creates, hears petitions, makes commandments, and executes judgment. In this context, the "commandments of God" are probably those prohibiting murder, with the implication that infants are persons and that killing an infant violates the covenant instituted in the Decalogue.⁴⁹ The children are to be delivered to an angel, Temlakos. Since *Apoc. Pet.* predates all the other apocalyptic texts in which this angel appears, no specific textual allusion can be identified. Clement of Alexandria and Methodius of Olympus spell the name *τημελοῦχος* (instead of *τεμελοῦχος*) when alluding to this passage.⁵⁰ This suggests its derivation from the verb *τημελέω*, "to protect, to look after," which makes good sense in this context.⁵¹ For this connection to be recognized, some familiarity with this angel or the linguistic ability to catch the word play (connoting a caretaking role) must be assumed on the part of the implied reader.

Social intertexture consists of the kinds of knowledge held in common by all people of a particular time and place through general interaction; it is opposed to cultural knowledge, which must be taught.⁵² Practiced but less attested in earlier times, abortion and infanticide are fairly common by the imperial period, and it is not until late in the fourth century that Roman laws equate abortion and infanticide with homicide.⁵³ Plato and Aristotle consider overpopulation to be a threat to the equilibrium of the

48. On cultural intertexture, see Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 58–62.

49. *1 En.* 99.1–5 also includes abortion and infanticide among those sins that "pervert the eternal law" and receive a harsh judgment.

50. Clement of Alexandria, *Eclog.* 48; Methodius, *Symp.* 2.6.

51. Bauckham, *Fate of the Dead*, 224. Isis was also seen as the protectress of children (Ovid, *Met.* 9.773ff.). Contrast the fallen angel Kasadya who, according to *1 En.* 69.12, introduced abortion to humans.

52. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 62.

53. Texts by non-Christian writers (thus less likely to contain polemical exaggerations) reflecting the degree to which these practices were taken for granted include Plautus, *Truc.* 179; Polybius 36.17; Ovid, *Am.* 2.14; Juvenal 2.6; Suetonius, *Calig.* 5; and Seneca, *Helv.* 16.3–4. Sarah B. Pomeroy discusses evidence from inscriptions for the prevalence of infanticide ("Infanticide in Hellenistic Greece," *Images of Women in Antiquity*, ed. A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983], 209–16). For a broad survey, see Enzo Nardi, *Procurato aborto nel mondo greco romano* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1971).

ideal state and see abortion as one remedy.⁵⁴ It is difficult to imagine, however, some such sense of civic duty as the primary motivation for aborting one's own child, especially in Rome, where underpopulation was seen as chronic problem.⁵⁵ Policy recommendations made by demographers rarely play a pivotal role in sensitive family decisions like those involved in having children, unless some form of coercion is brought to bear. A more likely factor than general population control in the decision to abort or to expose a child was the population of one's own household. Safety was also a factor to consider. Pregnancy was not as safe in the ancient world as it is in most places today, but neither were abortions.⁵⁶ It is not certain whether disposing of an unwanted child by exposing it would have been safer for the mother than aborting it, since the former entailed all the risks involved in carrying the child to term. Furthermore, since infanticide, at least according to Seneca (*De ira* 1.15), was a more blatant crime against nature, involving as it did the disposal of a living child, many opted for abortion in order to avoid a guilty conscience. Abortion, according to many sources, also would have been preferred by those wishing to conceal adultery or to preserve one's physical beauty.⁵⁷ Those for whom economic factors were primary—more children meant more mouths to feed—may have opted for exposure, though this would have been truer for families in urban areas than for farm families in need

54. Plato, *Rep.* 461c; Aristotle, *Pol.* 1335b (G. van N. Viljoen, "Plato and Aristotle on the Exposure of Infants at Athens," *Acta Classica* 2 [1959]: 58–69). Tertullian, however, was able to hold simultaneously a deep-seated moral opposition to abortion and a belief that the world was overpopulated (*De anim.* 30.4 [PL 2:743]; also Jerome, *Helv.* 21 [PL 23:215]).

