

**Is There A Critique of Greek Philosophy  
in the Gospels?**

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# CONTENTS

|   | Page |
|---|------|
| <b>Step A Introduction</b>  |      |
| Outline of a Problem  |      |
| <p>The book <i>Five Pivotal Texts</i> demonstrates that the gospel writers used a sociological discipline in their approach. Their texts were designed to construct a hybrid society consisting of the best aspects of Judaism and Hellenism. The texts included a critique of Hellenism as well as Judaism. However it appears <i>Five Pivotal Texts'</i> structural method of interpretation is generally considered to be outside of, rather than in front of, an evolution of approaches taken in NT interpretation. Its claims therefore have a credibility problem.</p> |      |
| <b>Step B Part 1</b>  | 1    |
| <b>TOWARDS A SOCIOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION<br/>OF THE GOSPELS</b>   |      |
| <b>Chapter 1 Shifts towards synchronic methods of gospel interpretation such as structuralism</b>   | 3    |
| 1. Development of the Historical Critical Method of Interpretation  | 3    |
| 2. Catholic Response to Historical Criticism  | 4    |
| 3. The Development of Narrative Criticism   | 6    |
| 4. The Potential of Structural Analysis   | 9    |
| 5. Starting out with a Question   | 13   |
| 6 Summary of Chapter One  | 16   |

*The Historical Critical Method of Exegesis allows for scientific research into Gospel Interpretation. However, as the Catholic Pontifical Commission admits, while it is basic to interpretation, it is a diachronic method that needs to be complemented by other, synchronic methods. Each of the methods described by the Commission have limited scope. These include Narrative criticism, Rhetorical Criticism, Structural criticism and Sociological criticism.*

*If in interpretation is to be made of the type of society being promoted by the gospels, a sociological interpretation is needed, at least in part. However this requires a grounding in the society that was authentic to the times in which the gospel was written.*

## **Chapter 2 Hellenistic influence on C1st Palestine and the ambivalent response of Jewish writers** 18

1. Recognition by Scholars of Hellenistic Culture in Palestine 18
2. Palestinian History and the Ambivalent Jewish Response to Hellenism 20
3. Jewish Writings and the Response to Hellenism 23
4. A Spectrum of Acceptance of Hellenistic Culture 26
5. The Environment of Gospel Writers e.g. the Cynics 27
6. Access to Hellenistic Education e.g. the Jerusalem Library 29
7. *(not yet done) There needs to be an exploration of C1st literary models that demonstrate a use of structuralism in Hellenistic literature. But this could also include Paul's use of definition e.g. of love and the lists of virtues in N.T. letters after Paul. It could also include extended inverted circular structures in general N.T. literature.*
8. Summary of Chapter Two 33

*Until the archaeological findings and developments in historical research that took place over the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, it was generally thought by Biblical scholars that First Century Palestine had a culture distinct from the Greco-Roman Empire. However over the Twentieth Century it was gradually realized that Hellenistic Culture pervaded Palestine as well. A reason why Jews managed to remain faithful to their Law was because in the centuries leading up to the First Century, Jewish writers and rulers used the literary and political tools of Hellenism to clarify their own distinct identity e.g. in the book of Ben Sera. The extent of Hellenisation amongst Jews varied. The wealthier classes more were likely to adopt the culture and its education. Even so the Greek language was widespread and necessary for upwardly mobile people. Those of a middle class such as the gospel writers would have had some access to knowledge about the major Greek philosophies. Also, the Jerusalem Temple, one of the largest of its type at the time, would have had a substantial library.*

## **Chapter 3 Indications of Hellenistic influence on early Church interpretation and the need to recognize this** 34

1. Idealised Interpretation of the Law at the Beginning of the Church (Outcome of the Jerusalem Council, Acts 15) 34
2. Mark's Historical Situation and His Use of Homer's Extended Chiasmus 50
3. Hellenistic Philosophical Influence on First Century Christian Theology 54
4. Early Gospel Interpreters e.g. Origen and Augustine the Neo-Platonist 61
5. The Damaging Effects of Salvation History and a one-sided view of Christianity 63
6. Summary of Chapter Three 65

*There is evidence of an increased influence of Hellenism on Gospel Interpretation in the First Century. The Jerusalem Council arguably used Greek idealism in “raising the bar” of three key social commandments, that is “Thou shalt not kill” cf. avoid blood, “Thou shalt not commit adultery cf. avoid fornication, “Thou shalt not steal” cf. avoid unjust business practices. Mark, the first Gospel writer, who was trying to improve the public profile of Christianity, could have copied circular and other literary structures from Homer, the most popular writer in the Greco-Roman world. The Church Fathers used Greek philosophical ideas and language to formulate their theology. Early Gospel interpreters such as Origen and Augustine, were steeped in Greek philosophical learning. However despite such Greek influences, a gospel interpretation called Salvation History was carried into the Twentieth Century. This gave the impression that Christianity emerged from the Old Testament (only), and only Christians inherited its promises. Such an idea was basic to the Nazi doctrine that the Jews as a race were obsolete and allowing them any role in public life was a retrograde step.*

|                  |  |           |
|------------------|--|-----------|
| <b>Chapter 4</b> | <b>Two differing Hellenistic approaches to society</b> | <b>67</b> |
| 1.               | Plato and Some Successors                              | 68        |
| a)               | Plato  | 68        |
| b)               | Augustine  | 71        |
| c)               | Luther   | 73        |
| d)               | Machiavelli  | 76        |
| e)               | Calvin   | 79        |
| f)               | Hobbes   | 82        |
| g)               | Rousseau   | 83        |
| h)               | Hegel  | 85        |
| i)               | Karl Marx  | 87        |
| j)               | The 1950's Catholic Parish                             | 92        |
| k)               | Segundo  | 94        |
| l)               | The Work World - Another Republic                      | 96        |
|                  | Summary of a Platonic approach                         | 99        |
| 2.               | Aristotle and some of his successors                   | 100       |
| a)               | Aristotle  | 100       |
| b)               | Aquinas  | 102       |
| c)               | Locke  | 104       |
| d)               | Durkheim   | 107       |
| e)               | Weber  | 109       |
| f)               | Talcott Parsons  | 111       |
| g)               | Vatican II   | 115       |
| 4.               | Some of the Flaws in both dualistic approaches         | 118       |
| 5.               | Summary and Conclusions                                | 122       |

*The influence of Greek Philosophical ideas about society have continued to influence key social thinkers in Western society over the centuries. An analysis of their ideas show the influences of Plato and Aristotle in particular. If it is possible now, to point out parallels and contrasts between these two approaches over the centuries, then it was arguably possible for the First Century gospel writers to do something similar. By the First Century CE. Jews had already had three hundred years of experience in trying to co-exist with Hellenism.*

## STEP C Part 2

### SEARCH OF THE GOSPELS

127

#### Chapter 5

#### **A weighing up of the likelihood of Historical Criticism or Narrative Criticism to reveal a critique of Hellenism in the gospels**

|       |   |     |
|-------|---|-----|
| 1.    | The Gospel Genre and Dominant Methods of Interpretation                       | 127 |
| (a)   | The Gospel Genre  | 127 |
| (b)   | Historical Critical Exegesis and Narrative Interpretation                     | 131 |
| (i)   | Terry Curtin's Thesis on Development of Interpretation in the Catholic Church | 131 |
| (ii)  | Joseph Fitzmyer's Description of Historical Critical Exegesis                 | 134 |
| (iii) | Mark Powell's Description of Narrative Criticism                              | 135 |
| (iv)  | Overview of the Above Methods   | 136 |
| 2.    | The Gospels   | 138 |
| (i)   | Mark, the deaf-mute and the credibility of extended chiasmus                  | 138 |
| (ii)  | Matthew and internalized law  | 152 |
| (iii) | Luke and Missionary outreach from Nazareth into the Book of Acts              | 172 |
| (iv)  | John, the Samaritan Woman and the Unification of a Hybrid Community           | 183 |
| 3.    | Summary and Conclusions   | 197 |

*Historical Critical Exegesis continues to dominate in the approach taken to Gospel Interpretation. Indeed the Catholic Biblical Commission says a proper understanding of Holy Scripture requires use of this method. The Commission does however recognize that this takes a diachronic approach, that is, it focuses on one small part of the text at a time. The Commission says it needs to be complemented by a synchronic method of interpretation. Since the 1970's the synchronic method of Narrative Criticism has emerged as a popular approach to interpretation. However Narrative Criticism takes a linear view of the text, that is, the text is considered in terms of the sequence of events and their significance within a story line. An approach that suggests that events in the gospels have been re-ordered to suit an inner pattern of meaning behind the texts, is necessarily discounted by the narrative critic. Such a pattern diminishes the impact of the story. Thus both the above methods may demonstrate an interest in outreach to the Gentiles. But they are unlikely to uncover a structure that develops behind the stories and which provides a rationale for the co-existence of Judaism and Hellenism within Christianity. .*

**Chapter 6                      Socio-rhetorical interpretation and the  
incorporation of Hellenistic methods in Paul’s  
letters and Mark’s gospel**                      199

1.        Effectiveness of Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation                      199
- (i) Paul and a Hellenistic Understanding of the Commandments                      200
- (ii) Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation and Mark’s Dependence on Socrates                      215
- (iii) Rules of Greek Rhetoric Applied to the Start of Mark’s Gospel                      223
- (iv) Early Liturgical Practice and a four-sided, transformative use of the  
              Gospels                      241
2.        Summary and Conclusions of Chapter Six                      243

*Socio-Rhetorical interpretation developed from Historical Critical Exegesis. However as the name implies it includes sociological and rhetorical interpretation. Unlike Historical Critical Exegesis, these are described by the Catholic Pontifical Commission as “synchronic” methods of interpretation. Socio-rhetorical interpretation as shown above, demonstrates how Paul used the formats of current Hellenistic letter-writing, and also its rhetoric, to encourage his new Gentile converts to practice the spirit of the key social commandments. It also shows how Mark’s gospel relied on the literature and popularity of the Greek Socrates tradition to describe the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. It shows how the Greek rhetorical form of chreia sayings, as taught in Hellenistic educational handbooks, was a form used to re-tell the stories of Jesus. Alexander Shaia has developed a method with parallels to the socio-rhetorical method of analysis. He calls this “quadratos.” The method considers a four-step process in transformation that is found in the early Christian lectionary and is repeated in a wide range of spiritual writings and psycho-therapy.*

*On the one hand socio-rhetorical interpretation shows that the gospel writers used Hellenistic cultural forms and universal themes in writing up the gospels. Some using the method appear to assume that a critique of Judaic and Hellenistic societies had been made and was being made in the gospels. However the method does not appear to show how this critique was being made in the underlying logic of the texts.*

**Step D                      THE SOLUTION**                      245

**Chapter 7    Semiotic Analysis - word patterns come first**                      245

- a.        Semiotic analysis and the Catholic Pontifical Commission                      245
- What a logico-semantic level in Mark’s gospel may look like                      249
- A Quick Look at Other Gospels                      251

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| • The Influence of Centralised Leadership in the Writing of the Gospels       | 252 |
| • Comments about Semiotic Analysis by Joseph Fitzmyer                         | 254 |
| • The Clues of a Water Circle in the Gospel of John                           | 257 |
| • Use of the Grammar of a Text to find another Level of Meaning.              | 257 |
| • Uncovering the “grammar” of a Water Circle in John’s Gospel                 | 259 |
| b. Semiotic analysis and the Gospels  | 265 |
| (i) The Gospel of Mark and “Recognise Law and Order.”<br>Sections A, B, C, D. | 265 |
| (ii) Matthew and “Internalise the Law.”<br>Sections A, B, C, D, E, F.         | 275 |
| (iii) Luke and “Give a Sense of Direction.”<br>Sections A, B, C, D, E, F.     | 286 |
| (iv) Luke’s Acts and “Launch the New Society.”<br>Sections A, B, C, D, E, F.  | 303 |
| (v) John and “Pass on the Power of One.”<br>Sections A, B, C, D, E, F.        | 311 |
| c. Summary of the Solution  | 327 |

Semiotic analysis as illustrated above in the gospels, demonstrates the rules for this method of interpretation as set out by the Catholic Pontifical Commission. The method as shown, follows a specific grammar that sets out a particular level of meaning in the whole of the discourse. The text uses elements of meaning such as actors, places and time and gives these figures specific values of meaning. Semiotic analysis as demonstrated above and as described by the Commission, looks exclusively at the Scripture text and the interrelationships to be found there. These interrelationships are especially defined in terms of differentiation and comparison. The findings of the method are expressed in abstract concepts. These findings enable people who have little knowledge of Scripture to understand a line of logic that underpins the text. In terms of the specific analysis above, the line of logic that defines, compares and contrasts Judaism with Hellenism. The critique of Hellenism is primarily based on its differentiation from Judaism.

## **Step E                    IMPLICATIONS** 328

### **Chapter 8 Implications** 328

- Is Semiotic Analysis a Viable and Credible Method of Gospel Interpretation? 328

- Did the Gospel Writers Collaborate with Church Leadership 329
- Why did Luke use patriarchal models? 329
- The relevance of Gospel attempts to build law and order societies 330
- Education and a simplified access to gospel structure 330
- Poverty, chastity and obedience - the nucleus of Christianity 331
- The importance of ancient secular literature in Gospel interpretation 331
- Allegorical interpretation revisited 331
- Nazism and the danger of salvation history 332
- Tension within Islam 332

## Step A

### Towards a Sociological Interpretation of the Gospels

**Note: Most of pages 1 to 127 are re-published in the booklet with the above name.  
Step C starts on page 127**

#### Introduction - Outline of a Problem

In the world of the Church there has been on-going conflict, especially since the Vatican II Council of the 1960's, between what is called the "left" and the "right." In politics it is accepted that both sides of the Parliament can make a contribution, depending on the circumstances. But in the Church it is often inferred that only "one" point of view can be the correct one. This cannot be so surprising given the theology of the Church that it is "one." But the view that the Church should be 'biased' towards one or other or neither position can result in the down-grading of essential components in the Church. A case in point here is the present position of Catholic Religious in the developed world. They may not appear to be involved in the left/right conflicts. But their circumstances suggest more sociological work needs to be done to understand where, if any, their rightful place in the church actually is. Consider. "The median age of all religious in Australia in 2009 was 73 years."<sup>1</sup> . The numbers of Catholic Religious in Australia dropped from about 19,000 in the late 1960's to about 8,000 in 2010.<sup>2</sup> Many Orders are on the verge of non-existence. Yet the official Church claims that Religious Life exists at its very heart and it "undeniably belongs to its life and holiness."<sup>3</sup> There is an anomaly here.

A sociological interpretation of the gospels could throw more light on the message that “in my Father’s house there are many mansions.” (John: 14:2). It may help to throw light on both the on-going conflict and the social phenomenon of “no vocations.”

In 1993 the Pontifical Commission of the Catholic Church, headed by Cardinal Ratzinger, urged that a *synchronic*, multi-disciplinary approach be added to gospel interpretation.<sup>4</sup> This included the use of sociology. Twenty years after their statement, it is opportune to explore how far their recommended approach has come. Have the range of *synchronic* approaches increased in credibility amongst biblical scholars and can they throw light on the dilemmas of the present Church? Also to what extent were these methods integrated into the interpretation of first century CE writers?

## **Chapter One**

### **Shifts towards synchronic methods of gospel interpretation such as structuralism**

#### **1. Development of the Historical Critical Method of Interpretation**

In this exploration let us first look at four interpretative assumptions about Scripture at the time of the first century CE the Scripture was cryptic, relevant, and perfect and the Word of God.<sup>5</sup> Interpretation, which was on-going, even as Scripture was being written,<sup>6</sup> sought to explain the texts that appeared to contradict any of these four assumptions.<sup>7</sup> Also differing degrees of status were given to interpreters<sup>8</sup>. After the final formulation of the Christian Canon and through the centuries to follow it was the Church that took on the major role of interpretation.

After the Reformation there was another shift in this situation. The emerging Protestant tradition did not recognise the authority of the Church Magisterium. Alternative explanations of Scriptural unity were therefore needed to be found. Luther simplified the problem by saying the literal or grammatical or historical sense is the true sense.<sup>9</sup> Calvin claimed Christ is the subject matter of the whole Bible and he saw God's Word as equally pervading all scriptural texts.<sup>10</sup> Later on Spinoza (1634-77) claimed the meaning of the Biblical narratives did not lie in their historical truth.<sup>11</sup> There were other proposed answers to the problem as well.

With the Age of Enlightenment (17th and 18th centuries) there was an increased challenge to the historical credibility of the Bible. In order to deal with this, the Protestant tradition evolved the Historical Critical method of interpretation.<sup>12</sup> This explored the historical background of stories and their likely historicity. It also sought out the original meanings of words and the literary forms to be found in the biblical text. Scholars focussed on those sections of Scripture that appeared to have relevance to their own situation and which, according to their research, they could demonstrate to be historical. The Historical Critical method helped to deal with the claims that the Bible was 'only' a collection of myths.<sup>13</sup> In the C 20th archaeological findings endorsed the method by showing many of the details of Old Testament stories, did in fact reflect the customs of the time. The historian John Bright<sup>14</sup> and the archaeologist William F. Albright were prominent in improving the credibility of Bible stories.<sup>15</sup>

## **2. Catholic response to Historical Criticism**

The Catholic response to historical criticism was slow, partly because of an early anti-church bias taken by some interpreters. However by the 1940's an encyclical by Pius XII recognised there was value in the further studies of linguistics and background.<sup>16</sup> The Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome was set up to train clergy in a better understanding of these studies.<sup>17</sup> At the same time Rome continued to exercise control over research by requiring that no one could be made a Professor of Scripture in a seminary without having been trained in this Institute.<sup>18</sup> A document on interpretation written by Vatican II in the 1960's gave further endorsement to the Historical Critical method of interpretation.<sup>19</sup>

The advantages of using this method of interpretation developed further and became more acceptable in the Catholic Church until its Pontifical Biblical Commission conceded it is “the indispensable method for the scientific study of the meaning of ancient texts.”<sup>20</sup> But even as the method has developed, its limitations have also become apparent. It is claimed for instance that it puts a focus on learning 'about' the Bible rather than 'from' the Bible.<sup>21</sup> It tends to focus on the past. Its scientific base makes its users less accepting of a “cryptic” meaning to biblical texts. Its focus on what is relevant to the researcher means it tends to overlook the overall relevance of the text.<sup>22</sup> In particular, because the method looks at sections of a biblical book, a sense of the whole structure can be lost. As the Commission describes, the method takes a *diachronic* approach to scriptural text and the Commission points out it is now in competition with methods that insist upon a *synchronic* understanding of texts.<sup>23</sup>

It has been said one of the great attractions of using the Historical Critical Method of interpretation has been its relationship to science and therefore its likelihood of improving the credibility of the Bible.<sup>24</sup> The Catholic Commission agrees with this but also recommends the use of a number of *synchronic* methods of interpretation which it believes should help interpreters to consider the texts in their final and complete form.

