

## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL TEXTURE

Every meaning has a context

A third arena is social and cultural texture. This arena differs from the arena of intertexture by its use of anthropological and sociological theory to explore the social and cultural nature of the voices in the text under investigation. Study of a particular sector of early Christianity with sociological theory appeared in Wayne A. Meeks's study of 'The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism' (1972). Meeks analyzed both 'the special patterns of language' in the Gospel of John and the special logic of the myth of the descending and ascending redeemer (p. 44), integrating a close, rhetorical reading of the text with anthropological and sociological insights into the formation and maintenance of sectarian communities. His interpretation demonstrates the profound relationship in Johannine discourse between the redeemer who belongs to the 'world of the Father' yet comes into the 'world which does not know or comprehend' him, and those who are 'in the world' yet are drawn to the redeemer by 'believing' in him. In the end, the reader sees that the redeemer's foreignness to the world is directly related to the sect's perception of itself as foreign to the world - 'in it but not of it'. In Meeks's words:

The Fourth Gospel not only describes, in etiological fashion, the birth of that community; it also provides reinforcement of the community's isolation. The language patterns we have been describing have the effect, for the insider who accepts them, of demolishing the logic of the world, particularly the

world of Judaism, and progressively emphasizing the sectarian consciousness. If one 'believes' what is said in this book, he is quite literally taken out of the ordinary world of social reality.  
(1972: 71)

This article was a superb initial step toward analysis of the social and cultural texture of a text in a mode that is attentive to the inner texture of the text. It contains a limitation that certainly cannot be criticized for 1972, but which needs to be transcended today, namely the place where it stops its analysis and interpretation. The article does not use sociological theory that would give further insight into the nature of the counterculture under discussion. Meeks discusses the historical existence of a community of Johannine believers without expanding the reader's sociological understanding of the discourse. These people, in his view, set themselves apart from the Jewish people in their setting and the world in which they lived. There are different ways in which people set themselves apart from others, and sociologists and anthropologists have given us language to describe different ways in which people do this. Meeks did not take the next step of using these resources. Though Meeks has, in a number of articles, pursued the social and cultural dimensions of various kinds of discourse in a mode similar to the initial article on the Johannine Man from heaven (1977, 1983, 1985, 1991), a historical rather than sociological orientation has remained prominent in Meeks's books. As Meeks has moved to an interest in the moral world of early Christianity (1986b, 1986c, 1987, 1988, 1990a, 1990b, 1993), he has maintained a historical focus rather than carrying out a socio-rhetorical project that programmatically explores the social and cultural nature of various kinds of early Christian discourse (but see Meeks 1985).

The year after the appearance of Meeks's article on Johannine sectarianism, Jonathan Z. Smith presented a paper on 'The Social Description of Early Christianity' that called for the incorporation of highly developed anthropological theory in analysis and interpretation of early Christian data (1975; cf. Meeks 1975). In his article, Smith referred to an 'almost total lack of persuasive models' (p. 19), a seduction 'into a description of a *Sitz im Leben* that lacks a concrete (i.e., non-theological) seat' and offers only the most abstract understanding of 'life' (p. 19), the writing of social histories of early Christianity 'in a theoretical vacuum in which outdated "laws" are appealed to and applied . . . which no longer represent a consensus

outside the New Testament or church history fields' (p. 19), and 'unquestioned apologetic presuppositions and naive theories' (p. 20). He suggested, however, that there were many resources available to move ahead, including a few 'major syntheses, lacking only the infusion of new theoretical perspectives' (p. 20). Calling for 'careful attention to the inner history of the various religious traditions and cults' (p. 20) and analysis and interpretation that are 'both richly comparative and quite consciously situated within contemporary anthropological and sociological theory' (p. 21), he pointed to Meeks's article on the Johannine Man from heaven as a 'happy combination of exegetical and sociological sophistication' (p. 21). Smith's critical agenda introduces theoretical practices that move interpretation beyond the boundaries of a poetics that limits textual discourse to its 'inner' world toward a comprehensive, critical method for constructing a new picture of the social and religious nature of early Christianity. New Testament interpreters have been gradually adopting the critical insights of cultural anthropology in his four books since that time (J. Z. Smith 1978, 1982, 1987, 1990), but much needs yet to be learned from these profound analyses of early Christianity.

The same year as the appearance of Smith's initial paper (1975), John G. Gager's *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* introduced models from twentieth-century sociology and anthropology for the study of early Christianity (1975). Gager's analysis was part of the same intellectual world as Smith's; but this was a distant world from the work of many other interpreters at the time. Many interpreters knew that these intellectual worlds should come together, but they also knew that the road would be steep and rocky. Gager broached the issue with a well-placed quotation from Peter Brown:

The need to link disciplines is frequently expressed among us. Discussion of this need takes place in an atmosphere, however, that suggests the observation of an African chieftain on a neighboring tribe: 'They are our enemies. We marry them'.

(P. Brown 1970: 17; quoted in Gager 1975: xii; cf. Gager 1982)

Gager himself used social anthropological studies of millennialist cargo cults in Melanesia, social-psychological studies of cognitive dissonance and a merger of cultural-anthropological and history-of-religions interpretations of myth to approach 'The End of Time and the Rise of Community' in first-century Christianity (Gager

1975: 19–65). Then he discussed the transition from charisma to canon and orthodoxy (pp. 66–92), the social class or status of early Christians (pp. 93–113) and a perspective on the success of Christianity (pp. 114–58) as major challenges for interpreters of early Christianity. Rich with sociological and anthropological insight as well as information about the first four centuries of early Christianity, this book established an agenda for a new paradigm of investigation and interpretation. While a number of its agendas have been pursued in one way or another, the task of incorporating its insights programmatically into exegesis of New Testament texts still lies in the future. Socio-rhetorical criticism sets forth a programmatic set of strategies to pursue, test, enrich and revise the provisional conclusions Gager advances in his book.

### SPECIFIC SOCIAL TOPICS IN RELIGIOUS LITERATURE

While Meeks used the term 'counterculture' to describe Johannine sectarianism and Gager used studies of millennialist cargo cults to inform his analysis, neither used a comprehensive sociological theory about religious communities in their analysis and interpretation. James A. Wilde, in contrast, investigated the social response to the world in the discourse of the Gospel of Mark with the aid of Bryan Wilson's seven types of religious sects (Wilde 1974, 1978). An adaptation of Wilson's sociological definitions to socio-rhetorical descriptions of different types of religious discourse produces the following seven major responses to the world.

*Conversionist* argumentation considers the outside world to be corrupted because humans are corrupted. If people can be changed then the world will be changed. It takes no interest in programs of social reform or in the political solution of social problems and may even be actively hostile to them. The judgment on humans and events tends to be moralizing, because it is grounded in a belief that humans are entirely responsible for their actions. This argumentation encourages revivalism and public preaching at mass meetings rather than door-to-door activity. It encourages emotional, but not ecstatic, experiences.

*Revolutionist* argumentation maintains an eschatological position that nurtures a desire to be rid of the present social order when the time is ripe – if necessary, by force and violence. It awaits a new

order under God's direction when the people who use this argumentation will become the holders of power as the friends and representatives of God. This argumentation is hostile at one and the same time to social reform and to instantaneous conversion. It tends to explain the world in determinist terms, just as it tends to consider the fate of individuals to be pre-determined. The argumentation occupies itself in prophetic exegesis, in comparisons of inspired texts and in the relation between predictions and contemporary events. Since conversionist argumentation considers change to be an occasional and gradual occurrence, it nurtures discourse that familiarizes newcomers with a complex spectrum of beliefs and moves them toward an acceptance of their truth. Revolutionist argumentation, in contrast, speaks in a matter-of-fact, unemotional manner, simply asking a newcomer to believe that this is the way things are. God is viewed as a divine autocrat. There is little feeling of direct relationship with the divinity. The members are considered to be God's instruments, waiting for the decreed moment, agents of God's work and will.

*Introversionist* argumentation encourages people neither to convert the population nor to expect the world's overturn, but simply to retire from the world to enjoy the security granted by personal holiness. The argumentation is indifferent to social reform, to individual conversion and to social revolution. It may consider some particular inspirational experiences to be significant for the entire group, or it may consider them to be purely individual revelations that might help the growth of personal piety. This argumentation is concerned more with deepening than with widening spiritual experience. It holds a certain disdain for those 'without holiness' and does not encourage the believers to introduce others to their holiness. It nurtures meetings that are 'assemblies of the saved' (gathered remnant). It views the community as supporting the individual and does not encourage people to act in mission in the outside world. The argumentation exhorts the faithful to be a law unto themselves and to live apart from the world.