55. Polybius (36.17.5–10) fears underpopulation. From the Augustan period onward, legislation was passed with the intent of encouraging childbirth since birthrates had decreased significantly (Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture* [London: Duckworth, 1987], 126–47). In early imperial Rome, therefore, abortion and good citizenship would have been in some ways incompatible (P. A. Brunt, *Italian Manpower, 255 B.C.–A.D. 14* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1971], 558–66). Cicero (*Clu.* 32) says that a woman having an abortion "cheated a father of his hopes, his name of continuity, his family of support, his house of an heir, and the republic of a citizen-to-be." See also Pliny (*ep.* 4.15) for a similar patriotic sentiment. Tacitus remarks that the legal measures taken by Augustus did not achieve the desired result of increased birth rates (*Ann.* 3.25). Some Stoics brought together arguments based on the order of nature with exhortations to good citizenship in urging married couples to bear children. See Antipater of Tarsus (*Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* 3:254–57); and Hierocles, *On Marriage* (in A. J. Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation: A Greco-Roman Sourcebook* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986], 100–104).

56. Ovid, *Am.* 2.14–15; Plutarch, *Lyc.* 3.3.

57. Juvenal 6.592–601; Seneca, *Helv.* 16.3; Soranus, *Gyn.* 1.60.

of cheap labor.⁵⁸ Longer term financial considerations included the reluctance to divide inheritances among too many offspring.⁵⁹ Musonius Rufus, however, argues that fear of economic privation is a poor excuse for exposing one's child.⁶⁰ Impregnation as a result of rape or incest as a motive for abortion leaves barely a trace in the ancient literary sources.⁶¹ A happy ending to a story of a young woman's seduction and her child's exposure, however, is a popular plot device in Athenian New Comedy.⁶²

Due in part to such economic considerations, female infants, whose future marriage would usually require a dowry, were more likely to suffer infanticide than were males.⁶³ But social, medical, and economic considerations were not the only, or even necessarily the most important, reasons for infanticide. For some, childbirth under a bad astrological sign or accompanied by a bad omen was reason enough to abandon a child.⁶⁴ Children born with deformities, especially those that might make them

58. On financial considerations as a motive for abortion or infanticide, see Menander, *Pk.* 811–12; Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe* 4.35.

59. Soranus, *Gyn.* 1.19; Suetonius, *Dom.* 22; Ambrose, *Hex.* 5.18.58.

60. Cf. Fragment 15, where Musonius Rufus' language is strikingly similar to Matt 6.25 (Cora E. Lutz, *Musonius Rufus, "The Roman Socrates"* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947], 97). Lactantius would later write that those with such worries should simply abstain from sexual relations (*Div. inst.* 6.20.25 [PL 6:709]).

61. When the subject of incest does appear, it usually relates to the fear of unintentional incestuous relationships between a parent and an abandoned child that survives, as occurs in the famous example of Oedipus (Boswell, *Kindness of Strangers*, 107–9, 157–60).

62. Patterson, "Not Worth the Rearing," 115.

63. Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe* 4.35; Ovid, *Met.* 9.669–681; Apuleius, *Met.* 10.23.3. This would not apply to abortions since folk methods and many of the more "scientific" methods (e.g., Aristotle *Gen. an.* 775a; *Hist. an.* 583b) for determining the sex of an unborn child are notoriously unreliable. Based on a statistical argument, D. Engels has argued that a high rate of female infanticide is demographically impossible ("The Problem of Female Infanticide in the Greco-Roman World," *CP* 75 [1980]: 112–20). Engels' arguments have been questioned by M. Golden ("Demography and the Exposure of Girls at Athens," 316–31), W. V. Harris ("The Theoretical Possibility of Extensive Infanticide in the Greco-Roman World," *CQ* 32 [1982]: 114–16), and Patterson ("Not Worth the Rearing," 107–8). That the number of female infants exposed did not constitute a high percentage of the total infant population does not mean that females could not have constituted a high percentage the total number of infants that were in fact exposed.