It might be pointed out that there has been an irony in the exploration of the range of disciplines in Scriptural Interpretation. Such exploration requires freedom to be exercised by Scholars. But if the Roman Pontifical Institute itself has a heavily endorsed discipline of historical criticism then other more *synchronic* methods of interpretation can tend to be downplayed. For instance, an unpublished comment about a biblical course in Rome around 2011, said a whole term was taken up looking at the passion story in the gospel of Mark. This

of course is laudable. But one wonders if students get the opportunity to see this section in the context of the whole gospel? Over-emphasis on the *diachronic* method in Rome would affect the approach taken by seminary professors around the world.

### 3. The Development of Narrative Criticism

Despite restraints, methods of interpretation, besides the historical critical method, have evolved to some extent. In the 1970's the Gospel of Mark was considered at length in terms of its literary narrative by David Rhoads and others<sup>25</sup> They argued a narrative approach is largely based on the idea that the final version of a gospel, was pulled together by the one person, even though the historical critical method may show it comes from a number of sources. For example Matthew and Luke appear to be based from Mark and the source called Q.

Narrative criticism has set in train more studies of the gospels which consider them in terms of their literary qualities.<sup>26</sup> Also, because historical criticism has continued to be the dominant method of interpretation being used, there appears to have been a degree of synthesis between this and other approaches. For instance Frank Moloney<sup>27</sup> and Brendan Byrne consider the "narrative" of Mark on the one hand but they also appear to be using the historical critical method of interpretation to look at the gospel's detail.<sup>28</sup> Their approach does fit in with the 1993 Statement of the Pontifical Biblical Commission which says the historical-critical method is the "indispensable method for the scientific study of ancient text".

But limitations also exist in their approach. In the case of Byrne, he says on page one that in the first century CE there were two world views, that of Judaism and that of Hellenism. But

his focus would only be dealing with the Judaic background.<sup>29</sup> In the case of Moloney, his book *Mark, Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* avoids considering the writer's use of *chiasmus* (inverted, ABCDDCBA parallels), because these do not fit with the flow of the text.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps in the case of both Byrne and Moloney, they needed to "close off" such avenues of exploration in order to retain both the "narrative" focus combined with the focus of historical criticism.

The Commission admits to limitations in the narrative method of interpretation. For instance "the distinction between the real author and the implied author does tend to make problems of interpretation somewhat more complex."<sup>31</sup> Perhaps another way to express this limitation is that somebody using narrative criticism becomes involved in "the narrative world." And in doing this they close off other types of text exploration.

It could be said the narrative method of interpretation is biased towards a linear understanding of the 'whole' gospel, which suits the modern mentality.<sup>32</sup> But it does not appear to explain why a writer such as Mark, rely so heavily on parallels in his text. This omission in interpretation becomes more awkward still when the parallels are inverted or worse, when they are not very clear or 'tidy'. Chiasmus (or circular construction) might be accepted in narrative criticism when it is limited to a few sentences. But a prolonged chiasmus such as *hysterion proteron* is either overlooked by the narrative method of interpretation or its existence is dismissed as "conjecture".<sup>33</sup> The narrative critic is likely to claim a reader could not pick up connections between parallels unless they were close to each other in the text. In the case of a *diachronic* critic, they would be arguably less receptive still to extended chiasmus.

Narrative Criticism is actually the second type of interpretative method that the Pontifical Commission listed as “likely to contribute effectively....”to opening up the riches of the biblical texts.<sup>34</sup> The first of these methods is described as “Rhetorical Analysis” and the Commission puts particular focus on the “new rhetoric.” This considers the essential message the writer is trying to communicate and convince his readers about. It considers how he does this. Thus the method looks at the power of argument being used in the text. But the Commission also points out that at the same time, a historical gospel situation needs to be borne in mind by a rhetorical interpreter in order to determine the likelihood that the writer would be using such an argument.<sup>35</sup>

The third synchronic method identified by the Commission is described as *semiotic analysis*. This relates to the biblical text as it comes before the reader in its final state. The approach considers the entire text, but only the text. In this sense it compares with Kugel’s claim that interpretation should start with the text.<sup>36</sup> Thus *Semiotic analysis* considers the network of relationships (opposition, confirmation etc) between the various elements of the text but does not go beyond this. At its deepest level, according to the Commission, “It proceeds from the assumption that certain forms of logic and meaning underlie the narrative and discursive organisation of all discourse.”<sup>37</sup> A way to understand this may be as follows. The real author stands back from the “narrative world” which contains the implied author and the implied reader. The real author retains the power to set out an abstract framework of logic on which the narrative world is developed. But this framework may not be explicitly mentioned in the text. The Commission points out that again, (at some stage) there is need to reference this sort of interpretation against the historical context of the gospel.

The Commission promotes approaches that use human sciences such as sociology. It says “Knowledge of sociological data, which help us understand the economic, cultural and religious functioning of the biblical world is indispensable for historical criticism.” However it points out there is difficulty in trying to understand the sociological models which were current at the time the gospels were written.<sup>38</sup>

#### **4. The Potential of Structural Analysis**

The *semiotic* method of analysis, and endorsement of the method by the Pontifical Commission gives encouragement to consider the paragraphing structure of the gospels. A query could be raised here as to whether or not the Gospel writers deliberately shaped the paragraph structures or indeed whether they wrote in paragraphs at all. It is well known that writing of the time did not use punctuation.<sup>39</sup> One might say if punctuation and even word separation was not used there was little likelihood paragraphing would be considered important. Indeed some claim paragraph construction is relatively recent, for example: “No English writer before Tyndale (1494-1536) has any sense of the paragraph as a subject of internal arrangement.”<sup>40</sup> However closer consideration of ancient texts, for example those of Homer and his *Odyssey* show otherwise.<sup>41</sup>

A factor to take into consideration here was the reliance on memory rather than writing for the dissemination and passing on of stories.<sup>42</sup> In the case of Homer there was in fact a highly structural framework in which the sub-plots and intricacies of his stories were interwoven. Also the verses of the lengthy poem of the *Odyssey* were in hexameter metre. There were standard organisational patterns that could be repeated or omitted as a story teller responded

to their audience. Thus sections of a story could be rearranged to sustain interest and drama in the plot.<sup>43</sup>

The gospel writers, for example Mark, would, in terms of the culture of the time, have some acquaintance with the Hellenistic methods of oral story telling. Mark's reliance on parallels shows this. A *semiotic* consideration of the parallels could raise questions as to whether or not such parallels were set up to provide more than symmetry, balance or assistance to story memorisation. Parallel paragraphs can demonstrate parallel themes and highlight a point in common to the pair. For instance apparently paired paragraphs could both be about the authority of Jesus or his need for support or the fear of the disciples etc. Such subjects on their own could be overlooked or considered in another context. But when the same point appears in a parallel way, attention is drawn to it. Also an understanding of the point in one paragraph can provide an interpretation in the parallel paragraph.

Using an interpretation technique such as a *semiotic analysis* enables one to delve further here. Why would the gospel writer be trying to highlight this or that point? Can the points be collected into a common theme? Does such a collection show a distinct section of the gospel which makes a general point which fits into a line of logic for the whole? Is there a "grammar" being followed in the structure of these paragraphs? For example is there a single "hook" to be found in each paragraph, for example the name of a place? This acts as a heading and can be paired off with a parallel place acting as a "hook" in another paragraph. The hooks in turn can form an overall pattern to constitute a gospel section. Does the sort of "hook" construction in one gospel compare with that of another? Is there a common link between gospel sections, for example the statement about going to Jerusalem?

It is obvious when looking at the gospels that the writer(s) did divide their texts in sections in terms of the beginning and the end at least. There are the infancy narratives at the start in Matthew and Luke and the passion narrative at the end of all four gospels. But a *semiotic analysis* would help to explore whether there are more sections inside the gospels as well. It could explore the question as to whether or not the whole of gospel in fact fits into one or other section, either sections that follow an overall “grammar” of construction or the occasional section that does not appear to follow such “rules” at all. In the latter case one could ask if another quite different theme is being dealt with here.

Further questions could include whether or not the sections of all the gospels fit into a coherent whole. Are there connections between the gospels, for example with one gospel developing one line of abstract reasoning and another gospel complementing it with a different theme? In terms of a sociological investigation one could ask how themes developed in the paragraph structures relate to a particular type of society. One could ask if more than one social type is being explored and portrayed. Further questions include whether or not the basis of such societies is being set out, whether or not the best aspects of such societies are being listed and whether or not their limitations are also noted. There is also the question of what sort of person could comfortably move between the different society types. Further one could ask if the societies are being presented in terms of universal creation themes of existence such as time and place. If so how is this presentation made? Also is there an implication that just as existence requires a balance between time and place so also such a balance is required in the harmonisation of different social types. This picks up on a key theme to be universally found in the ruins of ancient temples throughout the world. The ‘place’ is so constructed that it “captures” a moment in time such as the Summer Solstice or the start of Spring.

As discussed above, the Commission recommends the use of “semiotic analysis” or structuralism. In this approach a user of the method considers only the text and the network of relationships between its various elements.<sup>44</sup> Also, “Each text follows a “grammar,” that is to say, a certain number of rules or patterns.” Besides this, there is also the “logico-semantic level” of analysis which “proceeds from the assumption that certain forms of logic and meaning underlie the narrative and discursive organization of all discourse. ...(this is) ... the logic which governs the basic articulations of the narrative.”<sup>45</sup> It may be considered this is a further advancement on the “semiotic” method.

A *logico-semantic* level of analysis has special application to exploration of the question as to whether or not there is a critique of Greek society in the structures of the gospels. If for instance the writer is deliberately pairing off places that Jesus went into a parallel or inverted parallel literary structure, then just as places may be paralleled, so also the sentences around them be paralleled (or have opposite meanings). The parallel paragraph would be roughly the same size, whether long or short. There would be a major point common to both groups of sentences which, in a background and abstract dimension, would constitute a third parallel. Such ‘abstract’ parallels in a section could add up to a summary point about the whole. Following on from a “grammar”, all of the text in a “section” would need to fit into the background framework. Also, ‘points of logic’ that are developed in one section would need to follow into or follow on from other sections until the whole of the text is incorporated into the background framework.

In terms of the question being explored all the points would need to be relevant as to whether or not a critique of Greek society is being established in the gospel.

A further expectation of the text could be established by a *logico-semantic* sort of analysis as well. One could assume that if a writer was developing a critique of Greek society in his gospel structure they would also be doing this to compare and contrast Hellenism with Judaism. Therefore one could expect the same sort of structures and critique to be developed in relation to Jewish society as well.

## 5. Starting Out with a Question

The Pontifical Biblical Commission is not the only source to provide reflections on the range of approaches that can be taken to Biblical Interpretation. In her book *The Revelatory Text*<sup>46</sup> Sandra Schneiders describes a range of such methods. She describes attempts at developing structural interpretation and also psychological and feminist interpretation.<sup>47</sup> These methods include sociology. However one could gather from her book that in the area of sociological interpretation, progress has been slow.<sup>48</sup>

Schneiders claims that Scripture should be considered in a way similar to great literary works such as the Shakespearean tragedies. In such case the historicity of the story is less important than the great universal themes focussed upon by a writer. It is the presentation of universal themes that have permanent relevance to the human condition. Schneiders also says a literary interpretation, as with responses to great poetry, is a personal response which is unique to every individual, “Consequently there is no such thing as the one correct interpretation of a text.”<sup>49</sup>

Reading the gospels in the same way as great poetry does touch on the four traditional assumptions about Scriptural interpretation that is, that the Scripture is cryptic, relevant, perfect and the Word of God. It also it ties in with synchronic approaches that the Commission recommends as helping to balance out the diachronic approach of Historical Criticism. But there are also some problems here. For instance to what extent does a literary approach uncover the specific theological message that a writer is trying to pass on? Also, the gospel of Mark for instance was written around 70 CE when an urgent message about the nature of Christianity needed to be passed on to Jews, Christians, Gentiles and Romans alike.<sup>50</sup> Shakespeare's tragedies and much other great literature are not so conditioned by historical circumstance.

Another point Schneiders develops is that an interpreter "should start with a question that he or she wants to answer" and then work out the most appropriate method to find the answer.<sup>51</sup> An example similar to her point could be as follows. If one has been doing reading on the various social models suggested over the centuries by social philosophers, one can detect a common inheritance from Greek social philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. It is after all, general knowledge that Western culture is largely derived from the ancient Greeks. A study of social philosophers over the centuries can show them to be weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of following Platonic ideas or Aristotelian ideas. Having done such a study one could then ask to what extent gospel writers themselves knew about Hellenistic ideas on social construction and whether or not a critique of these ideas was built into the structure of the gospels. Such a question ties in with the structural methods of analysis as described above. A further follow-on of this question could be to focus (for a start) on the gospel of Mark which is generally accepted to be the first gospel that was written.

In order to look for an underlying critique one could list the places where Jesus went in a first section of the gospel, for example up to where his relatives came to take control of him (Mark 3:21). Then one could work out whether or not parallels are being set up between the places and whether or not there is a pattern here.

In making an attempt to analyse Mark's structure, some of the Pontifical Commission's recommendations for a synchronic reading of the text are being met. For instance it proposes use of "new rhetoric" to examine if the writers are trying to convince readers of a particular position.<sup>52</sup> In this case one is exploring whether or not a writer had particular opinions about Hellenistic social structures and whether or not he is trying to convince readers about this. The Commission also recommends the use of narrative criticism that considers the text as a whole. Thus one could expect the story of the life of Jesus would be told at one level of the text. But there would be a development of the writer's views about Hellenism at another level as well. One could also expect that the figure of Jesus would be tied in as the key to questions the writer is trying to raise at the level behind the story.

An exploration as to whether or not gospel writers are doing a critique of both Judaism and Greek society within the structures of their gospels may help to respond to questions raised by other methods again. For instance Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza approaches the texts with a "hermeneutics of suspicion". In her book, *In Memory of Her* she points out a there is an anti-female bias within the gospel text, especially that of Luke. She claims this has been influenced by the over-culture and patriarchal value system of Greek society.<sup>53</sup> Her criticisms and that of other feminists throw up a serious question about whether or not the gospel text could really be "the word of God." They appear to promote an anti-female view

that deters the full equality and participation of women in any society that is based upon the gospels.

Exploration of a critique of Greek society in the gospel structures may provide some clues as to why Luke for instance should have followed patriarchal Greek conventions. It could be suggested in this context that he realised he was using the “faulty” literary conventions of a “faulty” society. But he accepted these realities of the day for what they were and he was trying to balance them out with something else.

The “exploration of a question” approach, as proposed by Schneiders, also meets all four assumptions about Scripture interpretation in the first century CE and the centuries immediately after this as set out by Kugel.<sup>54</sup> In this approach an exploration is being made of a level of meaning underneath the text (cf. the assumption that the meaning of the text is cryptic), the whole text and a follow-through of this is being explored (cf. the assumption that the text is perfect). The question being explored has relevance to the societies of the present time (cf. relevance). The question is exploring reality as such and therefore is aligned to the ultimate reality, that is, God.

## **6. Summary of Chapter One**

In summary, modern methods of interpretation provide for a wide variety of approaches which include the possibility of a sociological investigation. They include the possibility that each gospel writer was creating a “paradigm” in his text through and in which the writer was, in conjunction with other gospel writers, working through a critique of two major societies of the day, that is Judaism with its emphasis on a moral God and Hellenism with its emphasis on

“pure Truth” and Order. Each writer was constructing, in his area of expertise, the vision of a better society. In theological terms he was setting out a society which would reflect “the Kingdom of God.” Structural methods of interpretation are of particular help in exploring how a gospel writer was doing this. They uncover the “underbelly” of the text.