*Gnostic manipulationist* argumentation insists especially on particular and distinctive knowledge. By and large, it accepts the outside world and its goals. It proclaims a more spiritualized and ethereal version of the cultural ends of global society, but it does not reject them. Gnostic manipulationist argumentation tries instead to change the methods appropriate for attaining these ends. It sometimes claims that the only way of achieving its spiritualized goals is

to use the special knowledge taught by the movement. This is the only true and worthwhile way of acquiring health, wealth, happiness and social prestige. Although reinterpreting 'worldly' activities, it offers special techniques and verbal modes of assurance that justify the pursuit and attainment of cultural goals. This argumentation offers means for learning the systems but does not provoke conversions since the important thing is for people to acquire spiritual attitudes rather than to offer specific activities or relationships. Anyone may accept the gnosis and use it for his or her own personal ends since its efficacy is not dependent on any relationship or on any mystical process.

*Thaumaturgic* argumentation insists that it is possible for people to experience the extraordinary effect of the supernatural on their lives. It encourages the seeking of personal messages from spirits, obtaining cures, effecting transformations and performing miracles. It defines believers in relation to the wider society by affirming that normal reality and causation can be suspended for the benefit of special and personal dispensations. This argumentation resists acceptance of the physical process of aging and death and encourages people to come together to affirm a special exception from everyday realities which assures individuals and their loved ones of perpetual wellbeing in the next world. For the present, the believers procure immediate advantages by accomplishing miracles. This argumentation does not claim a special knowledge, but calls upon spirits and other powers to perform oracles and miracles. The ends it seeks can be defined in terms of compensation for personal losses rather than the specific quest for cultural goals.

*Reformist* argumentation insists that social, political and economic institutions can serve good, rather than oppressive, ends. By encouraging a very strong sense of identity and study of the world, it attempts to encourage people to involve themselves in the world with good deeds. This argumentation nurtures a role of social conscience and acceptance of a place in the world without becoming part of the world or being made impure by it. In other words, it encourages active association with the world without becoming part of it.

*Utopian* argumentation asserts that people should inaugurate a new social system free from evil and corruption to run the world. This system will change the relation of everything and everyone in the world. This argumentation encourages partly withdrawing from the world and partly wishing to remake it into a better place. It is

more radical than reformist argumentation, because it argues that the whole system should be changed. It is potentially less violent than revolutionary argumentation, because it argues that authoritarianism is one of the major evils in the world. It is more constructive on a social level than conversionist argumentation, because it argues that the system is the source of evil, rather than people, whose nature is more naturally good than evil. Utopian argumentation encourages the construction of the world on a communitarian basis. While it regularly encourages the establishment of colonies, it does so as part of a program for the reorganization of the world along community lines.

It would be rare for discourse in a text as long as a Gospel or an Epistle to contain only one kind of social response to the world. Rather, two or three modes of response interact, creating a particular social texture for the discourse. For Wilde, revolutionist discourse dominates the text of Mark, and the social texture of this argumentation is 'objectivist'. This means that the discourse focuses primarily on the world as an object to be dealt with. Among the seven types of discourse, four are objectivist:

- (a) revolutionist, which says God will overturn the world;
- (b) introversionist, which says God calls us to abandon the world;
- (c) reformist, which says God calls us to change present social institutions so they function toward good ends;
- (d) utopian, which says God calls us to replace the present social system with a new social organization from which evil is absent (Wilde 1978: 50; Robbins 1994b, 1994d).

Wilde concludes that the objectivist aspect of Markan discourse is revolutionist. People themselves will never be able to change the world sufficiently enough to bring salvation. Therefore, the discourse does not use either reformist or utopian argumentation. The discourse also does not encourage people simply to abandon the world. Rather, people are to engage in various kinds of activity until God intervenes and overturns the world.

What does this mean that people should be doing until God intervenes? For Markan discourse, according to Wilde, two other kinds of social response are embedded in revolutionist discourse: conversionism and thaumaturgic response. Conversionism is a subjectivist aspect of discourse (1978: 50-1), and Wilde concludes that

'[d]eath makes sense in Mark only as a result of conversionism and only for the sake of revolutionism' (p. 64). Markan discourse challenges people to modify their predispositions, attitudes and beliefs toward a willingness to engage in 'a ministry of preaching, being delivered up, and death' (p. 64). A thaumaturgic response is a 'relationist' aspect of discourse (p. 50), according to Wilde, and it supports both the conversionism and the revolutionism by 'reflect[ing] or elicit[ing] a mountain-moving faith in God which has its reward both in a present and future age' (p. 66).

First of all, I want to emphasize the usefulness of this kind of approach for analyzing and interpreting the social and cultural texture of the discourse of a text. In rhetorical terms, this kind of analysis focuses on the 'special' or 'material' topics in the discourse (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.2.21-2; Kennedy 1991: 45-7 (esp. n. 71), 50-2). This means that the analysis works directly with the content of statements in the text. When the voice of Jesus in Mark 13.24-5 says, 'But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken', this is a 'revolutionist' premise. Jesus, the major actor in the narrative discourse, asserts in these verses that there will be a future time when God will intervene in the present order of the world and completely change things. Likewise, Wilde's discussion of 'conversionist' discourse is based on verses like Jesus' assertion that one must 'repent and believe in the gospel' (Mark 1.15). In turn, Markan discourse voices a 'thaumaturgic' response to the world in such verses as Jesus' statement in Mark 11.23: 'Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, "Be taken up and cast into the sea", and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what is said will come to pass, it will be done for that person'. The specific content of the discourse, then, asserts a social response to the world that is an underlying premise or 'first principle' of this kind of discourse (Kennedy 1991: 46).

Second, I want to challenge Wilde's analysis of Markan discourse at one point. My analyses suggest that Markan discourse is more 'gnostic manipulationist' in its orientation than conversionist (Robbins 1994d: 74-81). According to Wilde, conversionists are subjectivists who say, 'God will change us', while gnostic manipulationists are relationists who say, 'God calls us to change perception' (Wilde 1978: 50). I understand 'repent and believe in the gospel' (Mark 1.15) to be a call from divine authority to change perception.

Moreover, I consider the emphasis on listening, seeing, taking heed, accepting and understanding what is hidden, secret and mysterious to be more gnostic manipulationist in orientation than conversionist (Robbins 1994d: 75). Burton Mack's discovery that the language in the parables in Mark 4 has a close cultural relation to the system of *paideia* in Hellenistic-Roman culture is an important contribution to this insight (Mack and Robbins 1989: 143-60; Robbins 1994d: 76-9). A primary orientation of Markan discourse is to call people to change their perception of themselves and the world rather than to presuppose that God changes people so they see and think differently. Both conversionist and gnostic manipulationist dimensions are present in the discourse, but my conclusion is that gnostic manipulationist presuppositions dominate over conversionist presuppositions in Markan discourse.

In as much as I have engaged in dialogue with Wilde's analysis at this point, it may also be good to return to Meeks's analysis for a moment. If revolutionism, thaumaturgy and gnostic manipulationism are prominent in Mark, what types of social response are prominent in Johannine discourse? First, it would appear that there are strong thaumaturgic presuppositions underlying Johannine discourse. There is a 'relationist' dimension (Wilde 1978: 50) in common, then, with Markan discourse. Both accounts of the life of Jesus emphasize the extraordinary effect of the supernatural on individual people. The healing of the blind man in John 9 and the raising of Lazarus in John 11 point dramatically to the presence of thaumaturgic social response to the world in Johannine discourse.

Second, Johannine discourse does not move into strong revolutionist assertions like Markan discourse. Johannine discourse moves, instead, into assertions of separation from the world. This points to strong introversionist impulses in Johannine discourse. The emphasis is more upon God's call to abandon the world than it is upon an assertion that God will overturn the world (revolutionist), that God calls us to change present social institutions (reformist) or that God calls us to replace the entire social system in the world (utopian), though there may be a strain of this last one. Johannine believers are to gather in a community of those 'born of heaven' and deepen their spiritual experience in this context.

Third, it will come as no surprise to most interpreters that Johannine discourse contains gnostic manipulationist premises. Throughout the Fourth Gospel there is an emphasis on knowledge sent from heaven that comes into the world as light that shines in

darkness. 'All who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God' (John 1.12). The only way to receive this knowledge is through the Messiah Jesus, since 'No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known (John 1.18).