64. Ptolemy, *Tetr.* 3.9; Seneca, *Controv.* 10.4.16. On the basis of dreams interpreted by Median court magi to mean that his grandchild would usurp his throne, Astyages ordered his steward to expose his daughter's son (Herodotus 1.107–13). The grandson—Cyrus—survived because the steward did not carry out the king's order.

unproductive later in life, were also more likely to be exposed.⁶⁵ That the poor, the weak, and the sick might be deserving of care simply by virtue of their humanity and their status as God's creation was not a widely held view in classical antiquity.⁶⁶ Such social realities would lead the implied reader of *Apoc. Pet.* 8 to envision a group composed of a high percentage of female and deformed infants crying out to God for mercy and justice, a scene made even eerier by the fact that the cries of infants are not normally articulate.⁶⁷ As the weakest of the weak, abandoned by their parents, they are entrusted to the caretaking angel Temlakos.

SOCIAL-CULTURAL TEXTURE

The potential of a text to encourage its readers to adopt certain social and cultural locations and orientations in preference to others is what defines its social and cultural texture.⁶⁸ Bryan R. Wilson elaborates a typology of religious sects, organizing specific social topics into seven different kinds of religious responses to the world.⁶⁹ The seven responses he describes are the conversionist, revolutionist, introversionist, gnostic-manipulationist, thaumaturgical, reformist, and utopian responses.

Conversionist responses tend to view the corruption of the outside world as an epiphenomenon of the corruption of individuals. The world will change if only individuals will change. Conversionist discourse often

65. Plato, *Rep.* 461c; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. Rom.* 2.15.2; Seneca, *Controv.* 10.4.16; Livy 27.37; Soranus, *Gyn.* 2.9–10. Plutarch mentions a ravine in Sparta called Apothetae because it was a common place for parents to expose unwanted children (*Lyc.* 16.1). Cf. P. Roussel, "L'exposition des enfants à Sparte," *REA* 45 (1943): 5–17; and, more generally, Eyben, "Family Planning in Graeco-Roman Antiquity," 12–19. Again, this applies more to exposure than to abortion since amniocentesis and other prenatal methods for detecting birth defects were not available.

66. J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 187. Seneca (*ep.* 66.26–27), however, says that parents should love their weak children as much as their healthy ones.

67. Contrast Menander's account of a foundling who grows up and asks his biological father the reason he exposed him (*Pk.* 773–78, 801). On legal issues related to parents and foundlings, see Eyben, "Family Planning in Greco-Roman Antiquity," 19–32; and Boswell, *Kindness of Strangers*, 54–75.

68. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 72; idem, *Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse*, 147–50.

69. B. R. Wilson, "A Typology of Sects in a Dynamic and Comparative Perspective," *Archives de Sociologie de Religion* 16 (1963): 49–63; and idem, "A Typology of Sects," in *Sociology of Religion*, ed. R. Robertson (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969), 361–83.

carries a moralizing tone because deterministic explanations that attribute behavior to environmental factors are rejected and personal responsibility for one's actions is stressed. A revolutionist response, by contrast, explains the state of the world and of individuals in deterministic terms. It maintains an eschatological orientation that looks to the impending overturn of the present order of things from the outside. Members of the religious group may participate, but the initiative and ultimate responsibility for changing the world rest with God. Insofar as they both emphasize personal holiness, the introversionist response is similar to the conversionist. The former lacks the evangelical zeal of the latter, however, and shows little interest in actively changing the world through changing individuals in the world outside. Gnostic-manipulationist responses maintain a positive orientation towards the general goals of the world, but they typically advocate distinctive, highly spiritualized means to broad ends shared with others outside the group. Claims to special knowledge go along with the special techniques prescribed to attain salvation. The thaumaturgical response seeks to procure compensation in the here and now for personal injury or loss by means of miraculous intervention, rather than seeking to attain broader cultural goals. Special dispensations whereby normal cause-effect relationships are suspended for the benefit of specific individuals are seen as a privilege of group membership. The reformist response is related to the revolutionist response in that both tend to see the corruptness of the world as a function of corrupt social structures that sanction behaviors at odds with salvation. Instead of concentrating upon bringing others inside, reformist groups go out into the world to be the "leaven in the lump," so that altered structures will make altered patterns of behavior a real possibility. Finally, the utopian response seeks to reconstruct the social order in such a way that the potential for evil is radically diminished. There is a decided emphasis on human initiative in this project and less expectation of some divine intervention; thus utopian groups maintain a vigorous yet occasionally adversarial engagement with the world.