## Chapter Two

### Hellenistic Influences on First Century CE Palestine and the ambivalent response of Jewish writers

#### 1. Recognition by Scholars of Hellenistic Culture in Palestine

As the Pontifical Commission has pointed out, an exploration of social models being used in the Gospels needs to be based upon the culture and historical events which shaped Palestine at the time the Gospels were written.<sup>55</sup> If for instance there is an investigation as to whether or not the gospels provide a critique of Hellenistic society, as compared with Judaism, there needs to be a demonstration that this would have been a pressing need for this at the time the gospels were written. It has only been through more recent historical and archaeological findings that a clearer picture of the social situation of first century Palestine has emerged. With regards to Hellenism it can now be said that the impact of Hellenistic culture on Palestine over this period was like a “steamroller”.<sup>56</sup> Such an impact was largely underestimated well into the twentieth century when it was considered Palestinian and Hellenistic culture were largely distinct from each other.<sup>57</sup> Thus, while the extent of Hellenistic impact could be debated in the 1970's,<sup>58</sup> the idea that Jewish and Hellenistic cultures were "separate" in first century CE Palestine is no longer tenable.<sup>59</sup>

The evidence to show the cultural impact of Hellenism there includes:

- Buildings (even the Jerusalem Temple) were based on Hellenistic architecture.<sup>60</sup>

- Jerusalem was at the centre of Judaism. But at the same time it was a Hellenised city. Buildings and activities promoted by Herod included a Gymnasium, hippodrome, theatre and even an amphitheatre. <sup>61</sup>
- Palestinian people wore the same sort of clothes as other people in the Greco-Roman Empire. They used similar money and much the same customs as in the wider world for example how they buried their dead. <sup>62</sup>
- Social structures such as that of the Sanhedrin were actually based on Greek models of governance. <sup>63</sup> Even religious ceremonies had Hellenistic parallels. <sup>64</sup>
- The graves of wealthy Jerusalemites from first century CE copy the Greek styles with solid square bases, columns, capitals, cornices etc. <sup>65</sup>
- More than one third of inscriptions found in and around Jerusalem from the second Temple period, are in Greek. <sup>66</sup>
- Funerary inscriptions show that the Greek language was widely spoken. Lee Levine points out of the approximately 600 catacomb inscriptions from Rome in the later Empire, only 21% were in Latin, while 78% were in Greek and the remaining 1% in Hebrew and Aramaic. <sup>67</sup>
- Levine points out that Josephus, an historian of the first century CE, says even a slave can learn Greek. This implies it was a common language. <sup>68</sup>
- He also points out that Jews from the Diaspora would have spoken Greek. <sup>69</sup>
- There were some Jews in the upper classes that were given an advanced education in the Greek classics and in studies such as rhetoric and mathematics. There was a demand for such an education in the Empire in the areas of administration and business. Thus acquiring a basic Greek education was considered necessary for a better income. <sup>70</sup>.

## 2 **Palestinian History and the Ambivalent Jewish Response to Hellenism**

In an exploration as to whether or not the gospel writers were providing a critique of both Judaism and Hellenism in their gospel structures, there is also need to look for evidence that others around that time were doing a similar critique. What were Jewish writers concerned about in the centuries leading into and during the first century CE?

One of the distinguishing features of Jews, as distinct from other peoples of the Middle East was, that despite their immersion in Hellenistic culture, they also retained their faith in Jewish Law. According to Martin Hengel “The Jews were the only people of the East to enter into deliberate competition with the Greek view of the world and of history.”<sup>71</sup> At the same time there was on-going discernment in terms of what they would adopt from Hellenism, for example, cooperation with Greek-style public administration and what they would reject, for example attendance at blood sports in an amphitheatre.

The process of discernment here was not straightforward. In the 2nd BCE the upper classes of Judaism in Jerusalem had found that the Jewish law was hampering them from making more money and they tried to get rid of it. But the mass of the Jewish people, who came from the lower classes, revolted against them (168-164 BCE). The lower classes were victorious in this revolt and the Hasmonean rulers came into power in Palestine in 140-63 BCE. The four books of Maccabees in the Old Testament give a description of what happened.

Even while the Hasmoneans rejected the attempt at a full integration with Hellenism, they deliberately retained many of the administration practices already introduced. For example it

appears they retained the use of coins which they made bilingual.<sup>72</sup> They also learned the Greek language and acquired more Greek knowledge because they realised that without a Greek education they would lose their independence.

The practice of discernment of Hellenism then acceptance or rejection of its aspects continued. Consider the 2nd Book of Maccabees. This outlines the victory of the Hasmoneans over the inroads being made by the 'paganistic' Greek culture. But at the same time the writer uses a Greek literary structure for this book.<sup>73</sup> The same process is reflected in other books accepted into the canon of the Christian New Testament, for example the books of Koheleth, Daniel and Ben Sera.<sup>74</sup>

The process of acceptance or rejection is also evidenced in an offshoot of people from the Hasmoneans, believed to be the Essenes.<sup>75</sup> It is considered that the Essenes were connected with the manuscripts found at Qumran.<sup>76</sup> On the one hand these people asserted their rejection of Hellenistic culture. But the structure of their community (or communities) had more in common with Hellenistic social structures than did mainstream Judaism.<sup>77</sup>

The experience of Jews with Herod the Great who ruled from 37BCE to 4 BCE provides yet another example of the ambivalence with which Jews regarded Hellenistic culture and society. On the one hand Herod enthusiastically accepted higher Greek studies such as rhetoric. He employed the Peripatetic Nicolaus of Damascus, who had been teacher to the children of Cleopatra and Antony and the two became firm friends<sup>78</sup> Herod obtained and retained his position by cultivating links with the rulers in Rome.<sup>79</sup> He set about trying to establish Jerusalem as a "jewel" in the Greco-Roman world, with the same standard types of buildings to be found elsewhere. He set up a Gymnasium and this would have included a school

adjoined to it. He also established a library.<sup>80</sup> In all these activities he measured his progress against other great cities of the time and tried to outdo them. For instance the Temple was one of the largest of its type in the world.<sup>81</sup> He also encouraged upper class Jews to excel in Hellenistic culture and some structures e.g. a tomb built outside Jerusalem, were admired around the known world.<sup>82</sup>

In doing all of this, Herod established Jerusalem as the centre of the Jewish world, that is, as a centre of Jewish ritualistic sacrifices and Jewish learning and administration. He also succeeded in developing an outreach to all Jews around the Greco-Roman empire who constituted about 10% of the population of the Empire.<sup>83</sup> Both Herod and the Roman overlords would have gained considerable income from Jews visiting Jerusalem via the Temple drachma revenue.

Yet even while Jews of Jerusalem and the Diaspora supported the Temple there was still a process of discernment about Hellenism going on amongst them. For instance Herod had built an amphitheatre where there were blood sports with wild animals and between gladiators. But attendance at such a place was against Jewish law. The amphitheatre would therefore have been boycotted.<sup>84</sup> Josephus notes that unlike other public buildings, it was located outside the precincts of the city.<sup>85</sup> On the other hand it appears that there was some support for Herod's theatre and the hippodrome where races could be held.<sup>86</sup> But again, people remained suspicious. Levine comments on the record of Josephus about an outburst against Herod when it was mistakenly thought some of the prizes being given out at the hippodrome had idol worship images on them.<sup>87</sup>

Despite the grand building projects, the Jews had plenty of evidence to remind them that Herod's interest in learning did not match the moral demands of their own law and he had some of his own children murdered. Even the gospel of Matthew recorded the anomaly that the Jewish population witnessed in the life of Herod. On the one hand he was interested to hear from the Eastern kings who came following a star in the East. Then he murdered all the infants aged under two years around Bethlehem (Matthew 2:13-18).

### **3. Jewish Writings and the Response to Hellenism**

Interpretation of the Scriptures between 300 BCE and 100 CE shows that a process of discernment and response to Hellenistic culture was being reflected in the writings of the time. The historian Martin Hengel for instance comments on the interpretative writing of Jason of Cyrene. Jason was writing the history of Judaism from over the previous fifteen hundred years,

“The fact that he could attempt this in what is externally a completely Hellenistic, highly rhetorical form, is a sign of the flexibility of the Jewish religion and its capacity for adaptation to a new intellectual environment.”<sup>88</sup>

This was in fact a period described as Hellenistic Judaism.<sup>89</sup>

In was during this time the Jews realised that if they were to resist total assimilation into a Hellenistic environment they needed to extend the process of discernment into their writings as well as in their lifestyle. Thus, while they based their re-interpretation of the Torah on Hellenistic literary models, they exercised their own freedom in adopting which literary models and ideas would suit their own particular ends.<sup>90</sup>

Material from the First century BCE that was found at Qumran (in the 1940's) has shown that Scriptural interpretation in itself took on many more literary forms than that of the

traditionally accepted biblical commentary.<sup>91</sup> For instance the re-writing of a biblical story could in itself provide an interpretation of the story. Then, such a new interpretation would be further refined by later texts. An example of this process is provided in the Old Testament story of Joseph.<sup>92</sup> As demonstrated by Kugel, ancient interpreters would be trying to explain details of the stories about Joseph that appeared to be contradictory. The on-going refinement or elaboration of the original texts about him would be largely done in terms of "motifs".<sup>93</sup> These would be re-adjusted in an on-going way so that the overall scriptural story would continue to be viewed by its readers as "cryptic, relevant, perfect and the Word of God."<sup>94</sup>

In the history of the Jews, with their return from Babylon in (538 BCE), the interpretation of Scripture was accelerated. The Persian King Cyrus who permitted the return of the Jews had encouraged them to rebuild their Temple. He also encouraged the Egyptians to live according to their own ancestral law which was codified by Darius.<sup>95</sup> If the Jews did (or hoped to) have a similar permission given to them by Cyrus, this was an extra spur for them to clarify what their ancestral law actually was and try and make this more relevant to their times.

After Alexander the Great conquered Palestine in 332 BCE, and then after the establishment of the reign of the Ptolomies in 301 BCE, interpreters of Scripture again faced the challenge of grappling with inroads being made by a foreign culture. Decades later, with the rule of the Seleucid King Antiochus III (223-187 BCE) they were again encouraged to live according to their ancestral law. In this case they needed to clarify it in terms of their present Hellenistic environment. But then, thirty years later, Antiochus IV would try to totally Hellenise Jerusalem and its people. And again there was need for adjustment.<sup>96</sup>

The influence of Greek philosophy on Jewish material written over these years can be seen in the Wisdom literature and some of these books are included in the Christian Old Testament. Some biblical scholars may claim that this was a period when there was a synthesis of Judaism and Hellenism. And, at a cultural level this may have been true. But tension between the Judaic and the Hellenistic world views can still be seen in Jewish literature, even while Scriptural writers adopted concepts of God such as "Wisdom" which reflected the cultural beliefs of their overlords. Some may claim that this period of time was an "inter-testamental" period. But the Pentateuch of the Jews had already been written before the Babylonian exile and some of the "Wisdom" writings that were written between 300 BCE and 100 CE were eventually incorporated into the Christian New Testament. <sup>97</sup>

The impact of Hellenism on Judaism can be seen in books such as *Ecclesiastes* which was written by a person called Koholeth. This reflects the stance of Greek philosophy which asks questions about existence as such and its purpose. These sorts of questions do not reflect the certainty of the Jewish faith to be found in previous generations. <sup>98</sup>

The uncertainty and even disillusionment of Koholeth is also found in the book of *Ben Sira* or *Ecclesiasticus* written approximately 200-175 BCE <sup>99</sup> In this book Ben Sira tries to come to grips with the challenges of Greek philosophy and he re-interprets the Scriptures that the Jewish faith is based upon. On the one hand he points out how the prophetic tradition comes from God, whereas Hellenism only relies on human reason. <sup>100</sup> But at the same time he expresses confidence in the possibility of a rationalistic understanding of the world. <sup>101</sup> Ben Sira was held in high regard by the Jewish rabbis but they did not accept his book into their sacred texts, probably because they knew who the author was. His grandson was also well-

known.<sup>102</sup> On the other hand, his thinking was very much part of the Jewish interpretative process of the time.

In the adoption of books like Ecclesiastes and Ecclesiasticus into the Christian Canon, a similar process of on-going discernment was also adopted into the emerging church of the first century CE.

#### **4 A Spectrum of Acceptance of Hellenistic Culture**

In the Jewish situation around first century CE there was what could be described as a "spectrum" of acceptance of Hellenistic culture.

On the one hand the lower classes of Jews remained faithful to their law and although Greek was a fairly common language they did not have access to the high education that included the detailed study of rhetoric and classic philosophy. On the other hand, as Hengel notes, "It was necessary to get to grips with the Greek spirit which apparently dominated the world in so many areas, by learning as much as possible from it."<sup>103</sup> Upwardly mobile people would at least try to obtain some literacy in Greek.<sup>104</sup> At the upper end of the social scale there were Jews who were well advanced in Greek learning as in the case of the Jews of Alexandria.<sup>105</sup> There was also a school similar to that of Alexandria in Jerusalem although their culture was annihilated in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE.<sup>106</sup>

In Alexandria one of the prominent scholars in Hellenism was a Jew called Philo. While the writings of Philo did not have a great impact on Judaism itself he was a central figure in the early development of Christianity.<sup>107</sup> As with other Jewish scholars of the time Philo was conscious there were good and bad sides to the type of society based upon Hellenistic culture.

However, rather than weigh up the good and bad aspects of Hellenism itself, he praised the Greek culture in its purest form. But he also disparaged the way in which some of the Egyptians had adopted this culture.<sup>108</sup>

The historian Josephus, like other people of the time, had ambivalent experiences with Hellenism. On the one hand he had opposed the Greco-Roman Empire and had been a general in the Jewish army that revolted against Rome in 66 CE. But after the Jewish defeat, Vespasian spared the life of Josephus. Later again, when the prophecy of Josephus that Vespasian would become Emperor had come to pass, he was released.<sup>109</sup> Yet despite the debt Josephus owed to the Romans, the records of history that he used in his writings are based on an anti-Herodian source that was highly critical of the pro-Hellenistic Herod. Such criticisms contrasted with the descriptions of Herod that were given by Herod's friend Nicolaus of Damascus.<sup>110</sup>

## **5. Environment of the Gospel Writers e.g. the Cynics**

The gospel writers and writers of other New Testament literature found themselves in a general situation that was similar to the one described above. It is likely that at least some of them knew Greek. Peter for instance conducted a successful ministry in his later life outside Judea from Antioch, via Corinth to Rome.<sup>111</sup> So he must have been able to speak Greek. Even Jesus may have had some familiarity with the language and this has implications in terms of his actual words being recorded in the gospels. To illustrate this point, the town of Nazareth, where Jesus lived as an adult craftsman, was located near Sepphoris, a Hellenistic city being built by Herod Antipas. Jesus could have been employed there. In fact the building

of Sepphorus may have been a reason for Joseph, who was a craftsman, to move to Nazareth in the first place.<sup>112</sup> Also, Nazareth was located near the Roman road to Jerusalem.<sup>113</sup>

Despite the commonality of the Greek language at the time it is unlikely the gospel writers had the advanced learning in Greek classics that some of the upper class Jews enjoyed. But, given the environment, it is likely people in general had some knowledge of classical writers such as Homer (8th to 7th century BCE), and Plato and Aristotle (5th century BCE). Also, people were familiar with a common philosophy like that of the Stoics.

In his book *Christ and the Cynics*, F. Gerald Downing shows there are in fact close parallels between the teachings of the synoptic Gospels and the philosophy of the Greek Cynics.<sup>114</sup> which was an early strand of Stoicism.<sup>115</sup> The Cynic approach called into question the artificiality of the upper classes. It was reflected in the lifestyle and preaching of itinerants who travelled around with minimal possessions. Downing points out that parallels drawn between the Cynics and early Christian preachers have often been dismissed by scholars as irrelevant. But he says insufficient notice has been taken of the actual writings of the Cynics.<sup>116</sup> He also points out that the Gospels were mainly written for people who had a command of the Greek language and they largely come from a pagan background. Such people would have been familiar with this strand of Greek philosophy and would have associated it with Gospel preachers. Thus Paul would also have been aware of the association being made between himself and the Cynics.<sup>117</sup>

Downing points out the Cynics developed their preaching in terms of discussion and he suggests that this was how the basic stories of the Gospels were evolved as well. Thus, in the process of oral questions and answers there would have been a process of choosing or deleting

stories about Jesus according to what interested the listeners. The ordering of these stories could have been determined by mnemonics, that is, the stories were put into a pattern that could be easily memorised by the preachers and listeners. The use of parallels, for example in Mark's gospel, would have suited this purpose.

Paul's letter to the Galatians (a letter most scholars agree was written by Paul), shows a definite Cynic approach. For instance he chides the Galatians for their adherence to laws that were redundant. He advocates breaking free from social convention.<sup>118</sup> But at the same time it appears that Paul exercised discretion as to the extent to which he used the Cynic approach. In his dealings with the Corinthians he was appalled by the behaviour of someone who was living with his Father's wife (1 Cor 5.1-2). This was considered to be incest, even by pagan standards. Apparently the Corinthians, who had accepted this situation, could have been acting in terms of the "free from social conventions" attitude of the Cynic.<sup>119</sup> But Paul, in his reprimand of the Corinthians in his warning to them about this behaviour, he appears to switch from the Cynic approach to that of the more conservative Stoic approach regarding personal morals and the observance of convention.<sup>120</sup> Thus, as with other Jews in this period, Paul was prepared to use the thought structures and approaches that had been developed from the Hellenistic Cynics. But he exercised discretion as to the extent that he used their ideas.

## **6. Access to Hellenistic Education e.g. the Jerusalem Library**

Herod the Great not only built the Jewish Temple which, by the standards of the time was one of the largest and most magnificent in the Greco-Roman Empire.<sup>121</sup> He also established a library. It was his intent to "Hellenise" the Jews or at least equip them with the advantages of Hellenism. Herod's library would necessarily have contained the Greek classics such as

Homer's *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. These were the oldest and amongst the greatest of the Greek classics. People visiting Jerusalem annually over several days at a time would have had at least some access to such a library. The parents of Jesus for instance went up to Jerusalem each year. Such visitors could have picked up at least some rudimentary knowledge about Homer, even if this was at second or third hand. The poems of Homer were well known as reflected in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE when Cicero made a joke about Homer's structural use of *chiasmus* (circular parallels) "I'll be like Homer and put the cart before the horse."<sup>122</sup> Homer's use of more extended chiasmus, or *hysteron proteron* would also have been known. The whole structure of his poem the *Iliad* consists in fact, of an inverted (ABCDDCBA) parallel.<sup>123</sup>

Regular Jerusalem visitors could also have had a basic knowledge of Plato's *Republic* and the debate between himself and his student Aristotle who had left a collection of city constitutions.<sup>124</sup> Jerusalem visitors (or residents) could easily have been aware of Plato's dislike of Homer and other poets. This is reflected in the quote "We shall ask Homer and the other poets not to be angry if we delete these and all similar passages."<sup>125</sup>

As with other Jewish writers of the time, the writer of the first gospel would have exercised discernment as to what Greek literary models would have suited his purpose. Thus while Mark's gospel was on the one hand unique to its time, so also he could be expected to "echo" the established process of discernment. In fact he could have set out to provide a 'definitive' distinction of the differences between Hellenism and Judaism.