The remarkable thing about Johannine discourse is the manner in which it embeds conversionist premises in its gnostic manipulationist orientation. Throughout the narrative, there is a strong emphasis on God's changing of people. On the one hand, this occurs through the work of the Spirit Paraclete: 'The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of Spirit' (John 3.8). On the other hand, it occurs through the work of Jesus on earth: 'Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life' (John 4.14). In the Fourth Gospel a number of people are changed by Jesus to people who live with God's powers of life and truth in them: the Samaritan woman (4.7-30); many Samaritans (4.39-42); Nicodemus (7.50-2); a blind man (9.1-41); Thomas (20.24-9). The emphasis on change, then, is prominent. In fact, God's powers appear to effect much more profound and widespread change in people in the Fourth Gospel than in the Gospel of Mark. In Mark, the only people who experience profound change experience it through direct physical healing: the leper (1.45); the Gerasene demoniac (5.20); and blind Bartimaeus (10.52). This means that change is limited to thaumaturgic contexts. In Mark, people who do not experience physical healing do not undergo change that transforms them into believers who begin to receive the full benefits of God's powers in their lives. In the Fourth Gospel, in contrast, profound change occurs in people not only through the thaumaturgic powers of God but also through persuasive word of God. God changes people through powerful word as well as powerful thaumaturgic deed. This means that Johannine discourse is more prominently conversionist than Markan discourse. In Mark, people are either on the inside or the outside, and even those on the inside may discover in the end that they are without understanding and thus without the working powers of God in their lives.

Using a sociologically grounded typology of religious responses to the world, then, can exhibit the inner workings of the multiple discourses in the New Testament with more clarity and detail than

interpreters have seen thus far. Fortunately, others have also been engaged in this kind of work, but often these analyses still need to be taken into a programmatic socio-rhetorical form of analysis and interpretation.

John H. Elliott used Wilson's typology in the context of 'sociological exegesis' of 1 Peter at the beginning of the 1980s (1981). For Elliott, the discourse of 1 Peter evokes a dominantly 'conversionist' response to the world (pp. 75–8, 102–6). Elliott embeds his insights in a comprehensive approach to exegesis he called 'sociological exegesis' in 1981 and now calls 'social-scientific criticism' (1990a). His approach has an important relation to the four-texture approach of socio-rhetorical criticism. Elliott began with analysis of a repetitive pattern in the inner texture of 1 Peter. The term *oikos [tou theou]* (household [of God]) occurs throughout 1 Peter in correlation with *paroikos* (resident alien), *paroikia* (alien residence or residence as aliens) and *parepidēmos* (visiting stranger). It is 'their recurrence at key points in the structure of the document', the pattern of repetition, that attracted Elliott's attention (p. 23). Elliott did not use rhetorical resources to analyze the discourse in the letter, however. He presented a 'periphrastic outline' toward the end of the book that 'attempts to reflect the literary structure and composition of the text as closely as possible while also explicating its integrating theme and emphases' (pp. 234–6). Thus, he gave significant attention to the inner texture of 1 Peter on which interpreters can now build with the aid of rhetorical resources.

Next, Elliott turned to oral-scribal intertexture on the basis of the Septuagint, apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, Philo, Josephus, New Testament, rabbinic literature and Greco-Roman literature (pp. 24–37). Again, Elliott did not seek rhetorical patterns that accompany the language. Therefore, he did not engage in a fully socio-rhetorical analysis of social and cultural intertexture. Nevertheless, his quoting of Ecclesiastes and Psalms of Solomon, and his gleaning of linguistic evidence in the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Roman Law* (Berger 1953) gave considerable attention to the intertexture of the language in the repetitive pattern he identified in the discourse (Elliott 1981: 24–37).

Elliott contributed dimensions to interpretation that were decisively new when he turned to his analysis of the social and cultural texture of 1 Peter. In the process of developing a social profile of the addressees, he employed the sectarian typology of Bryan Wilson and proposed that the discourse reveals a 'conversionist

response to the world' (pp. 75–8). To fill in the picture, Elliott explored the discourse for reference to geographical location; ethnic composition; legal, economic and social status; religious allegiance and the social form such religious affiliation assumes; and the nature and historical circumstances of the conflict in which they are involved. This analysis, guided by sociological theory, focused on specific social topics in the discourse and exhibited a new way for interpreters to proceed. In essence, Elliott approximated the activity of a sociologist taking a survey throughout the discourse of 1 Peter, and with this approach Elliott was showing interpreters a new mode of analysis and interpretation. With the next step, Elliott moved beyond specific social topics and focused on a widespread social institution in the Mediterranean world, namely the 'household' (pp. 165–266). From a rhetorical perspective, this is a move beyond specific social topics to a common social and cultural phenomenon in the discourse. This kind of exploration has become the trademark of social-scientific criticism and makes an excellent contribution to one's understanding of the manner in which early Christian discourse often employs and reconfigures common social and cultural perceptions in the political, economic and social arenas of the Mediterranean world.

In the final chapter, Elliott turned to the ideological texture of 1 Peter. He discusses 'group interests' in the discourse and explains how analysis of ideology moves beyond theological analysis and interpretation. Then he turns to 'self-interests' that appear to point specifically to a social location in Rome. Last, he analyses cultural conflict in the form of Christian and non-Christian ideologies (pp. 267–88). With this move, Elliott took his analysis through the four textures that provide the comprehensive framework for socio-rhetorical criticism. Also, Elliott's interest in the ideology of the text reveals that his investigation is at least implicitly rhetorical from beginning to end. Elliott's concern lies with the specific nature of the discourse in 1 Peter, thus it returns regularly to the text as it proceeds. Since Elliott did not use rhetorical resources, the investigation is not a full-fledged socio-rhetorical analysis. Nevertheless, the abiding interest in exegesis throughout the book pointed the way toward a truly interdisciplinary paradigm of interpretation. The special contribution of the book to socio-rhetorical criticism is threefold. First, it introduced social theory into a context of detailed exegesis. Second, it explicitly discussed ideology within New Testament texts, something that historical-critical interpreters have

been, and in many instances still are, unwilling to do. Third, it moved programmatically through the four arenas of texture that are the most prominent in the new, interdisciplinary paradigm that has been emerging in biblical studies during the last two decades.

For this section of this chapter, the special interest is Elliott's use of Wilson's typology to analyze 1 Peter. Locating 1 Peter in Asia Minor, Elliott perceives the problems facing the Christians there to be a double one: 'Not only were they suffering at the hands of outsiders; this suffering posed a threat to their internal cohesion as well' (1981: 83). The conversionist nature of the discourse in 1 Peter sets negative and positive aspects of Christian life in tension with one another:

On the one hand, 1 Peter presents the relation between the believers and nonbelievers as one of alienation and hostility. The former are being demeaned and abused by the latter as inferior 'strangers' and 'aliens' (1.1, 17; 2.11), fanatical zealots (3.13), and ridiculous 'Christ-lackeys' (4.14, 16)...

On the other hand, this same document speaks in positive, optimistic terms concerning the eventual conversion of these outsiders (2.12; 3.1-2), supports a neutral, if not favorable, view of civil government (2.13-17), and utilizes the secularly popular model of the household to discuss the roles and relationships of distinctive Christian behavior (2.18-3.7; 5.1-5a).

(Elliott 1981: 108)

Elliott's analysis and interpretation function in the context of a comprehensive sociological theory about the development of religious sects and the strategies of different kinds of sects. This kind of analysis also looks carefully at the specific, material topics of the discourse and uncovers the particular social response which the discourse evokes. The reader is left to wonder, however, if the discourse of 1 Peter limits itself to conversionist premises. Does it put a few revolutionist premises at the service of its conversionist discourse (2.12; 4.5, 4.7, 4.17)? Does it use conversionist premises toward utopian goals articulated in terms of blessed people living generously with one another and with leaders of human institutions (2.4-25; 3.1-12; 5.1-5)? By pressing questions like this, the interpreter can begin a program of analysis and interpretation throughout New Testament discourse that can display the configurations of social responses to the world that exist in New Testament discourse

and those that do not. If we begin to see configurations that are conventional outside New Testament discourse but not inside it, we may begin to get a clearer view of the distinctive nature of Christian discourse in Mediterranean culture and society.