The heuristic value of Wilson's taxonomy is that it prevents reliance upon theological or doctrinal categories that may lead to a confusion of the descriptive and evaluative tasks in the study of the early church.⁷⁰ Christianity in the second century was a diverse movement and one must be careful not to take a text like *Apoc. Pet.* as necessarily representative of the whole. Moreover, a major challenge facing the church in the

70. Wilson, "Typology of Sects," 363-64.

second century had to do with its basic orientation to “the world.” How were Christians to be “in the world” but not “of the world,” especially with respect to matters of family and sexuality so closely related to abortion and infanticide?⁷¹ Answers to this question were not lacking. Much of the third book of Clement’s *Stromata*, for example, consists of his responses to gnostic, Valentinian, and Marcionite attacks upon traditional marriage, sexuality, and childbearing, attacks that were based on novel interpretations of various passages from the NT. According to Irenaeus, Basilides and Saturninus claimed that worldly customs like marriage and childbearing were “of the devil” (*Haer.* 1.24 [PG 7:675–78]). More generally, the existence of groups such as the Encratites and the Montanists, in addition to the sometimes conflicting strategies of cultural engagement among the apologists, shows that the kinds of local culture fostered by Christian teaching cannot be taken for granted. Because Wilson’s classification takes as its central criterion a group’s response to the world, it is especially helpful in examining a text from this second-century matrix.

Aspects of a number of different religious responses can be seen in *Apoc. Pet.*, while others are ruled out by the kinds of behaviors that are depicted and encouraged. The utopian response does not apply since there is no insistence upon people themselves remaking the world according to divinely given principles. There is no call for constructive attempts to establish a new social order that will eliminate evil. Neither does one see a thaumaturgical response in effect. Relief from present ills through miraculous or otherwise special dispensations is not given. The vision is a revelation rather of what “shall come upon the sinners in the last days” (*Apoc. Pet.* 3–4). Exposed and aborted infants are indeed “delivered” through divine intervention, but only after they have died. There is no call for complete withdrawal from an irredeemably evil world, and so the introversionist response does not apply. To be sure, Christians stood apart from most of Greco-Roman society in their vehement moral opposition to abortion and infanticide, but at least a few prominent pagans shared their antipathy, such as Hippocrates, Cicero, Seneca, and Musonius Rufus. Moreover, while opposition to abortion set them apart from the dominant culture, Christians were not on that account prevented from regular participation in this culture.

71. Reflecting upon the concrete impact on life in the Roman Empire made by Christianity, Ramsay MacMullen argues that Christian teaching and practice made a most emphatic difference when it came to sex (“What Difference Did Christianity Make?” *Historia* 35 [1986]: 342–43).

Elements of a reformist response can be detected insofar as certain social structures behind the text may have been such that multiple offspring, especially females and the deformed, were undesirable and thus more likely to be aborted or exposed. Fear of poverty caused by the overextending of family resources points to an economic system that may have encouraged parents to take the measures condemned in *Apoc. Pet.* 8. But it is one thing to state that a “corrupt” economic system empirically fosters sinful behavior, however true this may or may not be, and quite another to project this view onto the text. That is to say, there is no indication at all in *Apoc. Pet.* 8 that, in the author’s mind, corrupt social or economic structures “cause” abortion and infanticide, or that the reform of these structures is all that is needed for salvation and wholeness to be present in the world.⁷² Gnostic-manipulationist argumentation relies upon special knowledge, and as an ἀποκάλυψις, *Apoc. Pet.* contains elements of this in its response to the world. But the author does not proclaim a more spiritualized version of cultural goals, and the only real “revelation” is in the details of the punishments in the underworld. In fact, the murderers whose fate is described just prior to *Apoc. Pet.* 8 say, “[W]e heard, but we believed not, that we should come into this place of eternal judgment.”⁷³ The revolutionist response is present only insofar as the eschatological act of dispensing justice will take place after “the whole creation dissolves” (*Apoc. Pet.* 5). The evil at issue in *Apoc. Pet.* 8 is not easily eradicated by the efforts of the faithful. They can be God’s agents in overturning the world only in a negative sense, by not practicing abortion or infanticide themselves.