In terms of weighing up Hellenism as an acceptable type of society. If Mark and other gospel writers were providing a critique of Judaism and Hellenism in their gospel structures, one

could expect to find there, an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of Plato and Aristotle's teachings. Given there was common ground between these two philosophers, that is, the division between spirit and matter and reliance on rationalism, a gospel assessment of them would likely be set out in terms of a continuum line. If Mark, the first writer, was concerned with definitions of Judaism and Hellenism, he could have left the development of such a continuum line to be taken up by another gospel writer such as Luke who was, as compared with other New Testament writers, well educated in Greek ideas.<sup>126</sup>

Leading into the first century, Jewish writers were trying to work out what would make for the most viable type of society. They knew Plato and Aristotle had been caught up with the same subject centuries before. Plato put his own approach to social construction into his *Republic* and Aristotle put it into his collection of city constitutions and *Politica*. Thus in one sense Mark was carrying on a preoccupation of both the Greek and Jewish writers. But he was also assessing and incorporating these ideas around the person of Jesus. As compared with other Jewish writers, Mark would have exercised his own freedom in using or ignoring the Greek literary models available to him. Insofar as he may have adopted a Homeric structural model for his gospel, this itself would be a statement that he was not prepared to 'blindly' accept all of Plato's opinions, for example his opposition to democracy.<sup>127</sup>

Reasons for Mark's possible use of chiasmus (an A B C D E D C B A construction) would be similar to those of Homer's reliance on this literary model. Homer's poetry was meant to be publicly recited or read and Mark's text would have been used in a similar way. Thus in Homer's *Odyssey*, when for instance a number of questions were being asked (as when Odysseus met his mother in the underworld in the *Odyssey*) an audience was more likely to remember the last question first when it was answered.<sup>128</sup> Also the use of chiasmus allowed

for repetition. It provided balance, interest and a geometric structure. It also assisted memorisation for oral preaching. Not all of the *chiasmus* constructions and parallels in Homer are clear cut or tidy. But the writer could still be relying on this for the general shape of his material. John Welch says:

Where the inversion is less than perfect, some might contend that this is evidence that no inversion was ever intended by the writer at all. Rather, this might better be explained as evidence that the author simply took some liberty with the form, not adhering mechanically to the form for its own sake, but still choosing to operate within the general framework of an overall chiastic or related scheme.<sup>129</sup>

A chiasmus construction can omit a central point (ABCDDCBA) or have one (ABCDEDCBA). In terms of biblical critics and an understanding of Mark, if interpreters ignore such a possible literary construction they can miss out on a central point being made in the text.<sup>130</sup> In the case of Homer for instance, the use of extended chiasmus in *Odysseus* enables him to highlight the decision of Penelope to ‘abide by the test of the bow’. (This is at the centre of a concentric circle). In terms of Penelope’s relationship with the gods this is a key point in the meaning of the story. But only the detection and appreciation of an extended chiasmus literary structure will uncover it.<sup>131</sup>

The fact that Homer, the most revered writer in Hellenism, used the chiasmus structural model, should give cause for more reflection about the possible use of extended chiasmus in the gospels, especially in Mark’s introductory, definitive text. Cedric Whitman observes that “Homer’s *Iliad* consists of one large concentric pattern, within which a vast system of smaller ones, sometimes distinct and sometimes interlocking, give shape to the several parts of extended chiasmus.”<sup>132</sup> Mark could have used the a similar literary model for example to define the basis of Judaism the basis of Hellenism and then the basis of interaction between the individual person and their wider social environment.

A look beyond Mark's gospel to other New Testament writers shows they used extended chiasmus. A closer look at Paul's letters for instance shows that he uses the device in letters such as Galatians. According to Welsh, the New Testament letter to Timothy is clearly chiastic. But, on the other hand, in other letters such as the one to Titus Paul does not use this structure.<sup>133</sup> In the case of the *Book of Revelation* a case can be made that there is an extended chiasmus or *hyperon proteron* over the whole of this work. At the centre of the literary construction is the fall of Satan which is a key theme in the book.<sup>134</sup> An overall view of chiasmus in the New Testament shows that it is apparent the writers did not feel 'bound' to use the chiastic method. They would only do so in terms of whether or not it suited their intentions.

## **7. Summary of Chapter Two**

In terms of the social and literary environment of Mark, the first gospel writer, there was an on-going concern to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of Hellenism and compare these with Judaism. As with other writers Mark could use Hellenistic literary models if it suited his purposes for example the use of chiasm, as to be found in the poems of Homer, the most respected of Greek writers. Mark's special interest could have been in defining the basis of Judaism which was the moral law of God's commandments and in defining the basis of Hellenism which was concern for rationalistic order.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Indications of Hellenistic influence on early Church interpretation and the need to recognize this**

#### **1. Idealised Interpretation of the Law at the Beginning of the Church**

##### **(Outcome of the Jerusalem Council, Acts 15)**

Within the early church there would have been a special focus on trying to bring Jewish law and Greek idealism into the one ambit. A close look at an early Church Council, as recorded in the book of Acts, can demonstrate a way in which this was done. The section of Acts 15:1-35 deals with resolving a Jewish Christian conflict relating to the Law.<sup>135</sup> The use of Narrative Criticism in looking at the text about this Council of Jerusalem is particularly helpful here.

In simple terms the Jews that had converted to Christianity, especially those of the Pharisee sect, thought Gentile converts should be required to be circumcised. The verse of 15:1 describes how some people from Judea had gone to missionary areas to pressure Gentile converts into doing this. It appears they gave the impression they were authorised to do so, probably from the "Hebrew" section of the Church led by James (not the Apostle). The visit had triggered the trip made by Paul and Barnabas from the church in Antioch to Jerusalem and request a Church Council be held to sort out the question (15:2).

In 15:24 it was pointed out that the visitors did not have permission from the church leadership to spread such a message and this point was included in a letter from the Council. The letter also included the decision that was reached by the Jerusalem Church leadership (15:23). However it appears the visitors to Antioch (prior to the Council) carried considerable status in the Church (c/f Galatians 2:6) and in Paul's letter to the Galatians it appears this pro-circumcision lobby had coerced Peter into refraining from eating with Gentile converts (Gal 2:11). This practice had serious implications for joint participation in the Agape-Eucharist of the community. But it also fitted with a Jewish rule to refrain from eating Gentile food or entering the house of Gentiles. In Acts 10:14 Peter recounted a vision when he was told "What God has cleansed you must not call common." Paul had to later confront Peter about the reversal in his behaviour about this (Gal 2:11).

The major point at issue in the Jerusalem Council was circumcision (15:1). This painful and even dangerous operation for adults was deterring Gentiles from joining the church. A pro-circumcision lobby (whether from Jews or from Christian Jews) was also putting missionaries such as Paul in danger. For instance Paul had been dragged out of Antioch and left for dead after "Jews" had persuaded the crowds to stone him (14:19). But despite the opposition Paul had continued to tell Gentile converts circumcision was not necessary and salvation was to be found through faith or "the spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

At the convened Jerusalem Council, Peter again recounted how he had witnessed the Holy Spirit descend on Gentile converts in the same way as the Holy Spirit had filled the apostles at the time of Pentecost 15:8-9. In terms of the narrative as presented by Luke, the participants at the Council should have been familiar with the event as described by Peter. It showed how God's Holy Spirit, whom Luke portrays as guiding and empowering the church, came to

Gentiles as well as Jews.<sup>136</sup> The implication here was that a convert could not expect some sort of "coerced salvation" from God on the basis of their observation of a a myriad of rituals as pursued by many Pharisees.

Peter's experience of the Holy Spirit and his recollection of it reflected an emerging realisation in the Church that Pentecost marked a new beginning for the followers of Jesus. This was dominated by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself had heralded such a beginning when he returned to his native Nazareth, even though the people there had rejected him (Luke 16:4-30).

In terms of biblical interpretation, Peter's reference to the coming of the Holy Spirit and Pentecost has relevance to whether or not the early Church believed that an "end time" or parousia was imminent. According to Hans Conzelman, whose book *The Theology of St Luke* (1957) had such influence, the early Church thought in terms of three time phases - that of the Old Testament, the time of Jesus and a time of waiting for his return or parousia.<sup>137</sup> Conzelman said at the time of Luke such a time of waiting was becoming more extended and there was need for the Church to clarify its policies and future direction. But on the other hand, more recent scholars consider that there was an eschatology in the early church that incorporated the idea of Jesus coming in a spiritual sense, rather than the church needing to wait for an "end-time."<sup>138</sup> There was the idea that such a presence of the Holy Spirit was increasing as the position of the church and its mission became ever more secure and more widespread. Through the Holy Spirit, God was empowering the successors of Jesus, the apostles and their disciples in turn, to carry on his mission and bring the good news of the gospel it to all "the nations"

In the early church such a sense of the Spirit would have inspired confidence in the church leaders to clarify and make decisions about their future directions especially in relation to the Law and the cultural and social practices of the increasing number and proportion of Gentile converts. Thus in Luke's account of the Jerusalem Council there is the sense of an outward movement towards the Gentiles. Thus mention of "the nations" (that is, the Gentiles) is repeatedly mentioned in the text c/f 15:3, 7, 12, 14, 17, 19, 23.

In terms of an interpretation of Acts 15:1-35, it is helpful to keep in mind the observations made by the Catholic Pontifical Commission of 1993.<sup>139</sup> Their document describes the value of narrative criticism which is a "synchronic" approach to gospel interpretation and which helps to complement the necessary "diachronic" approach of Historical Criticism.<sup>140</sup> The Commission also points out the need to distinguish between the writer and the narrator.<sup>141</sup> Thus even while Luke the narrator was shaping the text to give an account of the Jewish Council, at a deeper level, he was organising the presentation of his theological ideas, which may or may not, have been explicitly mentioned in the story.

Luke the implied narrator was shaping the account of the Council to persuade his implied readers that the Council decision was both credible and inspired by the Holy Spirit. Thus the speeches were crafted in a rhetorical style similar to that described by Greek philosophers such as Aristotle.<sup>142</sup> The literary tools of Greco-Roman culture were being used even while Luke (through the speakers at the Council) was persuading a largely Jewish audience there, in Jerusalem, to admit Gentiles into their company.

Prior to the presentation of Peter's speech and the Council's decision, Luke mentions the great joy that had been given to people in Phoenicia and Samaria when Paul and Barnabas had told

them of the "conversion of the nations." (15:3). This "good news" was repeated at the Council as well (15:12). In terms of the historical story, Paul and Barnabas showed themselves to be adroit in relating the success of their mission on their way to Jerusalem. Some of their listeners, also on their way to the Council, were likely to spread the good news amongst attendees before the Council itself got underway.

Scholars describe Luke's approach to his two texts of his Gospel and Acts as an optimistic one.<sup>143</sup> There would have been an overall purpose in this. Luke was stressing the glory and joy of God's on-going planned action, rather than the dimensions of Jesus' suffering. This helped to keep a sense of momentum going as the story of God's actions unfolded. It might be argued by some that Luke fails to have a theology of the cross. However as Joseph Fitzmyer points out, Luke's theology should be approached on its own terms rather than being compared with the theologies of Mark and Paul.<sup>144</sup> He also says that Luke never gives any indication of having read the letters of Paul.<sup>145</sup> Thus on the one hand the "we" passages of the text claim Luke was a fellow missionary with Paul and a travelling companion on Paul's lengthy sea journey (Acts 27-8). At one point Paul claims in his letters "Luke alone is with me" (2 Timothy 4:11). But apart from Paul's speeches in Acts, Luke's concepts, differ markedly from Paul's and even from the other evangelists.<sup>146</sup> Each of the gospel writers and the main protagonists in the gospel story, have their own angle on how the early Church can shape its future based on the composition of both Jewish and Gentile converts.

Thus, in writing, Luke had his own agenda. Throughout Luke-Acts there is mention of a movement towards Jerusalem and then towards Rome. At another literary level there is the sense that God, the main character, is pushing Jesus and then his successors forward in terms of a "plan."<sup>147</sup> To while Luke presents Jesus as the "hero" in the gospel, his successors are

also shown to be "heroes" and they continue on with the plan of God in Acts. The narrative presentation of 'the hero' has allowed comparisons to be drawn between the "action heroes" of Luke-Acts and the heroes of the Greek writer Homer, for example in the use of verbs by the two writers.<sup>148</sup>

Even within the story of the Jewish Council In Acts 15:1-35 the sense of movement is evident here as well. In fact it appears to override some of the detail. Luke's style of telescoping events and glossing over negative complexity adds to this.<sup>149</sup> For instance Paul and Barnabas are at the Council, but they appear to have a passive role in the decision making there. Then in Acts 21:25 it appears that Paul himself was barely aware of the Council's outcome.<sup>150</sup> Also a closer look at the text, could raise questions about whether or not all of the people at the Council really understood what was going on. This lack of awareness is arguably reflected in biblical commentaries that describe the Council as being very "problematic' in terms of interpretation.<sup>151</sup> In the overall circumstance of trying to bring Judaism and Hellenism, that is, Jewish and Gentile converts together, it is not surprising that a key event in this effort was difficult to describe and the description has been difficult to interpret.

The text of Acts 15:5 says the council controversy was fuelled by converted members of the Pharisee sect who said Gentile converts should be circumcised and should be required to keep the law of Moses. The mention of Pharisees here is significant. Pharisees did not simply observe a rule of circumcision. Rather their whole lives were dominated by ritualistic rules that had been linked with the commandments. The rules were like an exterior cover of the key commandments of Moses. One might assume that by keeping the detailed rules people would be more likely to keep the key commandments of Moses as well. However Jesus had confrontations with the Pharisees on this very issue. He pointed out the failure of Pharisees to

keep the essential commandments. For instance they were putting their property into "Corban" (a form of dedication) and then saying they did not have to support their parents (Mark 7:11). Jesus even said that the Gentile converts to Judaism of such Pharisees were finishing up morally worse than they were before (Luke 11:26). Following this line of Jesus, at the assembly, Peter talked of the inability of both himself and those present to keep details of "the law." It was therefore unfair to place such burdens on converts (15:10). Peter's mention of this point shows that he, and presumably most of the people present, realised that more being imposed on the Gentile converts by the Pharisee agitators than just circumcision.

In the text about the Jerusalem Council, after Peter's statement about the Holy Spirit, the meeting was taken over by another leader called James. The emergence of James at this point gives some indication of the early church's structure and history. Some writers such as Kaseman claim it was an early indication of the development of "catholicity" in the Church and a move away from its original, more flexible shape.<sup>152</sup> Feminist writers such as Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza with her "hermeneutics of suspicion" would see a council of apparently male elders as a step towards a more patriarchal church model with a patriarchal stance similar to that of the Greco-Roman over-culture.<sup>153</sup>

At the Council Peter appeared to defer to the leadership of the elders and James who was apparently the elected leader.<sup>154</sup> Paul in turn appeared to defer to this leadership of the church in Antioch, given that he was appointed by the Church in Antioch to attend the Council. The Antiochene Church in turn deferred to the Mother Church in Jerusalem. This sort of background to the authority structure of the Church as provided by Luke, shows the Council decision to be pivotal to the Church's future direction.

Within the dynamics of the Council, the debate appeared to move from circumcision towards the dietary rules that would have been affecting Gentile Christian participation in the agape-Eucharist. Special weight was given to James' view about this, not just because he was (apparently) Bishop of Jerusalem but also because traditionally his credentials about law observance were above reproach.<sup>155</sup>

Some scholars such as Richard Pervo claim that Luke primarily wrote for entertainment and edification.<sup>156</sup> But at depth there is more than "just a story" going on in Luke's account of the Council.<sup>157</sup>

Ironically enough the chapter in Acts begins with the presentation of a heated debate about circumcision that threatens to split the church. But the solution offered in verse 20 does not appear to even touch on this subject. Rather it deals with four requirements that are parallel to those required of Gentile aliens who are living in Palestine. These requirements entail rules against the pollution of idols including eating sacrificial meat (Lev. 17:8-9), sexual immorality including certain types of marriages (Lev. 18:1-30), eating strangled animals that is, those not ritually slaughtered (Lev.17:13), and eating animal blood (17:10-14).<sup>158</sup> The requirements that James diplomatically puts forward at the Council appear to enable Gentiles to participate in meals with Jews, especially the Agape-Eucharist without further cause of disruption.<sup>159</sup> Thus according to the Council, its decree on this, to be carried by Paul and Barnabas to Antioch, appears to resolve the question (15:25).

However in a wider context of Acts, it appears that the circumcision question (which was the reason for the Council in the first place) does not appear to have been resolved. Even in the 2nd Century, in Justin Martyr's *Letter to Trypho* the question is (again) raised " Why do you

Christians who claim to be like us, not celebrate the Jewish festivals, or keep the Sabbath, or circumcise?"<sup>160</sup> Further along in the narrative of Acts there is still tension about circumcision and full adherence to the Jewish law. In Acts 21 when Paul returned to Jerusalem he was greeted by James and the elders (v.8). But James warned him about "tens of thousands of believing Jews who were all zealots of the law." (v20). In fact this sentence Luke appears to be understating the sort of pressure that James and the elders were still under.

Further complications about the effectiveness of the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 appear when Luke's account of it is compared with Paul's account in Galatians 2. Inconsistencies include the inference that after his conversion Paul had only gone to Jerusalem twice. But Acts implies he went three times, that is, after his conversion (9:26), in relation to a famine (11:30) and then to the Council (15:2). More significantly, Paul does not mention the "edict" of the Council in Galatians even though in Acts Luke says he was entrusted to take this edict to the missionary Churches.