Robert Jewett's rhetorical and social analysis of 1 Thessalonians made an additional contribution to a socio-rhetorical mode of analysis and interpretation (1986). From the perspective of Wilson's terminology, Jewett analyzed the happenstances in relation to revolutionist discourse during a period of time that spans the writing of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. For Jewett, some of the people in Thessalonica misunderstood the revolutionist discourse in 1 Thessalonians in such a manner that they became convinced that the Day of the Lord had already come. Jewett's analysis, however, does not use Wilson's typology, and it does not move fully into a socio-rhetorical mode as it moves toward its goals. Rather, Jewett uses rhetorical criticism in the context of socio-historical criticism. His goal is to exhibit the historical and social intertexture of the discourse. In other words, his social analysis finally devotes most of its attention to the social actions of a group of people in Thessalonica during a particular span of historical time. For this reason, Jewett does not analyze the relation of revolutionist discourse in the letters to conversionist, reformist, gnostic manipulationist, introversionist, utopian and thaumaturgic discourse in the letters. As a result, rhetorical analysis becomes a subdiscipline of historical criticism rather than an interdiscipline with a goal of exploring the ongoing social and cultural aspects of religious discourse during the first century.

Philip Esler's study of the social and political motivations of Lukan theology also used Wilson's typology, and Esler concluded that the thaumaturgic and conversionist types of response are especially relevant for Luke-Acts (1987: 59). He characterizes the thaumaturgic response in Lukan discourse, however, as 'anti-thaumaturgic', pointing to the superiority of the gospel over the thaumaturgic activities of Simon Magus (Acts 8.9-13, 8.18-24); Elymas, the Jewish sorcerer in Paphos (Acts 13.6-12), and the books of magic at Ephesus (19.19) (1987: 59; cf. Garrett 1989). The conversionist response, in turn, is evident in

its author's preoccupation with individual penance and acceptance of the Gospel in baptism, which enable the believer to enter a zone of Spirit-filled experience during the period

before the final consummation to be inaugurated by the returning Son of Man.

(Esler 1987: 59)

After showing that Lukan discourse does not engage in a revolutionist response (1987: 59–65), Esler does not continue to use Wilson's insights into religious sects. I have included a socio-rhetorical response to Esler's work in a recent study of Mary, Elizabeth and the Magnificat in Luke 1.26–56 (1994b). My conclusion is that Lukan discourse features an inner relation between thaumaturgy and conversionism that emphasizes reformist activity: for example, a significant change in the systems of distribution throughout the Roman empire. More recently, Esler has applied this kind of analysis to 4 Ezra and other texts (1994a, 1994b). We can look forward to refinements in this kind of social analysis in future studies.

Although John Kloppenborg has not, in the studies available to me, applied Wilson's typology to any text, his work has moved steadily toward socio-rhetorical analysis and interpretation of the social and cultural texture of texts. His article on Q and the Q people (1991) best exhibits the manner in which the overall movement of his work has been toward programmatic socio-rhetorical exegesis. First, he performs extensive analysis of the inner texture of texts and maintains a textual location as he explores other arenas and draws conclusions. The section on 'Form, Content and Rhetoric' in his study of the social history of the Q people vividly illustrates the careful attention he gives to repetitive–progressive, opening–middle–closing, narrational and argumentative texture in texts (1991: 81–5; cf. 1990c). He observes not only instructional rhetoric (1991: 81–5); but he analyzes abbreviated and elaborated chreiai that characterize Jesus as a founder of a movement (1991: 91–4). He enriches insight into the sayings through comprehensive analysis of oral–scribal intertexture, which he exhibits prominently in his book on Q (1987a). From the analysis of inner texture and oral–scribal intertexture, he moves to historical and social intertexture by investigating material and literary evidence concerning Galilee and the Decapolis (1991: 96–9). Within this context, he moves to social and cultural texture, exploring the countercultural nature of the sayings in the framework of hierarchies and interactions among people in the city and the rural areas of Roman Palestine. He has not attempted to move into programmatic analysis of ideology and theology in material available to me, but other

articles signal the presence of this arena in his work (1986, 1987b, 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1990c, 1990d). John Kloppenborg's work, therefore, has been contributing insights for socio-rhetorical criticism for a number of years.

Analysis of the special or material topics of early Christian discourse using Wilson's typology of religious sects, then, is well underway. Using the resources of rhetorical criticism, we can begin to display and analyze the configuration of premises both explicitly asserted and implicitly presupposed in the multiple kinds of discourse that exist in the New Testament as a result of the process of selection that occurred throughout the first centuries of early Christianity.

### COMMON SOCIAL AND CULTURAL TOPICS

Another dimension of the social and cultural texture of a text concerns the social and cultural systems and institutions that it both presupposes and evokes. In rhetorical terms, this is a matter of analyzing 'common topics' in a text (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.3.7–9; 2.19–24; Kennedy 1991: 45–7, 50–1, 174–213). As the 1980s began, Bruce J. Malina introduced the concept of common social and cultural systems and institutions to New Testament interpretation, using cultural anthropology as his major resource (1981a; 1986a). A *Semeia* volume edited by John H. Elliott gathered together a group of studies inspired by this new work under the rubric of 'social scientific criticism' (1986a). Then a series of studies by Jerome H. Neyrey (see bibliography), a volume on the social world of Luke and Acts (Neyrey 1991), and a volume on social-scientific criticism and the New Testament (Elliott 1993) have appeared, which display the results of a decade and a half of work by Malina, Elliott, Neyrey, Paul W. Hollenbach, Richard L. Rohrbaugh, Carolyn Osiek, Douglas E. Oakman, John J. Pilch, Halvor Moxnes, Philip Esler, Dennis Duling, Mark McVann (see bibliography for works of each author) and others (cf. Barclay 1992, 1995) on common social and cultural systems and institutions in the Mediterranean world like honor and shame, limited good, kinship, hospitality, patron/client/broker, sickness and healing, purity, dyadic personality, conflict, city and countryside, temple and household, and meals and table-fellowship. This work has added a new dimension through its concentrated focus on those social and cultural



phenomena that anthropological and sociological theory perceive to be common to all people in Mediterranean society. By now the work of these interpreters offers rich resources comparable to the overall historical phenomena that had become available to interpreters by the middle of the twentieth century. Most of the people engaged in this analysis consider themselves to be 'adding additional data' to the enterprise of historical criticism. Some in the group are trying to bring this data into contexts of interpretation informed by careful attention to the nature of texts as written discourse (cf. Robbins 1995).

Using the results of social-scientific criticism, Bernard Brandon Scott wrote a book on the parables that embeds analysis of social and cultural systems and institutions in close exegetical work on the texts themselves (1989). The book moves systematically through literary-structural analysis of each parable, explicit and comprehensive intertextual comparison and analysis, social and cultural analysis and at least implicit ideological and theological analysis. The manner in which Scott enacted this interdisciplinary analysis and interpretation virtually fulfills the goals of a socio-rhetorical study without claiming the designation. Scott's interest focuses on 'voice' in the parables, and his goal is to reconstruct 'the implied speaker/author of the corpus of the parables' (p. 65). His analysis features detailed exhibition of both repetitive-progressive and opening-middle-closing texture in the parables. After detailed analysis of inner textual features, he presents a line-by-line reading that identifies, among other things, the manifestation of social and cultural systems and institutions in the discourse of the parables. His analysis reveals three major systems and institutions of Mediterranean social life and culture in their discourse: (a) the institution of the family; (b) the social and cultural system of patron-client relations; and (c) the cultural symbol system of the artifacts of daily life of home and farm.

Scott's analysis of family life in the discourse of the parables suggests that the family is the major institution for organizing social exchange throughout the village, city and beyond (pp. 79-202). The center of the social map in the parables is the family, with the father as the prominent figure. This social map provides basic identity for people, defining their relation to one another in such a manner that it pervades their understanding of social activities in the village, the city and beyond to the ends of the world. In addition, '[t]his social map furnishes a metaphorical system for the kingdom

of God' (p. 79). The kingdom is like a family where one son says he will go out to work and does not and another says he will not work but does (pp. 80-5). Also it is like a man who gives three loaves at midnight to a friend in his village who must offer hospitality to unexpected guests who have just arrived (pp. 86-92). Moreover, it is like two men in the city who went up to the Temple, and the one with social status prayed confidently while the one who was a social outcast asked for mercy (pp. 93-7). Within these parables and others, the social map of family relations that reach out to village, city and beyond functions as a metaphorical system for the kingdom of God. A major feature of their discourse is to reconfigure traditional expectations concerning who is securely an insider and who is certainly an outsider. Each parable in its own way uses the social map to show the unusual, unpredictable and regularly disturbing nature of the kingdom of God.