Perhaps the conversionist response described by Wilson best fits the rhetoric in *Apoc. Pet.* 8. The corruption of “the world” is the result of specific corrupt human actions, not vice versa. The sin of the men and women is not attributed to misguided social systems, as in the reformist response. Their personal responsibility is accentuated by the deliberateness, as described in *Apoc. Pet.* 8, with which they carry out abortions and infanticides. They are not “in sin” in some abstract, existentialist sense; rather, they “have fallen away from faith in God and have committed sin” (5). That the various sinners and their sins are described in such a

72. The same is true from a legal standpoint. *Apoc. Pet.* 8 does not seem to suggest that permissive laws regarding abortion and infanticide are the necessary or sufficient cause of these sins.

73. The fornicators in *Apoc. Pet.* 7 claim not to have known that they would come to everlasting punishment, but they are also said to plait their hair “to turn them to fornication, that they might ensnare the souls of men to perdition.”

highly individualized manner further emphasizes their personal responsibility. It is not the view of *Apoc. Pet.* that life “in the world” inevitably results in the taint of sin in general, or in women having abortions in particular. Many are righteous and thereby escape damnation (cf. 6, 14), the threat of which one may see as a strategy to counter the attenuation of commitment over time to the group’s core values, a common occurrence among protest groups.⁷⁴ This stress on individual responsibility accounts for the moralizing tone in this passage. In *Apoc. Pet.* 13, the damned repent and acknowledge the righteousness of the judgment God has passed on them. Through the intercession of the righteous in 14, they are then admitted to paradise.⁷⁵ That “repentance”—a rendering of the same Greek term often translated “conversion”—is the means by which sinners may escape hell further supports the conclusion that the primary religious response in *Apoc. Pet.* 8 is conversionist.

Aspects of various common social and cultural topics also appear in *Apoc. Pet.* 8.⁷⁶ In the system of honor and shame present in the ancient Mediterranean, honor was a claim to worth, whether ascribed or acquired, along with the social acknowledgement of worth. According to Aelius Theon, a first-century rhetorician, the question of whether a fetus was a person and, consequently, whether abortion was a punishable offense, had been treated by Lysias centuries earlier.⁷⁷ Non-Jewish and non-Christian sources are divided on the personhood (at the risk of using an anachronistic concept) of the fetus, and even those who recognized fetuses and newborn babies as human persons sometimes permitted abortion and infanticide. Thus, there was no uniform pagan position on their “worth.” “Victims” of abortion and infanticide were by implication lacking in relative worth and therefore in honor as well. According to *Apoc. Pet.* 8, aborted children who are the result of fornication are deemed without worth by the parents. The element of shame appears in the actions of the parents, who have “despised” and “begrudged” their children “light” which God gives “to all creatures.” Slaying their children is therefore a denial of the honor God has ascribed to them. By reversing the

74. Wilson, “Typology of Sects,” 372.

75. The Ethiopic is unclear here, but the Rainer fragment of the original Greek text confirms this reading (M. R. James, “The Rainer Fragment of the Apocalypse of Peter,” *JTS* 32 [1931]: 271).

76. Cf. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 76–86.

77. F. Dölger, “Das Lebensrecht des ungeborenen Kindes und die Fruchtabtreibung in der Bewertung der heidnischen und christlichen Antike,” *Antike und Christentum* 4 (1934): 12–13. Cf. Seneca, *Controv.* 9.3; 10.4; Quintilian 7.1.14.

status of parent and child, *Apoc. Pet.* assumes a stance firmly on the side of the worth of the child both before and after birth. The children stand “in a place of delight” instead of in a pit or subject to devouring beasts. Over against the valuation of worth placed upon them by their parents, the aborted and exposed children are heard by God and receive a response to their cries. God’s response affirms the honor of the children. They sit or stand “opposite” the parents. If they are to be described as “dyadic” personalities, that is, individuals who derive their self-image from the perceptions and expectations of others, it is God and not the parents that defines them.⁷⁸