The failure of Paul to mention the Council edict is magnified by the special emphasis that Luke gives to the Council in the structure of Acts. It is placed right in the centre of his narrative. It is presented as a decisive turning point in the overall story and as a "story kernel."<sup>161</sup> Prior to the Council, the Jerusalem Church and the apostles are central to the action. But after the Council, the main actor becomes Paul and apart from the verse of 16:4 the apostles are no longer mentioned. Also, immediately after the Council Paul sets out on his second missionary journey and this takes in places such as Asia Minor 15:36, Macedonia 16:11, Athens 17:16 and Corinth 18:1. Thus focus in the Luke's text of Acts has now moved to Paul's mission to the Gentiles.

Scholars such as Tannehill say that it is the great tragedy of Acts that the mission to the Jews appears to fail.<sup>162</sup> But there are contradictions here, that is, as to whether or not such a mission has failed. On the one hand Paul states he will no longer try to deal with the Jews (18:6). But later on in the story he is preaching to them (19:8). Scholars such as Jacob Jervell and Joseph Fitzmyer take a more optimistic view of an apparent demise of the mission to the Jews. They say that rather than the Jewish mission being a failure, the outreach to the Gentiles was in fact built upon the successful conversion of a great number of Jews. These people formed a base from which it was possible to make an outreach to the Gentiles.<sup>163</sup>

Given Luke's ability to present accurate background details, one would expect that his account of the important Council would be historically accurate as well, even if, according to the style of the time he dramatised this.<sup>164</sup> According to Powell, Luke was using all three types of the genre of a Greek novel known at the time, that is, history, biography and the novel.<sup>165</sup> Luke also shows flexibility in his ability to shape speeches to fit the viewpoints of the speaker. Thus the earlier speeches in Acts appear to be more primitive and they echo Semitisms. But later speeches for example at the Areopagus in Athens (17: 21-31), show that a classical Greek style is being used.<sup>166</sup> Luke also shows sensitivity to people's viewpoints. Thus expressions peculiar to Paul are used in Paul's speeches even though these expressions are scarce in the rest of the text.<sup>167</sup>

All this being the case, one must wonder what dimensions are at work in the speech of James when he presents the Jerusalem Council with an "edict" that is supposed to resolve the circumcision crisis but in fact only appears to be about dietary rules.

There appears to be at least two key omissions in Biblical Commentaries and the so-called “dietary rules” solution. First it appears that Gentiles are being accepted into the church as if they themselves have little if anything to offer Christianity. Thus on the one hand the Jews have the tradition and strengths of the Mosaic law. But the Gentiles only appear to have negative customs that need to be prohibited. This omission of what Gentiles can contribute appears to contradict the whole tenor of Luke's writing. His writing for a start was solidly based on the sophistications of Greek culture.<sup>168</sup> One would expect a more understanding approach to the Gentiles.

Secondly it appears on the surface that James finds a solution to the present Church crisis by harking back to the book of Leviticus and elsewhere in the Old Testament. This solution may have appeared to carry weight with an audience of hostile Christian Pharisees. But the decision of James is being presented by Luke as being pivotal in the narrative and in the future direction of the church. Why then would there not be some reference in the “solution” to the teachings of Jesus himself?

These two "difficulties" plus other problems raised in Biblical commentaries could possibly be explained if there were a connection between the "dietary rules" of Acts 15:20 and "the way" that Paul said he had been preaching about. Here as well, there were problems in explanation. A literal translation of Acts 19:23 has Paul saying "Now there was about time that trouble no little concerning the way". In fact Paul's first confrontation with "the way" was in his own misunderstanding of it. In Acts 9:2 he was arresting both men and women that he had found following the "way".

To pick up on the two points raised above. What would Gentiles have to offer the church that would enable them to make their own response to the law of Moses? The whole of Hellenistic culture of course, cannot be summed up in a few words. But a quick overview would accept that it was largely based on rationalism and abstract concepts. Plato's *Republic* for instance was about an idealised society - impossible in fact to actually put into practice, but with ideals that could be pursued. Thus in terms of the commandments, rather than taking the minimalist approach of for example 'thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery or thou shalt not steal', these could be interpreted in an "idealistic" fashion. People could push beyond the boundaries of the "thou shalt not" and towards the avoidance of cruelty as such (c/f "thou shalt not kill), respect for the prime social supports of others (c/f "thou shalt not commit adultery" and the avoidance of unfair business practices (c/f "thou shalt not steal). They could push even further than this, beyond a tribal structure of mutual responsibility towards the universal provision of health care, social security and the production and provision of material goods. Arguably present day industry structures are based on such "ideals." In the days of a global economy industry outreach is having this outcome.

The question arises. Does this sort of development of the key social Commandments come from the teaching of Jesus? The gospel of Mark appears to challenge people towards this approach. It records a man asking Jesus "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17). Jesus replies, "You know the commandments; Do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honour your mother and father." (Mark 10:19) The man replies that he has observed these commandments since his youth. Jesus then challenges him to "Go sell what you have, give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come follow me." (Mark 10:21) In simple terms the challenge is to go beyond "do not kill, commit adultery or steal." Rather than steal, the man is challenged to contribute

to others. Rather than setting up his own family base he is challenged to identify with Jesus and help others rather than a family group find social support and self-determination. The same sort of "raising of the bar" of these three key commandments is found in Matthew 5:21-6:34. An abbreviated version of Matthew shows: "You have heard it said... "You shall not kill."...But I say to you that every man that is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment.... You have heard it said "You shall not commit adultery."...But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart..... "Do not be anxious about "What shall we eat? Or "What shall we drink? Arguably Luke repeats this challenge as well when he shows Jesus to be resisting the the temptations of the devil in 4:1-12. The devil tempts him to produce material goods v.4 (c/f thou shalt not steal). He tempts him to assume power over others v.6 (c/f thou shalt not kill). He tempts him to assume the support of his 'social' group v.11 (c/f thou shalt not commit adultery) But Jesus asserts there is more to found in life than material wealth, power and adulation.

With such a positive focus on the key social commandments there would not be the need for the observance of circumcision or a fabric of ritualistic details to "protect" the commandments.

While the challenge of Jesus is set out in the three synoptic gospels, such a presentation of the law would not have been easy in the early environment of Christian Jews. Most of Paul's problems were caused by Jews, or Christian Jews. He could not even convince them about his identity. Before Governor Felix, he asserts he has been trying to live according to "the way" even though his accusers claim that he has been a founder of the 'Nazarene sect' (24:14).

In terms of "the way," which is possibly a key to understanding the edict of Acts 15:20, there are instances in Acts when a full commitment is being made by people along the same lines of the challenge made by Jesus to the young man in Mark 10:20. When Paul eventually returns to Jerusalem and James mentions the "tens of thousands" of Jewish converts all "zealous for the law" this implies that the tension in Jerusalem about law observance is ready to erupt (c/f 21:20). James asks Paul to participate in a Temple ceremony in which some Christians are taking a "vow" (v. 24). James hopes that such an attendance will show these Jewish converts Paul's respect for the law. But apparently before the ceremony Paul is seen with a Gentile friend in the street (v. 29). Attendees at the Temple ceremony claim that he took Gentiles into the restricted area of the Temple (v. 28). A riot erupted and the Romans took Paul into protective custody (v. 30-32). Later, Paul's nephew found out (apparently from within Christian circles) that forty plus people had taken a vow not to eat or drink till they had killed Paul (23:16). An implied reader could wonder here if the vow taken by these people was a "parody" of the vow that was being taken by the four people earlier on in the Temple. One could also wonder if this story about the riot in the Temple is a surface indication in the text of the deep hostility that was being taken by some Christian Jews towards the "way" of observing the commandments that was being taught by Paul. Luke says it was Asian Jews in the temple that triggered the riot 21:27. But they had ready responders.

These factors, as recorded in Acts, leads to an exploration of the layers of meaning that are to be found in the "edict" presented by James to the Jerusalem Council (15:20). On the surface it dealt with some dietary regulations, already set out in the Old Testament. Observance of these rules would help to smooth the participation of Gentiles in the Agape-Eucharistic meal. But at the same time the edict could have carried a double meaning which encompassed a whole approach to the law based on "the way" as taught by Paul and which was both inspired

by and suited to, an idealistic, Gentile view of the law. It is interesting to note that when James asked Paul to attend a Temple ceremony in which a vow was to be taken James again referred to the edict of the Jerusalem Council (21:25).

In looking for parallels, one can work out that when James mentioned "blood" in the dietary regulations of 15:20 it could imply cruelty of all kinds, including blood sports which were so popular in Greco-Roman culture. When he mentioned "fornication" he could be talking about uncommitted sex as such, rather than adultery with another married person (or relative). When he spoke of "strangling" he could be picking up on the preaching of Amos whom he had just quoted. Amos railed against unjust business practices (Amos 2:6-7).

Such an interpretation of Acts 15:20 would solve many of the difficulties raised by biblical commentators. It would combine both the circumcision question with a dietary one and thus deal with the prime purpose of the Council which was supposed to be about the circumcision question. It would help explain why "fornication" was mentioned in the context of dietary rules. It would tie in with Paul's preaching about "the way" in which he had been teaching observance of the law. It would also help to explain Paul's silence about the edict. He would not want to draw attention to a secondary meaning in the "dietary rules" that some at least who were present at the Council were likely to oppose. On the other hand it is understandable that the people at Antioch were more likely to pick up on a secondary, double meaning in the "dietary rules" and they rejoiced about it (15:31). Another reason Paul could have avoided mention of the edict was that he was developing his own theology in support of "the way". This view was distinct from the perspective being taken by Luke (and James) and Paul's mention of the edict could have confused the two approaches.

Some commentaries such as Peake claim that there could not be a link between the dietary regulations of Acts 15:20 and morality. It says "a simple moral law would not have been transformed into a dietary law." <sup>169</sup> However it should be noted that an alternative text for Acts 15, that is, the Western text, as distinct from the probably older Alexandrian text, does make a connection between verse 20 and a moral meaning.

Ernst Haenchen sets out distinguishing features of the Western text. For a start it is almost ten per cent longer than the Eastern or Alexandrian text and it provides explanations for this text. It also appears to have a harsher view of Judaism and it emphasises 'Gentile' aspects and Christian differences from Judaism such as the Christian theology of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 15:20 the Western text omits reference to "things strangled" and it replaces this phrase with a decree to "refrain from doing to another what you would not want done to you." If the Eastern text of "things strangled" was referring in a secondary meaning to unjust business practices, it would be reasonable to replace it with a more obvious reference to the avoidance of unfairness. Thus "refrain from doing to another what you would not done to you," matches the phrase that it replaces. This phrase also gives a moral slant to the other aspects of the decree, that is, the worship of idols and the shedding of blood. In fact Martin Powell claims the replacement statement summarises a moral position that covers all the details of the "dietary rule". He says "Thus the Western text presents the four restrictions placed on Gentile Christians in a way that avoids any reference to Jewish dietary laws." <sup>170</sup>

It may be an unfortunate omission that in most Bibles and therefore Commentaries, the version of the Western text for verse 20 is overlooked.

The Western text may appear to be later. However some parts of it date back to the second century. Also it was cited by many of the church writers in the West, for example, Irenaeus, Tertullian and Cyprian.<sup>171</sup> Even if the Western text did entail the re-writing of an earlier text such re-writing was a form of interpretation. Such people writing the text were “implied readers” living soon after Acts was written and they would still be aware of the historical situation of the Jerusalem Council. Also they were re-writing at a time when there was an emphasis on interpretation that took into account the whole of Scripture. This was being stressed by Irenaeus who was trying to re-claim the Scriptures for Christianity in opposition to the heresy of the Gnostics. It was also a time before the use of commentaries, as introduced by Origen in the third century.<sup>172</sup> Thus in re-writing an earlier text (if there was one), the Western text writers could be taking into account the earlier challenge put out by Jesus and repeated in Matthew and Luke. The re-writing could be in view of a repetition of the challenge being taken up and put out by James and the successive leaders in the early Church.

In conclusion, an exegesis of Acts 15, and in particular Acts 15:20 shows the extent to which Luke as author was able to provide a narrative that both taught his own theology and also present the complexities faced by the early church in trying to set up a new type of social system. This new system was not only based on the Commandments of Judaism but it also incorporated the best aspects of Greek culture.

## **2. Mark’s Historical Situation and His Use of Homer’s Extended Chiasmus**

While the historical situation of James, the elders and the Church leadership in Jerusalem allowed them to conduct a Council and debate the future direction of the Church, this situation was not available to Mark when he wrote the first gospel reputedly in about 70 CE.

The Temple had been destroyed. So also the cultural heritage of an educated class of Jews in Jerusalem had gone. The priesthood was gone. The Temple system with its rituals of sacrifice as also its culture had been destroyed. The population had virtually disappeared. They had either been killed or had managed to flee before the Roman army arrived. It would seem the Church leadership had either followed Paul to Rome, or they had fled to other places such as Ephesus.

Many scholars believe a sizeable piece of Mark's text (chapter thirteen), appears to relate to this terrible crisis. Rome was taking an extreme position of wiping out the centre piece of Judaism altogether. Christians had already been suffering persecution under the Emperor Nero from 64 CE. For their own survival with a predominantly Gentile membership, they needed to clarify their identity, both in relation to Judaism and in relation to the Greco Roman Empire.

Thus re-telling the story of Jesus was important. But it was also of paramount importance at the time to re-tell the story to show that the movement that Jesus had started, did not reject Hellenism as such. Rather it incorporated it. What better literary method could there be for Mark in presenting this message, than to use the literary structure of the oldest and most revered classical writer in Greco-Roman culture, that is, Homer.

One of the characteristic features of Homer's poetry was his use of inverted parallels, that is the literary construction of A B C D E D C B A. This sort of construction is also called chiasmus. The use of chiasmus was not in fact peculiar to the Hellenistic culture and it can also be found in Hebrew poetry.<sup>173</sup> In fact some suggest that the Greeks originally picked up this literary method of writing from the Semitic culture.<sup>174</sup> But insofar as Mark copied

Homer's approach his choice of a literary model would have been related to his own and the Church's historical situation.

The use of extended chiasmus by Mark would enable him to develop 'under meanings' to the story of Jesus, unify whole sections of his text and also show that his work had permanent relevance by defining the reality of social life itself. Some claim that writing of the time did not have paragraphs as such.<sup>175</sup> But each step in an extended circle (for example the name of a place where Jesus went) could provide a new "paragraph," or group of connected sentences, as also a heading. It should also be noted that the use of places to form such a circle would provide an objective test of a detected circle. That is, two places either are the same or they are not. This is a simple yes/no test of science. The yes/no approach would meet a requirement of credibility as pointed out in the writings about chiasmus by John Welch.<sup>176</sup>

While Welch does not support the idea of gospel writers using paragraphs his comments about chiasmus does fit a description of the text that makes the claim that paragraphing was in fact used. He explains that in striving for objectivity, it is reasonable to expect that significant repetitions would be readily apparent and the overall structure of text (or collection of sentences) would be well balanced. Thus the second half of a parallel should tend to repeat the first half in a recognizable way. The juxtaposition of the two central sections should be marked and highly accentuated. Welch also says "Key words, echoes and balancing should be distinct and should serve defined purposes within the structure."<sup>177</sup>

If the names of places were used as focal points for parallels, there would be a Homer-like dramatic effect given to the text. The sense of urgency would be given as also the sense of a "hero" going into battle. This style of writing would also recall the funerary urns of Athens

that apparently influenced Homer.<sup>178</sup> In the case Mark, Jesus sets out to establish the rule of God.<sup>179</sup> One could assume that intrinsic to the “rule of God” would be a clarification of what viable type of society is being established. Thus with the use of the *hysteron proteron*, structure the narrative of Jesus could be told on one dimension while, as described by the Pontifical Commission, a “form of logic and meaning (would) underlie the narrative and discursive organisation of all discourse.”<sup>180</sup>

Because interpretations of Scripture in the first century CE assumed the texts were cryptic, perfect, relevant and the Word of God,<sup>181</sup> Mark the writer could assume his readers would look for such an underlying line of logic. Consider:

- a. A structure using *hysteron proteron* (extended, inverted parallels) could be **cryptic**, that is, not mentioned explicitly in the story, but to be found within the text.
- b. Extended circular structures in the gospel could be working through points of on-going **relevance** involving the dialectical tension between two quite different types of society. In the situation of Mark this was Judaism and Hellenism.
- b. The use of extended chiasmus in Mark’s gospel would be particularly helpful in keeping a basic unity and geometric proportion to the text. It would demonstrate its “**perfection**” which is the third assumption in scripture interpretation.
- d. Because the extended circles would help to develop universal themes this would tie in with the authority of the text as being the **Word of God**. The text would thus be dealing with social reality at its deepest levels.

If the whole of Mark's introductory gospel fitted into a tight "under-structure" that was geared towards clarifying the differences between a society based on law (Judaism) and a society based on order (Hellenism), other gospels would be likely to follow suit, given they are of the same basic literary genre and written for the same overall purpose. The whole of these later gospels therefore would also fit into a tight structure which was geared towards this kind of clarification and assessment. Whether or not later gospel writers set out their "under-structure" using *hysteron proteron* would be another question. But if Mark was following the Greek practice of providing abstract definitions, one could suspect that he, in any case, would use circular literary constructions.