In another group of parables, the social and cultural system of patron-client relations functions on a vertical axis to organize power exchange in society. The obligations are based on long-term relations, and actions are legitimated by custom more than law. For most matters, in fact, there is no appeal within the legal system. This system for 'allocating resources, exchanging power and wealth, and legitimating the social structure' (p. 205) provides a metaphorical framework for parables that feature master and servants, traveling householders and stewards, creditors and debtors, farm-owners and farmworkers (pp. 205-98). Again, these parables subvert the assumptions of the world. In this world of dependency and inequality, certain masters are generous to the complaint of some, others are hardhearted to the dismay of some, and some respond positively to crafty but illegal action to the surprise of many. Again this is a world where regular values and expectations are in upheaval. Working metaphorically for the kingdom of God, these parables exhibit a range of actions and responses embedded in patron-client relations. The parables intermingle the need to reassess how God works with judgment and mercy with a reassessment of people on earth who have power to judge and to have mercy and people who anticipate judgment or mercy.

In the third group of parables, the artifacts of daily life of home and farm function as the symbols of transcendent cultural values. Seed, an empty jar, leaven, a small coin, a net, a treasure, fig trees and sheep become symbols of the kingdom in ordinary, surprising and sometimes offensive ways. As these artifacts function as

symbols for values associated with the kingdom of God, the hearer of the parable has to decide which risk to take, which value to choose or which failure to accept (pp. 301–417). The basic ingredients of daily life function metaphorically for the basic dynamics of the kingdom. Big celebrations for little things, good results from unclean things or failure, or ordinary results from everyday things, are all present in this metaphorical world of the kingdom.

Exploring the parables in the context of the social and cultural institutions and systems of the first-century Mediterranean world, Scott concludes that their discourse coordinates the everyday, the unclean and miracle. One of the most surprising results is that parables do not invoke the fantasy world of the peasant (p. 421). They feature everyday activities of cheating, anger, loss, envy, disappointment and surprise without assuring the hearer that everything will be all right in the end. Rather, in the end there may be failure, mercy, judgment, praise, dismissal, joy or simply dismay. This study, appearing in 1989, exhibits the promise of embedding close analysis of the inner texture of New Testament texts in investigation of the dynamics of social and cultural institutions and systems that function in them. Scott does not call this a socio-rhetorical study, but the close reading of the parables is rhetorical in nature and the exploration of the social and cultural nature of the discourse is comprehensive. From my perspective, this book exhibits a form of socio-rhetorical analysis.

In 1991, David B. Gowler systematically investigated the function of the social and cultural systems of honor and shame, patron/broker/client, limited good, kinship, hospitality, reciprocity, purity and challenge-riposte in the context of a highly developed approach to the narratorial texture of Luke and Acts. As Gowler applied his socio-narratological approach to the characterization of Pharisees in Luke and Acts, he interpreted extensive portions of Luke 5–7, 11–19 and Acts 5, 15, 23 and 26 (1991: 177–296). His investigation of common Mediterranean social and cultural systems in the context of detailed analysis of the narratorial texture of Luke and Acts contributes to analysis of social and cultural texture in the framework of socio-rhetorical analysis. His analysis of Luke 7.36–50 serves well to illustrate the manner in which it makes this contribution.

First Gowler analyzes the inner texture of the narrative in a narratorial mode. The narrator (7.37) and the Pharisee (7.39) directly define the woman as a sinner, and Jesus implicitly defines her in this

way (7.47). The Pharisee Simon directly defines Jesus as a teacher (7.40), but his inner thoughts deny that he is a prophet (7.39). The narrator directly defines the Pharisee as the host (7.39), but Jesus names the host as Simon (7.40). Direct definition occurs, then, from points of view that alternate among the narrator, the Pharisee and Jesus (p. 219).

In this context, the woman defines herself indirectly through her action: she 'wet Jesus' feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, kissed his feet, and proceeded to anoint them' (p. 220). Then the focus turns from the woman to the Pharisee, bypassing Jesus. But the Pharisee does not speak at this point; the narrator reveals his 'inner thoughts', which raise doubts that Jesus is a prophet or he would know the woman is sinful and would not allow her to touch him (7.39). The dialogue that follows introduces comparison and contrast. As Jesus speaks, the two debtors in the parable function by analogy with the Pharisee and the woman, and this analogy, plus Jesus' additional statements, set the woman and the Pharisee in contrast to one another. The woman, Jesus says, provided a greeting kiss and water and ointment for his feet, and the Pharisee provided none of these. Jesus' favorable response to the woman and the Pharisees' unfavorable response result in status reversal: norms are defamiliarized, Jesus affirms the unfamiliar and:

the triangle of relationships between Jesus, Simon the Pharisee, and the woman forces readers to take sides and to identify with the woman's attitude toward Jesus. . . . Simon – as well as the reader – is forced to consider the fact that there is no qualitative difference between himself and the sinful woman, only a quantitative difference.

(pp. 220–1)

After this exhibition of narratorial texture in the story, Gowler turns to the function of cultural scripts in it. The dialogue between Jesus and Simon is an honor and shame contest. When Jesus responds publicly to Simon's silent challenge, Simon is put on the defensive. Simon's honor decreases as he joins all the other Pharisees who have been bested by Jesus, and Jesus' honor increases. Social meanings associated with different parts of the body highlight implications of honor and shame. The head is a primary symbol of honor; washing someone's feet is a shameful task. Simon did not anoint Jesus' head nor supply water for his feet; the woman did not

dare to anoint Jesus' head, but wiped his feet with the hair of her head, and kissed and anointed his feet. 'The stress upon her humiliation is shown by the seven-fold repetition of the word *feet* in these few verses' (p. 223).

At this point Gowler turns to Mediterranean hospitality and to patron-client relationships to interpret the honor and shame in the story. When a person outside a community is invited to dine or lodge in someone's house, that person changes from a stranger to a guest. Ambivalence is pervasive as the host gives precedence to the stranger over familiar guests. The host gains honor by the quality of his guests; guests in turn are expected to honor the host. Any implication that the host has slighted the guest brings dishonor to the host; any sign of ingratitude on the part of the guest brings dishonor to the guest. In this story, hospitality interacts with patron-client relations. Jesus' acceptance of the role of guest is also an acceptance of the role of a client to a patron. When the woman challenges Jesus' honor in this public setting, however, Jesus accepts her actions as a greater form of hospitality than Simon has offered and adopts the role of broker of God's blessings to her as a client. Jesus' roles as both client-guest and broker of God's blessings create a social fracas that the story does not resolve. The implication is that the Pharisee needs Jesus to function as broker of God's blessings to him also, which, of course, is an insult to the Pharisee's status as a religious leader in the community (pp. 222-6).

Gowler's interpretation investigates the function of common social and cultural systems in the discourse of the story. Thus, it takes a significant step toward socio-rhetorical analysis. The absence of rhetorical theory to analyze the argumentative texture of the story (cf. Mack and Robbins 1989: 85-106), of detailed comparative analysis to interpret the intertexture of the story, and of ideological investigation to analyze the stereotypes and ethnic strategies of the discourse prevent it from delivering a full-fledged socio-rhetorical analysis and interpretation (Robbins 1992a). Nevertheless, Gowler's analysis has contributed to the formulation of programmatic socio-rhetorical exegesis which integrates detailed social and cultural analysis with careful analysis of the inner texture of New Testament texts.

Building on the work of Malherbe and others, Stanley K. Stowers has taken analysis of cultural intertexture into a mode of rhetorical-critical interpretation that provides a 'thick description' of cultural codes and generic conceptions. His essay on 'Friends and Enemies

in the Politics of Heaven' exhibits the procedure well (1991). Stowers, observing extensive language concerning friends and enemies in Paul's letter to the Philippians, explores discussions of the ancient institution of friendship in texts from Aristotle, Plato, early Stoics, Epicureans, Cicero, Plutarch, Dio Chrysostom and Diogenes Laertius. Informed by this data, Stowers analyzes the architecture and strategies of the discourse from the perspective of a letter of friendship. Within the contrastive models of friends versus enemies, the discourse presents Paul as the author of a hortatory or psychagogic letter to a community of friends (p. 108), God as the creator and completer of the Philippian community (p. 117) and Christ as both Lord and friend of Paul and the community (p. 119). Since the cultural codes of friendship concern not only individual personal relations but politics and business (p. 107), the discourse establishes a politics of heaven that informs roles, economics and personal relationships in God's community on earth. The symmetry among 'the relationship of Paul to the Philippians, the relationship the Philippians are to have with one another, and the relationship both have with Christ' (p. 119) creates a culturally encoded symbolic world which nurtures theological convictions that inform wide-ranging sectors of Christian life. Distinctive features emerge with the pervasive use of language from the lower end of the status spectrum of Greco-Roman friendship and patronage, namely servants or slaves (p. 120), and the particular drama of Christ's decision to live as a servant (p. 117). Paul's own imprisonment and adoption of hardship in the tradition of the Cynics contributes the additional *ethos* to make the text an authoritative treatise for Christian life.