What would be the effect should God hear but choose not to respond? In the terms of the patron-client system, it would constitute either non-recognition or breach of contract.⁷⁹ As it stands, God responds positively to their challenge, consisting of an acknowledgement of their dependence upon God, though it is not specified how the children are to reciprocate. The more clients one has, the greater one’s status. When a potential client initiates a relationship, it is the patron who exercises the real power, but when patrons compete for clients, it is typically out of necessity; thus the clients hold some power in the relationship. Here, the former is the case. No prior service can have been rendered by the children to God. God’s status increases in the dispensing of justice as a response to the children’s cries. Finally, both parental groups in *Apoc. Pet.* 8 have engaged in activities that result in increased levels of impurity. Bastard children and foundlings rank very low on the scale of purity.⁸⁰ Even had those in the first group in *Apoc. Pet.* 8 not had abortions, their offspring would still be illegitimate. Likewise, even if someone had rescued the exposed children of the second group, the children’s subsequent status could also be lower.⁸¹

The net effect of the tendencies in *Apoc. Pet.* 8 is a predominantly countercultural rhetoric.⁸² Given the increasingly gentile composition of the church at this time, such a stance over against the dominant culture can by no means be automatically assumed. Among the characteristics distinguishing a counterculture from contracultures, subcultures, and domi-

78. Malina, *New Testament World*, 51–60.

79. On the patron-client system in general, see Richard P. Saller, *Personal Patronage Under the Early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, ed., *Patronage in Ancient Society* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

80. For classifications of purity, see Malina, *New Testament World*, 122–52.

81. This would especially be the case when poor people took in exposed children (Golden, “Demography and the Exposure of Girls at Athens,” 326 n. 34).

82. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 86–89.

nant cultures, Keith A. Roberts includes provision in its membership for both sexes and a wide range of age groups and a constructive interest in creating a more humane society.⁸³ Such groups eschew violent means of attaining their ends and place little confidence in legislative reforms for bringing about desired changes. Hopefulness for the voluntary reform of the world is the dominant tone in countercultural rhetoric. This hope finds expression immediately after the descriptions of hell, in the commissioning of Peter, when the risen Jesus tells Peter, “[M]y words shall be the source of hope and of life” (*Apoc. Pet.* 14).

Dominant cultural rhetoric is not in effect, since abortion and infanticide seem to have been widely accepted in Greco-Roman society. Christians, moreover, did not possess the institutional resources by which to impose their *ethos* upon their pagan neighbors or, for that matter, upon other Christians who did not share their views. Neither does *Apoc. Pet.* 8 display contracultural rhetoric, which functions only to encourage a short-lived counterdependent cultural deviance that offers no constructive plan of action and hence few, if any, rationales for the *ethos* it seeks to enact.⁸⁴ Contained in its invective against those guilty of abortion and infanticide is a positive vision of the good, founded upon concerns transcending generational boundaries and upon at least some values shared with the opposing (dominant) culture. If the arguments put forth in *Apoc. Pet.* 8 based on the order of nature obtain, one may discern some elements of subcultural rhetoric. Most notably among the Stoics, the ethical principle of “living in accordance with nature” was widely acknowledged by non-Christians.⁸⁵ The thrust of *Apoc. Pet.* 8 could be that the implied audience enacts the same nature *ethos* acknowledged by pagans, only more conscientiously. In its insistence that all children be included, even girls, those aborted to conceal adulterous liaisons, and deformed infants exposed because they are unproductive, *Apoc. Pet.* offers a different vision of the good from that of the dominant culture. Not all of the members of this implied counterculture are present in the narrative world of *Apoc. Pet.* 8. Presumably, parents who refrain from these practices would constitute

83. K. A. Roberts, “Toward a Generic Concept of Counter-Culture,” *Sociological Focus* 11 (1978): 111–26; Robbins, *Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse*, 169–70.