### **3. Hellenistic Influence on First Century Christian Theology**

A major reason why Christianity spread so quickly in the Roman Empire was because its early leaders quickly formulated its faith into a coherent system of belief that appealed to educated pagans.<sup>182</sup> They did this with the tools of Greek philosophy and in particular with Platonic philosophy which dominated at the time and which continues to dominate Christian understanding of human nature.<sup>183</sup> The gospels themselves contained a depiction of Jesus which in some ways could be understood in Platonic terms rather than the Old Testament. In fact given the hesitancy of Jewish response to preachers such as Paul, one could say an understanding of Jesus Christ could only be formulated through the tools of philosophy. Educated pagans were familiar with these. In his book *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity*, Christopher Stead lists some of the "difficult to understand" features of the life of Jesus:

Jesus was presented as unquestionably a man. But “He is set apart from other men by the authority with which he spoke, his miraculous powers, the prophecies which he fulfilled, his dispensation of the Spirit, his declared fellowship with the Father, his virginal conception and above all by his rising from the dead. ... the Fourth Gospel presents him as a heavenly being come down to earth, who can speak of ‘the glory which he had with his Father before the world existed’ (John 17:5).<sup>184</sup>

A key idea in Greek philosophy which assisted understanding of Jesus was Plato’s theory of Forms, even though (ironically) there was some scepticism about it.<sup>185</sup> Plato thought of God as pure being, goodness and truth. As such God was simple, one and unchanging.<sup>186</sup> This conception differed from that of the Old Testament which had a more anthropomorphic view of God as He could change his mind.<sup>187</sup>

Other Greek philosophies threw light on further understanding of the connection between Jesus and the Father. The Pythagoreans for instance had the idea of a ‘divine spark’ in people that was akin to God. The Christians adopted this idea but modified it with the idea of a Divine Spirit as a particular gift of inspiration but not theirs to control.<sup>188</sup> The Stoics believed there was a rational principle of the universe and their ethics considered action should be governed by reason. They compared the immanence of God in the world with that of honey spread through honeycomb<sup>189</sup> The Stoics also taught that the supreme principle of the universe had lesser powers with a more direct influence over the world, for example angels, which were like an idealised self. Of particular use to early Christian theologians was the Stoic idea of a Logos who had a life of his own and yet who could endure the radiance of the Father.<sup>190</sup> Philo (25 BCE – 45 CE), who was a Hellenistic Jew writing in the first century CE, had special influence over Christian thinking. He interpreted the Old Testament in terms of allegory and claimed that the exact wording of biblical text could be understood in terms of Greek philosophy.<sup>191</sup> Philo considered the Logos to be the totality of Plato’s forms.<sup>192</sup> He also connected the Logos to Sophia or Wisdom in the Old Testament and he claimed Sophia was masculine even though the language associated with it was in the feminine.<sup>193</sup> He did

however refer to her as feminine elsewhere!<sup>194</sup> But Philo's approach and emphasis on the Logos made it easier for Christians to adopt the idea that the Logos and Jesus were the same. According to Christopher Stead the early Church Fathers were by an large not philosophers themselves, despite their use of philosophy. The few exceptions included Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Augustine. On the one hand the Church Fathers had an interest in topics that were similar to that of philosophers such as the problems of theism, the origin of the world, the nature of evil and the interplay of fate and free will.<sup>195</sup> They were also ready to argue for their position. However they lacked the dispassionate approach of philosophers and they gave priority to tradition and community. Thus, while they had an interest in philosophy and used its terminology, they did not acquire the same sorts of skills as philosophers of the time and they made little contribution themselves to philosophy. Generally philosophy was considered to be an auxiliary to Christian faith.<sup>196</sup>

Despite this it did not prevent early theologians from using philosophical concepts and indeed it appeared that only such concepts could throw light on anomalies about the person of Jesus. Gradually there was a shift with the early Christian theologians and the Torah was no longer central to their thinking. Rather they saw that the future lay with understanding God, Word and Spirit.<sup>197</sup> Platonic philosophy was a key to such understanding. Thus Augustine for instance thought of Platonic philosophy as the perfect fit for Christianity and he synthesised the two.<sup>198</sup>

However, despite a reliance on philosophy, during the first and second centuries the early Church Fathers formulated a doctrine of the Trinity which was different from the triadic approaches of other philosophers of the time.<sup>199</sup> But it was in the context of philosophy that the formulation about the Trinity was made. In fact the whole debate about clarification of

the Trinity was in a Platonic tradition. This debate lasted from approximately the second century to the Council of Chalcedon in 451.<sup>200</sup> In the debate theologians relied on the word definitions of philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics although even so there was a confusion which continued.

In his book Stead explains some of the background to the confusion.

Problems arise from the fact that the Latin word *essential*, which is the exact equivalent of *ousia* fell out of use. Latin theologians therefore translated *ousia* by *substantia*, which is etymologically equivalent to the Greek ‘hypostasis’. The Latins thus used *substantia* to express the divine unity; the Greeks used the corresponding word to confess three hypostases: Father, Son and Spirit.<sup>201</sup>

Besides the lack of clarification about the meanings of the key words, *ousia* and ‘hypostasis’ there was an overlap in many of their uses and sometimes the words were used interchangeably. Eventually the Cappadocian Fathers stipulated that *ousia* means substance and ‘hypostasis’ means person. In terms of this clarification the theologians relied on the Stoic meaning of *ousia* for the clearest meaning of the word, that is, it meant the final substance that is to be found at the bottom of urine.<sup>202</sup>

Stead says some of the confusion about word meanings may have been avoided if there had been a bigger emphasis on the contributory work of the members of the Trinity rather than their origin.<sup>203</sup> He also notes that early Church Fathers of course had no access to the modern methods of lexicographers. But at least they had access to some of the tools of Greek philosophy.

In the adoption of Greek philosophical concepts and language by early theologians, there was also a discernment process going on. Thus some ideas were ignored for instance those of the Epicureans, who advocated popular polytheism, the indifference of the gods and the

suggestion that wise men should flee religion.<sup>204</sup> They also avoided the pantheism of the Stoics even while adopting the Stoic idea of the Logos which helped to explain why God could be both pre-existent and unchanging at the same time and also how God could exercise concern for the changing needs of creation and humankind.<sup>205</sup> Even Plato's ideas about God were not fully adopted. He had the idea that the Craftsman (God) made order out of confusion.<sup>206</sup> But his successors (including Christians) said the universe had existed from all eternity. They also saw matter itself as being at the edge of non-being.<sup>207</sup> The Christians also rejected Gnosticism and fought against it. The Gnostics had gone further than thinking of matter as being at the edge of non-being. They in fact saw matter and the universe and its creator as being evil. Even so, while on the one hand Gnosticism was rejected by the Church Fathers the struggle against it had an indirect influence on the formulation of Christianity. Formulations were made in terms of opposing Gnosticism. There was also an indirect impact on Scripture interpretation. For instance Irenaeus sought to show how Scripture was interconnected and relevant, in order to oppose the Gnostic rejection of Scripture. The fight of the Church Fathers against Arianism was another example in which a position opposed by the Fathers had an indirect influence on early Church formulations. The Arians taught that the Logos was a creature. But Church Fathers such as Athanasius insisted that Father and Son were of the same *ousia* or substance.<sup>208</sup>

Despite the assistance given by philosophy, especially Platonic philosophy, some of the difficulties arising from a Greek philosophical explanation of Jesus continued into the theology of St Augustine and beyond. In *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* Stead says that Augustine, who set a framework for the church for the next ten centuries, had a conversion to Platonic philosophy which preceded his conversion to Christianity. It was Platonic philosophy that enabled him to overcome his ideas of Manichaeism and see that God is the

source of all happiness.<sup>209</sup> Augustine (354-430 CE) also adopted the Platonic ideas of an immaterial Godhead and an immortal human soul.<sup>210</sup> But there can be an implication here that the body and the soul are in conflict. Augustine also adopted the idea of the Logos. But here again there is an inference that the flesh is weak.<sup>211</sup> In Augustine's writings this was emphasised because much of his perspective was autobiographical (Augustine had a mistress for fifteen years).<sup>212</sup> The dualism between spirit and matter in Platonic philosophy has had further implications. Philo for instance made the point that the Logos was asexual.<sup>213</sup> In his writings, Augustine claimed that man was powerless without Divine Aid and this claim led to an idea of predetermination. Stead says this idea was the same as that of Calvin who developed the idea of predestination further some centuries later. Stead points out this conflicts with faith in a compassionate and merciful God.<sup>214</sup> He also observes that the Platonic idea of evil being an absence of good does not adequately explain evil in terms of motivation.<sup>215</sup> Given such inadequacies, Stead says at the end of his book:

Over the centuries the Platonic ontology has proved a valuable support for Christian philosophers... Yet it is worth remembering that it formed no part of the original message of Christ or his Apostles.....Many lovers of Augustine cannot conceive of a Christian philosophy divorced from Platonism. But we have had to consider this prospect.<sup>216</sup>

One could argue against this conclusion of Stead. On the one hand the inadequacies of Platonic philosophy appear to be inextricably bound up with a Christian interpretation of the gospels and one asks if it would be possible to separate them. Also it is difficult to accept that the Gospel writers and their communities were not using Platonic philosophy themselves in order to interpret the life, meaning and identity of the historical Jesus. During the decades between the life of Jesus and the time the Gospels were written the first Christian theologians would be trying to come to grips with this. The Acts of the Apostles and the letters of St Paul show an early theology being formulated. At one stage some Epicureans and Stoics in Athens

accuse Paul as being an “ignorant plagiarist” (c/f the literal translation of the Revised Standard Version Acts 17:18).<sup>217</sup> So they realised he was trying to use their ideas in the effort to understand and preach the person of Jesus. Philo in the first century CE. claimed to provide an allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament showing Greek philosophical ideas and definitions existed in the text. So also the gospel writers could anticipate that their own stories in turn about Jesus may be interpreted in a similar, allegorical way. They could have deliberately built Greek philosophical logic into the structure of their text in anticipation of this. Also in terms of their understanding of Jesus, it is difficult to believe they were not influenced by the Platonic ideas around them. Thus extricating Platonism from the Gospels could be an impossible task.

One of the ways in which to deal with the inadequacies of Greek philosophic, and in particular its dualism, could be through a sociological interpretation of the gospel. This could explore whether or not the writers were structuring their text in such a way that the inadequacies of a Hellenistic philosophy and world view could on the one hand be adopted. But at the same time their weaknesses could be exposed. Hellenistic ideas could be challenged within the text itself by the co-existence of a distinctly different social system and world view. Thus instead of trying to extricate Platonic philosophy from early gospel interpretation the philosophy could be weighed up against a system that would complement and challenge it. Stead says Augustine saw Christianity and Platonic philosophy as being complementary. But Christianity itself could consist of two distinctly different world views, each of which are inadequate and each of which complements the other.

#### 4. Early Gospel Interpreters e.g. Origen and Augustine the Neo-Platonist

Some scholars argue that the shape of a society can in itself show what sort of interpretation has been given to the Scriptures. For instance in the case of the Jews, there has been an evolution of the idea that the expected "messiah" may in fact be the community in itself, rather than a single individual person.<sup>218</sup>

The way the Christian church has developed also gives some indication as to how the gospels were interpreted from the time they were written. An abstract understanding of God, based on Greek philosophy, was formulated by the Church Fathers. Of particular interest here is the work of Origen (184-253 CE) who had great influence in the early years of the Church.

Origen was steeped in Greek learning and was convinced of the incorporeality of God (c/f abstract Greek principles). However the Scriptures, including the Gospels, did not appear to support his position on this. Origen used the assumption that Scripture was cryptic in order to provide an allegorical interpretation of it. Thus he demonstrated that the passages in the gospels that appeared to present God in anthropological terms did in fact mean that God was incorporeal (without a body).<sup>219</sup>

The fact that his interpretation was accepted by the early Church demonstrates that his method of allegorical interpretation was being accepted as well, as also his ideas on incorporeality. His work was also seen to follow an established, interpretation tradition that emphasises the unity of Scripture. Thus he showed that all the apparently anthropological presentations of God in Scripture were united and perfect because they could all be interpreted allegorically to show that God was incorporeal. Also because Origen's understanding of God was based on abstract principles (c/f Greek philosophy) it would continue to have relevance. Later, when

the church established its Scriptural Canon and the Word of God, Origen's interpretation and his method of interpretation was established in Church teaching as well.

There are in fact parallels between a sociological interpretation of the Gospels and the methods used by Origen. A sociological interpretation can consider whether there is an allegorical meaning about society as such at the back of the biblical narrative. Because society is in a sense organic a holistic view of the Gospel(s) would need to be taken. Also because this type of interpretation would be an exploration of abstract principles about society it would, as such, continue to have relevance. And, because it is an exploration of the reality of society it would parallel the search of Scripture into what is reality, or as Plato would express it "pure Truth."

In terms of the task of interpretation in the early years of the church, the need to clarify commonalities and distinctions between Judaism and Hellenism continued. This can be seen in *The City of God* was written by St Augustine in the C 5th CE. In this book Augustine talks about the City of God and the City of man. It cannot be claimed that the distinction he was making here was a direct outcome of the sort of distinctions been made for example by Ben Sera who wrote about Jewish/Hellenistic tensions in *Ecclesiasticus*. But Augustine does explore the sorts of tensions that can exist between two different types of society. Moreover he makes the claim that both types of society are valid in their own right.

Augustine was writing at a time when the Roman Empire was in decay and some people were blaming the Empire's adoption of Christianity for its demise.<sup>220</sup> However *The City of God* demonstrates that Christianity had already incorporated into itself the most sophisticated aspects of Greek culture. Also Augustine tried to hold two differing understandings of

society and two differing world views in a dialectical tension. This effort in itself shows how he and others at the time were interpreting what they saw to be in the Gospel texts.

## **5. The Damaging Effects of Salvation History and a one-sided view of Christianity**

In light of C 20th research into history and archaeology, the possibility of a critique of Judaism and Hellenism being in the gospels may appear to be self-evident. But in terms of the history of biblical scholarship one could argue that the search for a critique of social models in the gospels has been largely overlooked. A bruising example of a failure to consider the possibility of multiple types of societies existing within the gospels could be pointed out in the case of a German scholar named Gerhard Kittel.<sup>221</sup> During the Second World War Kittel and a number of other German theologians, were members of the Nazi party.<sup>222</sup> Kittel considered himself to be a moderate as regards condemnations of the Jewish race. But he argued in favour of the ban against the participation of Jews in public life.<sup>223</sup> Given all his scholarship in the history of Judaism and the scholarship of his father, one could well wonder how he could rationalise himself into such a position. As it happened, Kittel argued that Christians were the rightful heirs of the Old Testament promises of God and therefore the Jews were now redundant. He held that the roles of Hellenism and Judaism in the formation of Christianity were “asymmetrical” and therefore could not be used as interpretive alternatives in understanding the gospels.<sup>224</sup> In the tradition of Martin Luther he believed that the Jews had been ‘accursed.’<sup>225</sup> He also believed the propaganda that the Jews had plans for world domination.<sup>226</sup> Because he thought they had been historically ‘sidelined’ he considered that such a domination would be a retrograde step for humankind.

Had there been a more sociological approach to Gospel interpretation prior to the Nazis, and had there been a more discerning clarification between Judaism and Hellenism then the political position taken by Kittel could have been challenged more readily. However at the time an added problem was that Kittel's position reflected an attitude that permeated the world of biblical studies and theology. Bultman for instance, who was one of the most influential theologians of the C20th, had a characterisation of Judaism that was similar to Kittel's, even if Bultmann had disdained the Nazis,<sup>227</sup> and stayed out of politics<sup>228</sup>.

Kittel was editor of the *TDNT* (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*) which became a standard text book throughout the seminaries of the world. Yet, despite its popularity and status, the same attitude can be seen threaded through the pages of this reference book.<sup>229</sup> According to Wayne Meeks "Very few of the users of that work are aware of the paradoxes in Kittel's career and of the fundamentally anti-Jewish structure of *TDNT* itself."<sup>230</sup>

In contrast to the gospel interpretation of Kittel and some of the early C20th scholars, there appeared to be in the first century CE, a general recognition that both types of society, that is Judaism and Hellenism, were based on universal principles and yet both were separate. As Martin Hengel has pointed out, even though the impact of Hellenism continued to increase and the surrounding cultures were merged into it, very few Jews actually rejected the heritage of their own law.<sup>231</sup>

With Jews, the distinction between themselves and other eastern cultures lay in the way that they exercised choice, as to what they would adopt or what they would reject from their Hellenistic environment. Against such a background it would have been a logical

development, on the part of Christians, to see themselves as inheriting a hybrid of both societies. And in fact one of the very first pictures given of the emerging church is that of a tense scene between the “Hebrews and the Hellenists” because the Hebrews were ignoring the Hellenistic widows in the daily distribution of food. (Acts 6:1) Also, in the early understanding of Christ’s “kingdom” as pointed out in John’s gospel, Christians understood there was a multiplicity in their oneness c/f “There are many abodes in my Father’s house.” (John 14:2).

It would appear that Kittel and others like him, were influenced by the “Salvation History” idea of the Old Testament to the extent that they thought only in terms of the one pure type of society being inherited by Christians. A sociological interpretation of the gospels could explore whether or not Christians in fact inherited a hybrid society of Judaism and Hellenism which were (and remain) valid types of societies in their own right. The genetic definition of a hybrid may be of help here. When two types of animal within the same species interbreed, the chromosomes consists of one or other of the two types and the chromosomes themselves are not fused.

## 6. **Summary of Chapter Three**

A close exegesis, using narrative criticism shows the early Church was trying to come to grips with the beliefs of both Jews and Hellenistic converts. The Church Council, held in Jerusalem and as described in Acts 15 gives a dramatic picture of the efforts to come to a compromise between the two groups. The story of this Council is told in such a way by Luke that one wonders if a sizeable proportion of those present agreed to a formula for reconciliation with the idea that it “only” consisted of dietary rules that dated back to

Leviticus and was about co-existence with “strangers”. But in fact this formula was presenting a new “way” to observe the key social commandments. Thus the circumcision debate was choosing between an external, ritualistic observance of “the law” or changing the way that people viewed and practised the Law. . At the time there was a pressing need for an acceptable “formula”: about the law to carry the Church through the coming years of persecution by the Emperor Nero (54-68 CE) and then through the trauma of the annihilation of Jerusalem by the Roman Army in 70 CE. Mark, who was writing about the same time had the urgent need to demonstrate that Christianity was not rejecting Hellenism and the Greco Roman culture and rule. Rather, it was incorporating it and providing a critique of Hellenism. Mark used literary techniques of Homer in the writing of his gospel. This was partly because these techniques, especially Homer’s use of chiasmic paragraphing, suited Mark’s purposes of defining the bases of Judaism and Hellenism. He also used these easily recognisable techniques because they showed a knowledge of and respect for the most revered of the Greco-Roman writers. Also just as Plato had set out his ‘ultimate’ type of society in *The Republic* , so Mark was setting out the “kingdom” type of society in his gospel.