Willi Braun brought analysis of social and cultural systems into a full rhetorical mode in his recent study of Luke (1995). The two major systems are honor and shame and the distribution of food and wealth in the context of the city. These social and cultural systems provide the dynamics for the exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees at the great banquet scene in Luke 14.1-24. First, Braun shows that Lukan discourse introduces the topic of greed, love of money and excessive banqueting with the presence at table, across from Jesus, of a man sick with dropsy. The disease of dropsy, being 'watery', which causes people to have unquenchable thirst and insatiable hunger, is a standard Cynic topic for describing wealthy people who waste their life and health with eating and drinking and who, though loaded with money, continually crave more of it. Here Braun has uncovered a primary feature of cultural intertexture in

Lukan discourse that traditional interpretation has missed. Second, with the insight into the meaning effect of a man with dropsy at the banquet table among Pharisees, Braun is able to identify the opening scene in the chapter as a 'mixed chreia', a brief episode that attributes both dramatic action and decisive speech to Jesus in a well-known social situation. Jesus' action and speech make up a sharp social comment in the context of a banquet hosted by a Pharisee, a representative of a group Lukan discourse stereotypes as 'lovers of money' (Luke 16.14), people 'filled with extortion' (Luke 11.39). Third, recognizing the extended discourse attributed to Jesus from 14.8–24 as rhetorical elaboration, the 'working out' (*ergasia*) of a set of topics in a special social situation, Braun presents an intricate analysis of the function of the internal 'units' in the discourse and the social and cultural values and topics in the analogies, examples, judgments and exhortations. Fourth, in the context of this analysis, Braun explores in detail the implications of honor and shame, distribution of wealth (and honor), living by the 'roads and hedges' outside the city-gates and wealthy people conspiring against 'peers' who violate the practices of the 'elite' by failing to honor the rich and put the poor in their place. In particular, Braun benefits from Rohrbaugh's recent study of the Lukan perspective on the ancient city in Luke 14 (1991b), the studies by Moxnes and Gowler on the Pharisees (Moxnes 1988a; Gowler 1989, 1991, 1993) and Scott's extensive study of parables of Jesus (1989). Braun's insights into rhetorical elaboration are deeply informed by the work of Mack and Robbins (1989) on patterns of argumentation in the Gospels. The study features throughout a rich use of traditional resources, both ancient and modern; the work of social-scientific critics associated with the Context Group (Elliott 1993; Malina 1993; Neyrey 1991); and the work of rhetorical critics who have explored the function of the rhetorical chreia and its elaboration in the Gospels (Mack 1990; Robbins 1993a). Braun's investigation contains some of the most mature socio-rhetorical analysis currently available in New Testament studies.

Analysis of common social and cultural topics in New Testament texts, then, is well underway. Beginning in seminal works in 1981 by Elliott and Malina, this kind of analysis and interpretation has reached an advanced stage characterized by rich collaboration with literary and rhetorical interpretations.

## FINAL CULTURAL CATEGORIES

Analysis of cultural alliances and conflicts in New Testament discourse is in its infancy (Robbins 1993c). In contrast to analysis and interpretation of special and common topics, this calls for rhetorical analysis of 'final categories' in texts (*Rhet. ad Alex.* I.1421b, 21–1422b, 12; Lausberg 1990: par. 375; Mack and Robbins 1989: 38, 58). Mack's study of the Gospel of Mark in the late 1980s brought this kind of analysis and interpretation decisively into view (Mack 1988; Robbins 1991b), and his recent study of the earliest sayings material has advanced the project further (Mack 1993). In his studies, Mack investigates discourse in the Gospels as an archeologist investigates different kinds of data in a site. Mack's goal is to uncover 'local' voices embedded in the discourse of the Gospels. The task Mack faces at this point is one of 'cultural intertexture' – namely identifying early cultural voices among the followers of Jesus that attained a significant enough 'identity' that they can still be heard in the new discursive context.

Rather than explain Mack's work on its own terms, I will bring his insights into the context of the socio-theoretical project of analysis and interpretation explained in this volume. Mack builds on the work of earlier scholars who have detected early 'collections' of sayings, miracles, parables and pronouncement stories in Mark, Matthew and Luke. Putting this work alongside the discourse in the letters of Paul, he identifies five kinds of 'local' discourses among followers of Jesus during the first four decades after Jesus' life. Let us analyze them briefly in the context of the practices of socio-rhetorical criticism.

Paul Achtemeier identified earlier collections of miracle stories in Mark 4–8, which he called 'chains' or *catenae* of stories (1970, 1972). Mack observes that the discourse in these stories contains no antagonism or polemic toward other Jews. Rather, these stories perpetuate the discourse of the great traditions of Moses and Elijah in the Bible. God's mighty powers affect the sea, the wilderness and individual people in direct ways to protect, feed and heal them. The new mediator of these marvelous powers is Jesus, rather than Moses and Elijah, so this discourse has been recontextualized in new stories. Also, these powers occur through new stories in new locations, so the discourse is reconfigured. Echoes of God's feeding of the people in the wilderness occur in the miraculous feedings of 5,000 and 4,000 people in Markan discourse, as the people sit down

in groups with numbers related to the division of people into groups during the wilderness wanderings. Also, echoes of Elijah and Elisha's miracles appear as Jesus raises a young girl from death to life (Mack 1988: 215–19, 230–8). In socio-rhetorical terms, this discourse is thaumaturgic. The special concern is individual people's lives, and Jesus is the person through whom the powers of God work to answer their needs and fears.

We can take this analysis a step further in terms of final social and cultural categories if we introduce a typology of cultures I have recently developed (1993c; 1994b: 189–194; 1994d). If we take a brief digression to look at different kinds of basic culture, then we can return to this Markan discourse with yet additional insight.

*Dominant culture* is a system of attitudes, values, dispositions and norms supported by social structures vested with power to impose its goals on people in a significantly broad territorial region. Dominant cultures are either indigenous or conquering cultures.

*Subcultures* imitate the attitudes, values, dispositions and norms of a dominant culture and claim to enact them better than members of dominant status. Subcultures are wholistic entities that affect all of life over a long span of time.

[The term subculture] stand[s] for the cultural patterns of a subsociety which contains both sexes, all ages, and family groups, and which parallels the larger society in that it provides for a network of groups and institutions extending throughout the individual's entire life cycle.

(Roberts 1978: 112, quoting Gordon 1970: 155)

Subcultures differ from one another according to the prominence of one of three characteristics: (a) a network of communication and loyalty; (b) a conceptual system; and (c) ethnic heritage and identity. In a *network subculture*, a chain of communication and loyalty among certain individuals, families and institutions is the most prominent feature. In certain circumstances, it is difficult to decide if a network is simply part of the dominant culture or is a subculture within the dominant structure. In a *conceptual subculture*, a system of basic presuppositions about life, the world and nature is the most prominent feature. An *ethnic subculture* has origins in a language different from the languages in the dominant culture, and it attempts to preserve and perpetuate an 'old system' in a dominant cultural system in which it now exists, either because a significant number of people from this ethnic culture have moved into a new

cultural environment or because a new cultural system is now imposing itself on it.

A *counterculture* arises from a dominant culture and/or subculture and rejects one or more *explicit* and *central* values of the culture from which it arises (Roberts 1978: 114; Yinger 1960, 1982). The term is best reserved for intra-cultural phenomena; 'counterculturalists are cultural *heretics* trying to forge a new future, not *aliens* trying to preserve their old culture (real or imagined)' (Roberts 1978: 121). Countercultures are 'alternative minicultures which make provisions for both sexes and a wide range of age groups, which are capable of influencing people over their entire life span, and which develop appropriate institutions to sustain the group in relative self-sufficiency' (at least twenty-five years) (Roberts 1978: 113). A counterculture is 'interested in creating a better society, but not by legislative reform or by violent opposition to the dominant culture', which are common characteristics of subcultures. The theory of reform is to provide an alternative, and to 'hope that the dominant society will "see the light" and adopt a more "humanistic" way of life'. In other words, 'social reform is not a preoccupation' of a counterculture (Roberts 1978: 121). Its constituents

are quite content to live their lives and let the dominant society go on with their 'madness'. Yet, an underlying theme is the *hope* of voluntary reform by the dominant society in accord with this new model of 'the good life'. Hence, one would expect a fully developed counterculture to have a *constructive* image of a better way of life. In short, the term counterculture might best be reserved for groups which are not just a reaction formation to the dominant society, but which have a supporting ideology that allows them to have a relatively self-sufficient system of action.