84. Roberts, “Toward a Generic Concept of Counter-Culture,” 121–24.

85. Philo as well saw nature to be in accordance with Jewish law (*Op. mun.* 3.8 ff.) and his position on abortion is in agreement with *Apoc. Pet.* 8 (cf. *Spec. leg.* 3.108–17). Most recently, see Hindy Najman, “The Law of Nature and the Authority of Mosaic Law,” *The Studia Philonica Annual* 11 (1998): 55–73. On the specific application of this to principle to families, see A. C. van Geytenbeek, *Musonius Rufus and Greek Diatribe* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1962), 78–88.

the visible core of such a community, along with the children of those punished here.⁸⁶ Those considered “insiders” from the perspective of this text do not, in the real world of the author “behind the text,” derive tangible benefit from this rhetoric. The explicit “insiders,” that is, the aborted and exposed children, are by definition not present in the real world because they are dead. Perhaps those who refrain from practicing abortion or infanticide do so in order to be reinforced in their community ethic by this discourse. This is one possible benefit to be derived by aligning oneself with the ideology at work here, but it leaves unexplained why someone would preach a countercultural opposition to abortion and infanticide in the first place. Lacking the means by which to force conformity with its vision of the good society, *Apoc. Pet.* must be content with the hope of voluntary repentance and reform on the part of the dominant culture. It does not call for the wholesale rejection of the dominant culture, only the actualization of that culture’s noblest (from *Apoc. Pet.*’s perspective) ideals and, failing that, the judgment of “every one according to his transgressions.” Absent these crimes, the dominant culture has the potential to be absorbed into the counterculture of God’s righteous ones (*Apoc. Pet.* 13–14).

CONCLUSION

One might carry out this kind of analysis for any of the hell scenes in *Apoc. Pet.* Not every scene will necessarily participate in the same pattern of conversionist-countercultural rhetoric as does *Apoc. Pet.* 8 in depicting the fate of those guilty of abortion and infanticide. “Those who have denied righteousness” in 7 and those whose lies have caused the death of martyrs in 9, for example, are described in such short compass that it may not be possible to specify the types of rhetoric in terms of the models employed here. Other passages are substantive enough to be amenable to sociorhetorical analysis. Upon analysis of these passages it will perhaps be possible to determine whether *Apoc. Pet.* is *in toto* a conversionist or a countercultural document. The thrust of *Apoc. Pet.* 8 has as one of its rhetorical effects the discouragement of certain kinds of behavior that are putatively within the power of the readers to control. As the earliest

86. The in-group implied in *Apoc. Pet.* cannot be identified with the church as a whole without remainder. Hippolytus (*Haer.* 9.7) describes Christians—heretics, in his view—who practice abortion. The existence of provisions in the church’s penitential discipline relating to abortion means that some Christians had them performed.

extant Christian description of hell, then, this may mean that modern arguments that hell was a Christian invention intended to “scare” people into the church are not totally without point. But at the conclusion, God, in response to the pleadings of the righteous, has mercy on the sinners. In some later Ethiopic traditions into which *Apoc. Pet.* is incorporated, this happy ending is revealed to Peter, but God forbids him to report the contents of the revelation of the future to the sinners “lest they transgress the more and sin.”⁸⁷ *Apoc. Pet.* envisions holiness as embodied behaviorally in this world and divine justice as dispensed in the next. If wisdom discourse is concerned with the good on the basis of the order and beauty of God’s creation, then *Apoc. Pet.* 8, with its implicit emphasis upon the evilness of abortion and infanticide as a function of their violation of nature, is not so different from wisdom.⁸⁸ *Apoc. Pet.* does not see creation as the source of evil, as in many gnostic variations on apocalyptic such as the gnostic *Apocalypse of Peter*. Nor does it see evil as inevitably punished in this world. In *Apoc. Pet.*, it is not at all clear that “whoever sows injustice will reap calamity” in this lifetime as the author of Proverbs (22.8) asserts. Precisely the opposite would in fact appear to be the case. In this respect, *Apoc. Pet.* embodies the type of theodicy Peter Berger describes, in which “the afterlife becomes the locale of nomization.”⁸⁹ Justice comes to full fruition only in the afterlife, where there will occur a reversal of present suffering and evils. By drawing the boundaries in this fashion, *Apoc. Pet.* transfers justice to the next world, where the effects of holiness in this world are registered.

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87. Cf. M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924), 505, 520.

88. On wisdom literature and creation theology, see R. E. Murphy, “Wisdom and Creation,” *JBL* 104 (1985): 3–11.

89. *The Sacred Canopy* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 70. Inasmuch as it emphasizes the importance of the present world because of its materiality, the gnostic theodicy Berger describes is at odds with *Apoc. Pet.* (71–72).