In writing the gospels and trying to come to grips with the identity of Jesus Christ the writers were inevitably influenced by the dominant Platonic of the time. Like the early Church Fathers to succeed them, the tools of philosophy would be of some assistance in the gospel presentation of Jesus.

In the years to follow the gospel, the writings of Church Fathers continued to present and develop an interpretation of Jesus that was heavily reliant on Greek philosophical concepts. Origen for instance claimed the Biblical references to God could be interpreted to show he was incorporeal. Augustine understood the city of God and the city of man to be co-existent and valid.

The difference between such “cities” and the differences between Judaism and Hellenism as they co-existed in Christianity tended to be overlooked in “salvation history.” A negative outcome of this was to view the Jews as being theologically sidelined from history. This had the practical outcome of a Nazi attempt to physically annihilate the Jews as well. A sociological interpretation of the gospels would have helped recognition of their society type as being valid in its own right.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Two Differing Hellenistic Approaches to Society**

It has been claimed above that it is likely to be impossible to separate out a reliance on Greek philosophy from the presentation of Jesus Christ in the gospels. But it has also been claimed the gospel writers have possibly attempted to provide a critique of Hellenistic society and its ideas in the “underbelly” of the gospel texts. In an exploration of this possibility it would be necessary to demonstrate what a Hellenistic type of society actually was (and is). On the one hand, it cannot be demonstrated how the gospel writers could have made such an analysis in their own time. But it is possible to consider Hellenistic types of society that have evolved in the time to follow the first century CE. A way to do this is to consider the ideas of key social philosophers in Western society since early Christianity and the extent to which they based their ideas on the two major Greek social philosophers – Plato and Aristotle.

The Greeks presented a view of the eternal order as expressed in the world. Plato and

Aristotle presented the two major sides of this approach. A general introduction to a discussion about this is to suggest that Plato sought to impose order on society.

Aristotle accepted what order was there and he classified it. Plato's society was based on the individual and the State was the 'individual writ large.' For Aristotle, society was based on the social unit of the family. Both philosophers believed in a dualism between matter and spirit. Plato looked back towards the "pure truth" of the Divine craftsman and saw matter as being removed from this. Aristotle looked forward to its potentiality.

## 1. Plato and Some Successors

### a) Plato

Plato (c.427-347 B.C.) grappled with the question as to why Socrates his teacher, had been forced by society to take his own life. Socrates had seen his role in society as pointing to the truth and people objected to this. Leaders of the time pressured Socrates to drink hemlock poison. He did so, not because he thought the laws condemning him to do this were right, but because he believed that law and order as such should be imposed on a society for its own best interests.<sup>232</sup> Plato wrote the *The Republic* and set out the arguments of Socrates to support this position. In this book Socrates claims that a just man is one who aims to achieve what is best for the common good. He is like a medic who tells someone what to do. He is like the captain of a ship who is conscious of the needs of the whole concern. He says that discerning what is best for the whole, requires great skill. Great stock therefore should be put on having such a role performed as well as possible.<sup>233</sup> Plato says, through Socrates, that a society has three great needs of food, shelter and clothing. The people who provide these services should be able to get on with

their job without interference. Therefore related work, for example, marketing should also be protected.<sup>234</sup> He sees this type of order as a just situation.<sup>235</sup> Plato insists that it is in the design of Ultimate Order that good and harmony should prevail. He objects to whatever suggests otherwise, for example poetry that presents the picture of a mischievous God.<sup>236</sup> He says that the rulers of a society should be selected from students who have the best aptitude for discerning ultimate truth and order. These will become the Guardians of the State. Some will be the rulers and others the executives of the law.<sup>237</sup> This Guardian class will not have property or wealth in case this tempts them to act for their own interests rather than for the good of the State.<sup>238</sup> Plato saw that each individual should be able to work according to their own aptitude regardless of parentage.<sup>239</sup> He said men and women should have equal access to jobs.<sup>240</sup> Family structures seemed an obstacle to this so he suggested women should be shared in common. Children should be bred from the best types of males and raised apart from their parents.<sup>241</sup> He said a Philosopher Ruler class would have pressures to face, just as Socrates had to face the pressures geared to to stop him questions that were forcing people to re-think their position.<sup>242</sup> However Plato held it would be possible for such a Guardian class to exist and function. Indeed it was essential for this to happen if Athenian society itself was to be reconstructed and survive. Selected people therefore were needed to be trained to perceive the truth and to use their skill to rule the rest of the society..<sup>243</sup>

Plato, who was himself a close follower of Pythagoras, believed mathematics were basic to the structure of the universe. He said Geometry in particular reflected a universal order. He pointed out that a right-angled triangle for instance could be found in many shapes and sizes. But the same rules of form were prevalent in all the variations of this.<sup>244</sup> Mathematics therefore would be an essential part of the education of the philosopher-ruler class.

Harmonics was also important.<sup>245</sup> Plato claimed on the other hand, that poetry and art was suspect, despite the fact that *The Republic* is itself a great literary piece of art. He said artists were too removed from the clear logic of mathematics.<sup>246</sup> The poet Homer, whose *Odyssey* had been seen as a 'Bible' amongst the Greeks, was viewed by Plato as especially suspect.<sup>247</sup> For instance Homer's heroine, Helen of Troy, reflected a force of sexuality that was beyond the control of reason and logic. In this way Homer (in the view of Plato) actually showed up the limitations of people's attempts to order life according to a strict, logical pattern. But Plato still insisted that society needs to be ordered according to clear insights and definite outlines. He said it was the role of philosophers to see the truth and to tell society about this.<sup>248</sup> In his image of the cave he pictured the ruler philosopher who sees the light of the sun while other people remained chained up in a cave, watching the reflections of life go by.<sup>249</sup> It was this ruler philosopher who could teach real truth to society and enable it to make the laws that were needed to enable everybody to work in harmony and as one.

Plato's ideas continued to provide an essential basis for Greek philosophy and Greco Roman culture. His tendency to see matter as evil was challenged by Aristotle, his student, who provided an alternative view. Even so, both Plato and Aristotle both presented a division between spiritual and material reality which has continued throughout the development of Western culture and which can be seen in the ideas of Western social philosophers.

The emphasis taken by Plato can be seen in particular in the works of people like Augustine (5<sup>th</sup> century), Martin Luther (15<sup>th</sup> century), Machiavelli (15-16<sup>th</sup> century), John Calvin (16<sup>th</sup> century), Hobbes (16<sup>th</sup> century), Rousseau (18<sup>th</sup> century), Hegel (18-19<sup>th</sup> century), Karl Marx (19<sup>th</sup> century) and more recently J. Segundo (20<sup>th</sup> century). An outline of their teachings, showing some of the parallels between them is as follows:

**b) Augustine**

Augustine lived in 354-430 CE. . During the first few centuries of the Common Era the Christian community grew, despite the persecutions against it. At the same time the inner strength of the Roman Empire was waning and in 410 it was sacked by invaders. The Romans blamed Christianity, which by now was the strongest form of religion. They claimed Christianity had distracted people away from the religious foundations of the city. Augustine therefore wrote the *City of God* to challenge this claim. He pointed out that it was not the pagan gods that had protected Rome over the centuries. Rather, it was because of the virtues of the Roman people that they had gained their worldly success.<sup>250</sup> By contrast their religious rites were depraved and had done their civilisation more damage than good.<sup>251</sup> Augustine showed how pagan thinkers like Varro had long doubted the value of pagan worship.<sup>252</sup> and he recalled how Plato had a deeper understanding of what God was like than was to be found in popular paganism. Augustine reminded his readers that Plato perceived God as the Truth of an eternal order.

In Part 3 of the *City of God* Augustine claimed that the Christian religion reflects an order which exists beyond the everyday order of the State.<sup>253</sup> He said Christianity challenges people to focus on God, rather than on themselves, which is sinful.<sup>254</sup> He claims religious order has existed side by side with the State since the earliest times (Part 4).<sup>255</sup> He put out a challenge to the State to look beyond this present life to another one. He said that on the one hand the city of the world is inferior to the city of God. Yet the city of God relies on the world for the provision of its material needs. Thus he both downgraded the city of the world and yet affirmed its importance and its independent role. He reflected that people of the city of the world are motivated by earthly desires such as worldly

success.<sup>256</sup> Yet even while these are not the best sorts of reasons for acting the results of the work done are worthwhile. Thus people acting for their selfish ends at least discipline themselves and prevent the growth of worse vices. They also promote an ordered environment and provide basic necessities for themselves and religious-minded people.<sup>257</sup> People belonging to the city of God are and should be grateful for this.<sup>258</sup> Those of the City of God should support the city of the world even though the duties of a secular job can appear at times to conflict with the ideal sphere of acting from the motive of pure love e.g. in time of war.<sup>259</sup>

Augustine saw the city of God as being an order or "body of Christ" that is beyond an earthly form such as the state or even the Church.<sup>260</sup> In the City of God, people are united in a sense of goodwill which has been brought about by their faith in God and their dialogue with Him. Their lives are inspired with a sense of the truth beyond the values of worldly success.<sup>261</sup> People therefore should look towards the city of God and beyond, to God himself, to find the foundations and security of a just order.<sup>262</sup> Augustine argued that if the Romans had looked to God for security then they would not be so disheartened by the destruction around them. In turn if the Christians did this more, they would find new strength and clarity in each other's faith and they would sense a world-wide unity amongst themselves.<sup>263</sup> They would also be encouraged to promote their faith as a source of strength for re-building of the civilisation around them.

In the writings of Augustine the division between spirit and matter as taught by Plato is reflected. Augustine idealised a world order that was promoted by the "elect" people of the City of God. At the same time he lauded the practical outcomes of the exercise of skills for whatever motive.

The writings of Plato, through the influence of Augustine, influenced the Renaissance and Reformation especially after works of Greek philosophy were rediscovered through the Crusades of the late Middle Ages. With the Renaissance, came a great emergence of Greek learning and its art forms. These in turn set the base for the Protestant Reformation that was triggered by the Augustinian monk Martin Luther.

**c) Luther**

Martin Luther was born in Germany in 1483 and died 1546. This was a time when the Renaissance was at its height. Foremost among the patrons of art was the Medici family in Rome and a number of its members were Popes. These people were planning to build the Vatican in Rome but the sums of money needed for this were enormous. In the effort to raise money, a practice grew in the Church of "selling" off positions of power. In Luther's geographical area a man of only 23 years of age was made Archbishop on the condition that he paid a great sum of money to Rome which was allowing people like himself to "sell" indulgences. This practice gave people the idea that if they made a donation to the Church's building projects then they would be forgiven whatever wrongs they may have done. Such an idea was not in fact correct Church teaching but a preacher in Luther's district gave the impression that it was. Luther, who was responsible for Church teaching in the same area, protested about the preaching. But the Archbishop, who wanted as many funds as possible, did nothing about it. Luther did not know about the Archbishop's monetary deal with Rome.<sup>264</sup>

At the time people in Germany were tired of the amounts of money that was going to

Rome each year and they were also concerned about the many other abuses in the Church. Such abuses extended to the Papacy itself. People wanted reform but it looked unlikely that the Church was going to reform itself. When Luther was called to Rome to explain his position the Germans protected him.

The rift between Germany and Rome widened and Luther began to outline more fully, his idea that religion should be based on faith in the Word of God. He objected to Rome's practice of controlling people by setting out a range of "good works" that they must do in order to reach heaven when they die. Such "good works" not only included the paying of money to Rome's building projects, it also extended to practices relating to the rituals of Mass, the sacraments, the use of relics and the status of religious life.

Luther set out his major ideas in a small essay called the "Freedom of a Christian "(1520) and he sent this to the Pope in a final effort to keep in union with Rome.<sup>265</sup> This pamphlet stated that the soul of a person is independent of the conditions in which that person may live. It said the Christian relies on a spiritual life, separate from the material things around them. Their spiritual life comes from the Word of God.<sup>266</sup> The "work" that God asks of people, is to believe in this 'Word' who is Jesus. (c/f John 2:28 ff and Romans Ch 8).

Luther also taught that since belief in the Word of Jesus is key to a Christian life, then the works that people may do are separate from this. He recalled the fable of a dog with meat in its mouth and compared it to a Christian holding on to faith as the crux of their religion. In the Fable's story, the dog saw its reflection in a pool of water. It dropped the meat in order to snatch at the reflected meat and finished up with nothing. Such behaviour was like dropping and losing one's faith in order to snatch at "good" works as

being the essence of a Christian life.<sup>267</sup>

Luther said that people should do good works. But they should be like the free work that Adam did to please God in the garden of Eden before he fell into sin. Thus people should be able to work at a whole range of professions and jobs and be equal in doing this in the sight of God. They did not have to do special deeds to gain Christ's life or righteousness as they already have this sort of life by faith. Their ordinary work therefore could be done in freedom -to please God, give good example, keep their bodies under control and enable them to submit to others out of love.<sup>268</sup>

Luther was very conscious of how wayward people can be, unless they are controlled. The times he lived in were very violent and he wrote about the need for Princes to be strong in keeping order. When the peasants of his country thought they were 'free' because of his teaching and revolted against the nobles, Luther surprised Europe by harshly condemning them. He said order is needed at any cost and the peasants should be crushed by every means at hand.<sup>269</sup> In this way, he showed that the State, rather than the Church, needs to be active and impose order.

Within his lifetime Luther brought about the Protestant Reformation,<sup>270</sup> and it split the Church in two. Had he spoken at another time and place he may not have had such an impact. The times demanded reform and more separation between the Church and State. People needed freedom to go about their business in a more independent way. The teaching of Aquinas (1225-1274) had already allowed for this but the Church had not yet adopted what he had said.

Luther was an Augustinian monk and his approach was akin to Augustine and Plato (rather than Aristotle). He saw the Church and State as being distinctly separate rather than seeing them with a graded connection between the two and he was not prepared to modify his ideas when the Dominican Cajetan (of Aquinas' Order) urged him to adopt their line.<sup>271</sup> Thus Luther exalted the State as major leader instead of the Church.

Besides the need for reform, another factor had arisen which enabled Luther's reformation to surge onward. This was the advent of printing (about 1450). The printing machines quickly spread Luther's writings around Europe. They enabled ordinary people to pick up the Bible and read it in their own language. Printing enabled them to find out for themselves what the Word of God was saying. In the event of printing, the power of the Church was undercut. People thought they could work out for themselves what the Word of God was saying. Also with the advent of printing, the power of the monasteries that had hand-copied manuscripts and monopolised learning was now eroded.<sup>272</sup>

In the figure of Luther, the era of the individual conscience and a work world separate from the Church, had now begun. The rationalism of Plato and Greco Roman culture was reasserted. Yet, so also was the Greco Roman practice of imposing order on a society at any human cost. This showed a separation between the morality of a line of action and its results. A social philosopher such as Machiavelli would emphasise this.

#### **d) Machiavelli**

Machiavelli (1469-1527) was born in Italy around the time Luther was born in Germany. At the time, trade with the East was booming for the Italian City States. The East had

been recently opened up by the Crusades and the Italian cities were well placed for this trade. But the new wealth was beyond the control of the city's-constitutional form of government.

Also, conflicts between the cities became deeper. Machiavelli saw it was likely foreign armies would take Italy's wealth unless it united against them. He looked back to the early days of the Roman Empire when Italy was one. He claimed that Christianity had been a hindrance rather than a help to strong unity because it praised weakness in virtues such as humility and meekness.<sup>273</sup> Machiavelli said that "virtue" consisted in the skill of using any means at all which would bring about a desired result. In some ways therefore his approach was similar to that of Plato who said the "philosopher ruler" could skilfully impose order, because unlike others, he saw truth as it really is.<sup>274</sup>

There are further parallels between Machiavelli and Plato as well. Recall that Augustine spoke of two cities, the city of God and the city of the world. In Machiavelli's time Luther said that the two "cities" should be kept separate and the Church should not interfere with the State. Machiavelli went further still and said success in ruling related to causes and results and these had nothing to do with morals or Christian principles. On the one hand this was similar to the Roman "city of the world" as described by Augustine. However, since Machiavelli deleted all morals, even the Roman stress on the common good and law were secondary to Machiavelli's stress on the end in view.

As a public servant of his time, Machiavelli closely observed the causes and effects of actions within politics and he also read the histories of ancient Rome. When he was forced into early retirement because of a switch in government, he wrote up his observations

into a small treatise called *The Prince*. In many ways the principles he sets out here were based on the actions and success of Caesar Borgia, the illegitimate son of Pope Alexander VI. Machiavelli hoped that the treatise would influence the new prince Lorenzo de Medici but Medici ignored him. On the other hand *The Prince* has had a great impact on politics ever since and it is said Hitler kept a copy by his bedside.<sup>275</sup>

*The Prince* sets out principles which appear to be used by many rulers in the industrial work world. One of these is that such leaders need to have the appearance of morality i.e. compassion, religion etc. But they also need the skill to be able to act without these when it is expedient.<sup>276</sup>

In the treatise of *The Prince* Machiavelli warns that if people are morally good they will come to grief amongst so many others who are unscrupulous (ch. 15). He warns against spending money too freely (ch. 16). He also says the use of some cruelty will result in general order but leaders should be careful to avoid making people hate them. (ch. 17). He uses the image of the fox which is wary of traps and also the lion which can confront the wolves. He also claims most people are vulgar. They go by appearances and results and do not notice if someone has used devious means to gain their end. At the same time, the few people who suffer from these devious methods will be too isolated to be able to speak out and complain (ch. 18). Machiavelli warns against arousing the hatred of the masses e.g. by stealing and he advises a leader to do actions that look grand instead (ch. 19). He advises listening to what people actually think and to avoid flattery (ch. 20). He also advises that helpers should be well rewarded so as to retain their loyalty (ch.21) and he urges leaders to be in tune with the times (ch. 25.)<sup>277</sup>

Machiavelli concludes that the armies of Italy had been very poor at fighting. He hoped a strong leader would closely observe and use the methods of government that history has shown to be most likely to unite the country. Such unity was an “end” in itself and more important than any means used to achieve it.<sup>278</sup>

One is again reminded here of Plato’s stress on the role of the Philosopher Ruler to impose order.