(Roberts 1978: 121)

The value conflict of a counterculture with the dominant society 'must be one which is central, uncompromising, and wrenching to the fabric of the culture. The concept of counterculture also implies a differentiation *between* the two cultures which is more distinct than the areas of *overlap*' (Roberts 1978: 121). There is, then, a 'fundamental difference between a counterculture and a subculture'. A subculture 'finds ways of affirming the national culture and the fundamental value orientation of the dominant society'; 'a counter-

culture rejects the norms and values which unite the dominant culture' (Roberts 1978: 112–13).

A *contraculture* is a 'short-lived, counter-dependent cultural deviance' (Roberts 1978: 124). It is 'a groupculture rather than a subculture'. Contracultures are deeply embedded in a dominant culture, subculture or counterculture. Contracultures are 'groups that do not involve more than one generation, which do not elaborate a set of institutions that allow the group to be relatively autonomous and self-sufficient, and which do not sustain an individual over an entire life span' (Roberts 1978: 113). A contraculture is primarily a reaction-formation response to a dominant culture, subculture or counterculture. One can predict the behavior and values in it if one knows the values of the society, subsociety or counterculture to which it is reacting, since the values are simply inverted (Roberts 1978: 123–4; Yinger 1960: 629; Stark 1967: 141, 153; Ellens 1971). In a contraculture, then, the members have 'more negative than positive ideas in common' (Roberts 1978: 124, citing Bouvard 1975: 119).

*Liminal culture* is at the outer edge of identity (Bhabha 1992: 444). It exists only in the language it has for the moment. In some instances, liminal culture will appear as people or groups experience transition from one cultural identity to another. In other instances, liminal culture exists among individuals and groups that have never been able to establish a clear social and cultural identity in their setting. The language of a liminal culture is characterized by a 'dialectic of culture and identification' that has neither binary nor hierarchical clarity (Bhabha 1992: 445). Speech is disjunctive and multiaccental (Bhabha 1992: 445). It starts and stops without obvious consistency or coherence. It features 'minimal rationality' as a dialogic process that 'attempts to track displacements and realignments that are the effects of cultural antagonisms and articulations – subverting the rationale of the hegemonic moment and relocating alternative, hybrid sites of cultural negotiation' (Bhabha 1992: 443).

From the perspective of these different kinds of culture, the miracle discourse Achtemeier and Mack identified is 'subcultural' discourse that is conceptually related both to Jewish and Greco-Roman culture. Some of the final categories in this discourse are 'care', 'mercy', 'life and death', 'fear and cowardice', 'faith or trust' and 'the possible' (Robbins 1994d: 66–7). This discourse shows few 'countercultural' features like the discourse in the Gospel of John

that Meeks analyzed. In other words, the discourse perpetuates strong thaumaturgic emphases present both in Jewish and Greco-Roman tradition. There is an ethnic subcultural base for this discourse in Mark. But there is no decisively 'alternative' or 'oppositional' cultural system at work in the discourse. Rather, people who tell these stories and live in their meaning effects locate themselves in a subcultural thaumaturgic world. Their world is subcultural, because it is a local variation of dominant Jewish and Greco-Roman traditions that feature the great healers of the past like Moses, Elijah and Asclepius (Robbins 1993c: 448–9). Markan discourse, then, embeds this subcultural, thaumaturgic discourse in its own discourse. Analysis of the fully-developed rhetorical nature of this discourse has been started recently (Robbins 1994d: 65–74); a full socio-rhetorical exploration of this discourse in its contexts in the Gospels awaits interpreters who are equipped to analyze and interpret it.

A second form of local discourse in the Gospels is the kind of parable discourse that appears in Mark 4. The preceding chapter in this book contains a brief discussion of Mack's analysis of the 'cultural intertexture' of *paideia* in the topic of seeds as words that fall on different kinds of soil and produce different amounts of 'fruitfulness' under different circumstances. In this chapter, we can take this analysis a bit further. On the basis of its specific social topics, the discourse in the parables in Mark 4 is gnostic manipulationist. Not everyone is able to understand this discourse. Some are on the 'inside' and some are on the 'outside'. Those who hear it and understand it will be able to endure and be fruitful (Mark 4.20). On the basis of its final social and cultural categories, this discourse evokes a conceptual subculture in Mediterranean society. People are invited to think their way into the kingdom of God. The realms of agricultural life (Mark 4.1–20, 26–32), light in a house (Mark 4.21–2) and the marketplace (Mark 4.24–5) provide the categories of 'mystery', 'worth', 'the visible' and 'the just'. This discourse shows few signs of a 'countercultural' stance. The discourse does not suggest that the world is decisively 'against' people who understand these things. Those who use this discourse do have both 'tribulation' and 'persecution' in view (Mark 4.17), but the discourse does not seem to envision a 'programmed' attack on those who understand. Rather, this is simply the lot of a 'subculture' that aspires to participate in the wealth of the dominant class but is regularly disenfranchised from it. The discourse envisions that certain members

of the group 'give in' to 'the cares of the world, delight in riches, and the desire for other things' (Mark 4.19). Life is good enough that some slip into the 'ways of the world'. It is necessary, from the perspective of this discourse, to maintain a commitment to a special, subcultural view of the way salvation occurs. This, then, is an alternative subcultural discourse among some early followers of Jesus. This discourse does not give prominence to a 'thaumaturgic' response to the world but to a 'gnostic manipulationist' response where one seeks a full life by pondering and celebrating the mysterious ways God works in the world (Robbins 1994d: 74–81).

A third form of discourse appears in the large collection of sayings common to Matthew and Luke regularly referred to as 'Q'. Instead of being thaumaturgic or gnostic manipulationist, the discourse in these sayings was strongly conversionist in its earliest stages. The emphasis was on changing people's view of life in the world as a way of changing the world itself, and some of the final categories are 'being blessed', 'loving' and 'not judging' (Mack 1993: 73–80). This is a noticeably countercultural view of the world with decisive affinities with the alternative lifestyle Cynics in Antiquity commonly recommended to people. The view is not to follow the values and perspectives of either dominant cultures or their subcultures. Here is a wisdom that turns usual values upside down, like when Diogenes the Cynic said, 'Why should my body be buried so the birds can't eat it when I have eaten so many of them?' While this movement probably began as a contraculture in Galilee, within two decades it emerged as a counterculture with substantive rationales to support its ideology. One of the ways it began to support its ideology was with a revolutionist view of an abrupt change that would occur in the world. In the earlier stages of this discourse, wisdom traditions both from Jewish and Greco-Roman tradition nurtured its vision of the world. Within two decades, revolutionist presuppositions began to serve as rationales for the conversionist discourse. God will burn the chaff with a fire no one can put out; Sodom will have a lighter punishment than you; every one who admits in public that they know me, the Son of Man will acknowledge before the angels of God; whoever disowns me in public, the Son of Man will disown before the angels of God; I came to strike fire on the earth, and how I wish that it were already aflame; there will be wailing and clenching of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves excluded (Mack 1993: 81–102). This revolutionist discourse

fits naturally with the rising revolutionary discourse in Galilee during the 50s. The Q discourse is deeply grounded in conversionist presuppositions: God's powers can change the ways of people according to the discourse that lies at the base of the collection. But now the discourse exhibits an angry response to the world. It is so difficult to change the world that God, and his representative the Son of Man, will have to change it. Now what can mostly be done is to tell other people what the dire consequences will be if they do not respond. This discourse remains strongly countercultural. Representatives of this discourse have no choice but to be against the world, since the world does not share its point of view or heed its warnings. In the Q material, then, we see a countercultural movement in early Christianity that began with strong conversionist presuppositions and topics and gradually added revolutionist presuppositions to undergird its countercultural view of the world.

A fourth form of discourse appears in the pronouncement stories in Mark. This discourse is pitted not against 'the world' but against a particular group of people: leaders in charge of synagogues in Galilee. This discourse is not so countercultural as it is *contra*-cultural. This discourse selects a few matters of behavior and, by inverting them, argues that it stands for something entirely 'new' and 'different' from other people. Major final categories in the discourse are 'the lawful', 'forgiveness', 'the new' and 'the pure'. The discourse contains 'ethnic' strategies as described by Fredrik Barth (Barth 1969; Goudriaan 1992; Østergård 1992). It actually shares many values with the discourse it attacks. Rather than emphasizing any common ground, however, it concentrates on certain points of behavior that it 'turns on its head'. While this discourse is decisively contracultural in relation to the Jewish culture it holds before the hearer and reader, it is either subcultural or countercultural in relation to Greco-Roman culture (Mack 1988: 179–204).

A fifth form of discourse appears in the letters of Paul and in the passion predictions and passion narrative in the Gospel of Mark (Mack 1988: 249–312). This discourse focuses on the death and resurrection of Jesus as a means by which people have received salvation. The data in this discourse suggest that in its earliest stages it was significantly introversionist (cf. Esler 1994b), focusing on a particular thing that had been achieved for certain people. People gathered in small assemblies both to deepen their own experience of being in a secure position in relation to promises concerning death and to deepen their relationship with others who participated in the

same 'victory' over the forces of death and suffering in the world. Some of the final categories in this discourse are 'the memorable', 'the worthy' and 'the perishable'. Paul reconfigured this introversionist response into a significantly utopian response with reformist tendencies. We will expand on this in our discussion of 1 Corinthians 9, to which we will turn after a brief summary.

### SUMMARY

Analysis and interpretation of the social and cultural texture of New Testament discourse begin to give us a significantly new look at first-century Christianity. The discourse embedded in the earliest texts furnishes the resources to deconstruct and reconfigure the story of the 'victors' as they told it in the Acts of the Apostles. Many scholars have known that the standard story of the beginnings of Christianity in Acts is highly schematized and embedded in a distinctive ideology of its own. Its social response to the world is both conversionist and reformist. The goal is to change people and institutions significantly in ways that will change principles of distribution of food and honor among people. It presents a picture of Christianity as the extension of the history of Israel in a context where 'leaders of the Jews' continually attempt to subvert their activity and get them imprisoned, killed or at least run out of town. This 'contracultural' discourse in relation to leaders of Jewish synagogues is embedded in 'subcultural' discourse that presents Christians as people who espouse the highest values of the emperor, namely peace (*pax*) and salvation. In other words, Jewish contraculture discourse interweaves with Mediterranean subculture discourse in Acts to present a favorable view of Christians in the Mediterranean world.

Traditional historians of New Testament literature presuppose that the account of early Christianity promulgated by the Acts of the Apostles is accurate in its essential outline. The view is that even if the account smoothes over disagreements that existed among various factions, schematizes Paul's activity in terms of two or three missionary journeys, and shows no knowledge of things as substantial as Paul's letters to various communities with which he worked, any significant 'reworking' of the history of Christianity as Acts presents it exhibits a scepticism that is disrespectful of 'scripture'. The problem with this view is that Acts presents a particular

configuration of 'voices' within early Christian literature in a very particular way. What about the 'voices' in the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and John? They are 'scripture' also. It is obvious that Acts presents a picture of early Christianity in terms of the 'great traditions' of Israel. Both Stephen and Peter rehearse the 'history of Israel' in terms of its 'great leaders' and only certain early Christians – namely Peter, Stephen and Paul – are the major 'leaders' and 'movers' of Christianity in the context of these 'great traditions'.

The New Testament literature itself asserts that there were at least twelve men who were close associates of Jesus during his lifetime, plus a group of women who followed Jesus during his time in Galilee and through the travel that led to Jerusalem and his death. What about the voices of these early followers of Jesus? Where are these voices in the New Testament? Where is the voice of James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, whom the accounts call the sons of thunder (Mark 3.17)? Where are the voices of Andrew, Philip and Bartholomew? Where are the voices of James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus and Simon the Cananaean? We now have a Gospel of sayings attributed to Thomas, which Greek fragments and careful analysis of the text show was written as early as the other Gospels that currently exist in the New Testament. Should we give any attention to voices attributed to Thomas? Or should we just ignore this voice? Also, there is a Gospel that attributes the voices in it to Matthew. Should we pay careful attention to those voices, or should we ignore them also? And there is a Gospel that attributes voices to John. Should we ignore them? And what about the voices Paul refers to but overspeaks? Should we pay any attention to them? Many voices speak out in New Testament literature, but it is common practice in interpretation to drown most of them out in favour of a 'story' that recounts the 'significant' events in terms of the 'great traditions' of Israel. Few have attempted to write a story of Christianity that begins with a group of early followers whose belief system focused on parables of Jesus that contained the 'mysteries' of God's ways of working in the world. Few have taken seriously the large collection of sayings of Jesus that a group took seriously for its lifestyle in Galilee during the early decades of the movement. Few look seriously at those groups who emphasized the special powers of God to heal their diseases, remove the evil spirits that afflicted them, provide food for them in miraculous ways and indeed be able to calm the raging waters of the sea. Few include in



this story a group of early followers who fought about issues of leadership in synagogues throughout Galilee. The implication seems to be that taking all these movements seriously would be disrespectful of scripture, since the Acts of the Apostles is the authorized 'scriptural' account of the history of early Christianity. But perhaps the time has come to undertake a complete rewriting of the history of first-century Christianity on the basis of the multiple kinds of discourse that exist in New Testament texts. A major question in the coming years, then, is not the relation of the Acts of the Apostles to the letters of Paul, but the relation of Acts to discourse throughout the New Testament.

## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL TEXTURE IN 1 CORINTHIANS 9

### Specific social topics in 1 Corinthians 9

Analysis of the social and cultural texture of 1 Corinthians 9 begins with Bryan Wilson's typology of sects. This Pauline discourse shows no signs of being *introversionist*. This discourse does not focus on retiring from the world to enjoy security granted by personal holiness. Nor is it indifferent to social change or individual conversion. As Meeks observed some time ago, Pauline discourse does not encourage people to 'go out of the world' (1979). The discourse in 1 Corinthians 9.19–22 evokes an image of moving out to Jews (those under the law), to those outside the law and to the weak. This chapter, then, does not show significant dimensions of *introversionist* discourse.

This discourse is also not significantly *thaumaturgic*. It does not encourage a focus on obtaining cures, receiving special, personal dispensations and performing miracles. In certain contexts Pauline discourse evokes the presence of thaumaturgic interests in early Christianity (e.g. 1 Cor. 12.9–10), but it does not feature healing and miracles as a major response to the world. To be specific concerning 1 Corinthians 9, the discourse does not say, 'To the weak I became a healer, that I might through God's power make them strong' (cf. 9.22). Responses other than thaumaturgic are central to Pauline discourse.

Nor is this discourse *reformist*. It does not encourage investigation of the world to encourage and inform people as they involve themselves in it by good deeds. 1 Corinthians 9.3–14 does not evoke

an image of changing the way in which the institutions of apostleship, military life, vineyard keeping, shepherding sheep and goats, agricultural work or temple service operate. The discourse presupposes that these social structures are basic systems of life and does not imply that they could be changed.

There are four more kinds of social response – *conversionist*, *revolutionist*, *utopian* and *gnostic manipulationist* – and strains of all of these four kinds of response are present in this Pauline discourse. First, in the mode of *conversionist* response, Pauline discourse considers the outside world to be corrupted. Jews consider Christ to be a 'stumbling block' and the nations consider him to be 'folly' (1 Cor. 1.23). This discourse seems to imply that if these views of people changed, the world would be changed. 1 Corinthians 9 evokes the image of proclaiming the gospel 'to win' people (9.14, 9.19). The goal is for people to change. The discourse in 1 Corinthians 9, then, does appear to contribute to a vision that the speaking and doing of the gospel create a context in which God's spirit changes people and this change is an important aspect of dealing with what is wrong with the world (cf. 1 Cor. 3.5–9).

This discourse is also significantly *revolutionist*. Pauline discourse maintains that God will change the present social order when the time is right (1 Cor. 7.31). In fact, 1 Corinthians 15.51–8 merges *conversionist* and *revolutionist* discourse: at a particular time in the future God will act decisively (*revolutionism*) and the result will be that all people will be changed (1 Cor. 15.51–2). There are definite limits concerning what can be achieved on earth. No matter how many people respond positively to this discourse, it will not be possible for people to change everything or for God's spirit to change everyone in it. This can only occur with a decisive moment in the future when God will change all things.

Pauline discourse also has *utopian* strains. It encourages the creation of a perfect society (1 Cor. 13), but this utopianism is modulated by *conversionist* and *revolutionist* presuppositions. Utopian discourse is more radical than reformist argumentation – more change is necessary than the world could ever tolerate – and Pauline discourse has a strain of this radicality. Pauline discourse is also less violent than single-minded revolutionary discourse: more can be done in the world than facilitating God's overturn of this world, even though God soon will overturn it. This *more* that can be done has utopian dimensions. Community is a very special thing, and if the world could become a community like the communities