While Machiavelli tended to negate morality for the sake of an end, John Calvin took a more rationalised and religious approach to governance.

#### e) **Calvin**

John Calvin was born in France in 1509 and died in 1564. He was raised a Catholic and was trained in theology and law. At twenty-one he converted to the New Protestant Reform. Then at the age of 27 he published his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* which set out a systematic basis for Protestantism. In this book Calvin tried to show that Scripture provides all the answers to questions about law, government, work, purpose in life etc.<sup>279</sup>

In Book IV of the *Institutes* he sets out a rationale for secular law and rulers. This had been a crucial question faced by the Reformers such as Luther, for example in relation to the Peasant’s Revolt of 1524. In Luther's teachings on the rights of the individual he had unwittingly encouraged the German peasants to revolt against their princes. But then he condemned the peasants and the Princes crushed them with great bloodshed.<sup>280</sup>

Calvin, writing in 1530, said that rulers are agents of God's will for general order and they should be mindful of this. On behalf of God rulers protect property, daily trade and social living etc. (c/f Book IV:22 ).<sup>281</sup> Thus on the one hand individual people should honour and obey their ruler even when they are unjust.<sup>282</sup> But on the other hand if such rulers oblige people to act against God's will, then the religious leaders of the people, can lead an ordered revolt against them.<sup>283</sup>

Calvin visited the city of Geneva and was asked to stay there. As a city Geneva was trying to retain its independence. Calvin presented the city with a new Constitutions. This provided for the state and church to work together. The state would embrace order, standards of morality, respect for religion etc. The Church would be governed by a council. In some ways this Church Council was parallel to the government. But it could also dictate at times to the government about what was God's will.<sup>284</sup>

Calvin recalled, that the kind of council Paul set up to keep order in the early Christian communities, was similar to the Council that he established.<sup>285</sup> Thus the Church ministers would preach the gospel and administer sacraments while the doctors (connected to the Church Council) would teach and set up schools and universities. The elders would keep discipline. The deacons would care for the sick and the poor.

In this sort of structure one is reminded of Plato's "elite" as described in *The Republic*.

Calvin's ideas were based on his belief that God has, from before time, already decided on whether or not each person is to be saved or not saved. Nothing that people do themselves could change this. They should accept that God's ruling on them is just, even if

they do not know what it is.<sup>286</sup> On the other hand, logic tells people that since God made the world, He expects it to be run in an orderly way. Where order, discipline, justice etc. exist, then it is apparent that God's will is being done. Those who are working along these lines are doing God's will and therefore they show themselves to be amongst God's elect.<sup>287</sup>

The followers of Calvin used these ideas as a basis for their way of life. They tried to show glory to God by working as well as possible. They tried to prove the value of their work by producing and increasing their profits. So, while they continued to admit that their salvation to eternal heaven or hell, relied on God alone, they would produce profits and impose order so as to 'prove' that it was most likely they were bound for heaven.

Weber, a 20th century sociologist and arguably the first sociologist, says in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* that Calvin's doctrine of predestination was a major motivation for the growth of capitalism. He showed how capitalism, that is, the drive for profits, had developed. He noted that such a drive was stronger in Protestant countries rather than in Catholic ones.<sup>288</sup>

Calvin's Church-state of Geneva was a model to Protestants of the day. It showed how Christians could work in both the Church and the State with the sense of being agents of God. The more they extended social order and achievement the more God's glory and God's will was being proclaimed. In their daily work people could honour God by extending social order and achievement as well as possible. They could put aside 'selfish spiritual' worries about whether or not they were gaining enough spiritual merits to get themselves into heaven. They would leave the question of their spiritual future up to God.

While Calvin appeared to “knit” the dimensions of both morality and the imposition of order back together, an underlying sense of division between spirit and matter as described by Plato, remained. Others could therefore reassert a division between governance and religious morality.

**f) Hobbes**

T Hobbes (1588-1679) was born about a century after Luther and Machiavelli. The latter reformers (as well as so many others) had been concerned to strengthen secular government so that order would prevail. But in many quarters even more violence erupted because of divisions between Catholic and Protestant thinking. Hobbes himself was born at the sound of the guns of the Spanish Armada being fired. In 1640 he had to flee England because of his ideas. Then later he fled France and came back to England where his ideas and writings were banned as being atheistic.

Hobbes put forward a rationale for the organisation of government and he did not relate this to religion. He said that people are born free with two great drives, that is, fear for one's life and a range of desires. In terms of strength, people are largely equal. But they naturally want to take from each other and will gather forces in order to do so. Endless battles ensue. Hobbes said the only way to obtain order would be for each individual to hand over their freedom to a central Sovereign. Then the Sovereign would in turn protect the right of the individual to live in peace.

Hobbes conceded that Sovereigns can be tyrants and the title of his book *Leviathan*

(meaning the monster), shows this. But he claimed that at least the Sovereign makes and enforces laws which allow his subjects to live and work together. On their own they could not achieve this sort of peace (c/f *Leviathan* Ch 13)<sup>289</sup> He argued that it is reasonable that people should be grateful, adjust to each other, avoid cruelty, contempt and oppression and treat others as they would have others treat themselves. (Ch 15).<sup>290</sup> There is a shift here, so that the practice of virtue is related to reason and environment rather than religious faith. A further development along these lines would be towards the “corporate mind” as seen in the writings of Rousseau.

#### **g) Rousseau**

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1702 - 1778) moved to France early in life. France at the time was moving towards a revolution. In contrast to England there was a wide gap between the nobility and peasants here. To some extent this difference dated back to the time of Henry VIII. In England, Henry VIII established the custom of taking his court around the country to stay with the nobles. This encouraged English nobles to build castles on their land and it reduced the king's costs of supporting his court and it defrayed taxes. But in France, the nobility moved to Versailles where the Sovereign and court grew more remote from the people and charged heavy taxes.

In England, with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, the independent yet loyal nobles set up industries and became industrial magnates.<sup>291</sup> But meanwhile in France the starving peasants were looking for an inspiration and momentum to reject their kings and nobles. Rousseau supplied this for them.

In his book *Social Contract* he systematically put forward a model for a Republic. He said the family is the major model of a society. And just as slavery is alien (to the individual and family) so slavery is alien to humanity. (Book 1) He said man is naturally solitary and free (Ch 4). People join together for self-defence and by their joint contract, they form a collective and moral body (6). By such a contract the individual is committed to co-operate with the whole (7). Yet in carrying out this contract they still retain their free will (8).

Rousseau said the true Sovereign discerns the corporate will of the State (Book 2) and this is like the individual's will over their own body (2). Thus the general will as expressed by the true ruler, is the sum of individual wills. He said that on the one hand the general will tends to be fragmented by smaller associations (and in this way they are a threat) (3). But the Sovereign (like Plato's philosopher ruler), can enforce the general will through execution (5). Laws are the guidelines of the general will (6) and Religion serves this (c/f 7). He said smaller states are more likely to stay united, as shown for example, by the rapport between the people of Corsica. Rousseau saw liberty and equality as being basic to a republican state (10) (as with Plato's *Republic*) and it is most important that laws are attuned to the heart of the people (11).<sup>292</sup>

The French caught hold of Rousseau's romantic notion of the individual and state being much the same. Perhaps this is reflected by the extent of enthusiasm with which they welcomed Napoleon from the small island of Corsica. In the times to follow Rousseau's understanding of the corporate spirit was applied to theories about the State.

As the industrial revolution advanced, so also the modern corporation began to evolve. As

described by Rousseau, the corporation acts as a body and the law treats corporations as a single legal body. The concept of corporation has developed further still, with the notions of corporate guilt and corporate responsibility in relation to exploitation of the environment and the Third World poor. On the other hand, the role of religious faith appears to have been further privatised and sidelined. Historically, this became more evident in the writings of Hegel.

#### **h) Hegel**

Hegel was born in Germany in 1770 and died 1831. He was concerned that by the end of the 30 years war that Germany was divided into many municipalities, He admired the aims of Machiavelli to unite Italy into a strong state. He also admired Rousseau who had helped unite France into a common spirit of nationalism. In a similar way, as the son of a civil servant he placed great store in the role of the State.<sup>293</sup>

Hegel began writing as a theologian and he attempted to provide a philosophical rationale for the sense of oneness in the state as perceived by Rousseau. In this he recognised some of the thinking of Plato who saw truth as translating itself into its imperfect image in the material order. He also picked up on ideas of Augustine who understood the Trinity of God as being the Ultimate Reality, with the Godhead knowing Itself in the Son. An infinite love, generated between these two 'persons', produces a third person which is (the Holy Spirit).

Hegel said that the individual person moves from consciousness to self-consciousness when confronted by another being. It is through such alienation and reconciliation that the

person comes to realise who they are. In his book *Phenomenology of Mind* Hegel says that in a similar way to this explanation, God experiences and expresses Himself in creation. In this sense therefore God relies on creation to reflect back who He is so that He can know Himself.<sup>294</sup>

Such an idea of God and creation allowed Hegel to perceive an Absolute which is dependent on creation and which therefore, is the sum of all its parts. And, in this approach, he did not recognise a mystical reality or Being that is beyond the existence of creation.<sup>295</sup>

From this position Hegel perceived that the individual person in the wider community is in a similar situation. He saw the individual person as being separate from the wider community and also feeling alienated from it. Yet, he also saw the individual as existing in the wider state as well. He said it is in the process of reaching out to this wider state that the individual is able to realise who he is.

In his major work, *Phenomenology of Mind* Hegel sets out the role of work in such a situation.<sup>296</sup> On the one hand the individual works for himself. But in so doing this he also works for everyone else and he benefits all. Hegel claimed that an individual can enter a noble type of consciousness when perceiving the needs of the State and working for the cause of the State rather than himself. (In such an approach he recalls the role of the “elite” in Plato’s Republic). It is through working in this way that the individual can truly find himself. Also, he saw the State as being able to exercise power to unite the interests of all members into common action.<sup>297</sup> Also again, State-based language and wealth would help individuals to do this.<sup>298</sup>

Hegel provided a philosophic background for submerging one's self-interest in order to work for the advance of the whole. He provided a framework in which the State could be seen as the Absolute Reality in life and where it alone could interpret what reality is. Marx was to follow on from the thinking of Hegel in building a political and economic system that would approach life only in terms of its materialistic needs. Because such a state system would be Absolute, all the work of individuals could be controlled in a totalitarian kind of way. And, all individuals could be obliged to focus on achieving the goals of the State.

**i) Karl Marx**

Marx was born in 1818 and died in 1883. He first tried to get work as a theologian but was considered to be too radical. He moved to England and he spent most of his life in the library of the British Museum. To a large extent Marx was a romantic. This can be seen in the volumes of poetry that he wrote to his wife.<sup>299</sup> Such poetry was discovered in 1930 after the impact of his political, economic and socialist writings had already changed the face of Europe, especially Russia.<sup>300</sup> With the discovery of this poetry, it was realised to what extent Marx had a very strong imagination and to what extent much of his writing and the theories that he claimed were scientific, were in fact, more suited to the realm of metaphysics. In other words, Marx's ideas were based on theory rather than solid evidence. Also, his projections for the future were theoretical rather than practical. Unfortunately for so many, by 1930 Marxian economic theories had been tried in Russia and they were to be tried further afield as in China, Vietnam, North Korea and elsewhere.

Ironically, as a private person, Marx could be described as a hopeless economist. At one time he gave an inheritance away and at least one of his own children died of hunger. Marx himself lived in dire poverty all his adult life. He was partly supported by Engels, the son of a manufacturer who shared and developed his theories. The thinking of Marx was strongly influenced by that of Hegel who had taught that the Gheist (Spirit) created the material world. He was also influenced by the philosopher Puerbach who held that instead of the Spirit of God

creating the world, man creates his own idea of God<sup>301</sup> In either view, he said that God (or the Gheist) does not exist beyond creation. Marx took up Hegel's ideas of there being a dialectic between man as an individual and man as he exists in the social world.<sup>302</sup> He applied these to the world of work. Marx was very aware of the negative social effects of the Industrial Revolution and he said the old style of worker had become alienated from his work. As a poet, he believed the worker creates an extension of himself in his work and somehow he shares in the existence of what he produces. He saw that the industrial system had forced artisans and skilled craftsmen to work for wages in boring and fragmented jobs. They now had to sell their labour and, as this was part of themselves, they were in a sense enslaved.

In 1848 Marx wrote the *Communist Manifesto*. This was a year in which revolutions were taking place around Europe. In this piece of brilliant journalistic writing he claimed "A spectre is haunting Europe," that is, communism. In the *Manifesto* he tells the new industrial magnates, that is, the Bourgeoisie, that right through history there have been class struggles. For now they as a class, have succeeded by their industrial revolution. They have overthrown the old feudal system of work. Now more and more workers were

relying on cash payment or wages and this was spreading around the world. Control of work was becoming more centralised.

But Marx also claimed that the commodities that capitalism was producing were also enabling the increasing numbers of paid workers to unite. The workers themselves were gathering forces to oppose the control of wealth and work by the Bourgeoisie class. In Part II of the "Manifesto" Marx says that the communists represented the increasing numbers of poor workers, that is, the Proletariat. And this Proletariat was organising the masses to take control of monopolised wealth and change such wealth into social property. They would also bring in a social education.<sup>303</sup>

Once again, there are echoes here of Plato's "philosopher ruler" who sees reality as it really is and with the help of the "elite" (c/f the Proletariat) will impose order and justice on society. Marx listed the aims of the communists such as the abolition of private monopoly of properties and also abolition of rental systems and interest rates. There would not be inheritance or generational ownership. Rather the State would run factories and agriculture according to a common plan. The State would also control communication and transport. Industrial armies, especially for agriculture (c/f Plato's chapter on Guardians and Auxiliaries) would be established. Distribution of population would be controlled by the State. There would be free education for children.

As it turned out all these programs were adopted by Russia after its revolution in 1917 and the *Manifesto* has been used as a blueprint for communist societies ever since.

In the *Manifesto* Marx said that the Church may in theory oppose private monopolies of

wealth. But in practice the Church sides with these.<sup>304</sup> He then contrasted the commonest forms of socialism in his day with his own description of communism and he claimed that his version of it aimed at attaining results.<sup>305</sup>

Marx was convinced that the communist revolution would take place because this was part of an historical law. He said that of its nature, capitalism requires the worker to spend extra time at a job in order to create a profit for the capitalist. Such a profit is invested to buy more machinery, produce more goods and force smaller businesses out of existence. Thus the wealthy capitalists become wealthier and fewer. Competition between them becomes ever sharper. To keep profits up the capitalists force wages down thus making the poor workers more numerous. Eventually however, the poor will rise up, take control of the country's wealth for themselves and so unite as a socialist state. Equality would then be established, production and the well-being of all would surge forward and the work and interests of individuals would be submerged into the interests of the State. Also, since the being of a person exists in a social rather than in an individual self, in a Socialist State everyone will be able to overcome their alienation. Once again the workers will by working for the State, be really working for themselves.<sup>306</sup>

The extent to which Marxian theory has been adopted is evidenced by the fact that for some time over a third of the world's population came to live under a communist regime.<sup>307</sup> However ironically enough, the number of people queuing up for food or dying of hunger in regimes of "pure" communism has shown that the 'scientific law' Marx claimed to be following did not work. For instance new technology has mass produced goods independently of 'surplus' labour. Poor people have become middle class. A country such as China, that claims to be "communist" country, now contradicts the Marxian model

because it allows private ownership and wealth.

Marx proposed an aggressive movement to protect people from capitalist aggression. In doing this he repeated the approach of Plato in imposing order as an end in itself and in viewing the State as the “individual writ large.” But with time and the evolution of industry, the blueprint model of his ideal society was discarded. For decades Russian leaders claimed that their system was a success. But belief in it was gradually eroded. One of the triggers for the demise of Russia as a communist state came with the publication of Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s book *The Gulag Archipelago*. This documented how the lives of hundreds of people in forced labour camps had been destroyed by the Soviet system. .<sup>308</sup>

One of the interesting features of Marxism, as compared with Plato’s approach of imposing order on a chaotic situation, is its vulnerability to time and evolution. Against a certain background the “model” may appear to be viable and arguably it does work. But in the case of communism, it has done so at a cost of human rights and with a change of the background situation, the model has quickly collapsed.

Not all Platonic models have been developed in terms of State. The Catholic Church for instance has continued using key ideas that were put forward in Plato’s *Republic*. From the 1800’s institutional forms of Religious Life flourished. They provided services of health, education and welfare to the Catholic community. But such models could also be undercut by the evolution of the social background.<sup>309</sup>

## j) The 1950's Catholic Parish

Consider the Australian Catholic Parish of the 1950's. At its remote head was the Pope who could be paralleled with Plato's "philosopher ruler". The Pope could see a situation as it "really is" and impose rules on the rest of the Church. The Bishops could be compared with Plato's "Guardian Class." At the local level the Parish Priest has also been like the "philosopher ruler" with the final say in practically all decisions made in the parish. In terms of status only the priest could (and can) offer the Eucharist which is central to the life of the parish. In the 1950's, attendance at the weekly Eucharist was obligatory under pain of mortal sin and eternal damnation. It was here that the priest and only the priest would mediate between a large proportion of the parishioners and God.

In the 1950's the local Religious Order was viewed like Plato's elite. These people did not have personal property or family life and they committed themselves to the mission of the Church. Compare this with Plato's *Republic* "First they (the Guardians) shall have no private property beyond the barest essentials. Second none of them shall possess a dwelling house or storehouse to which all shall not have the right of entry. .... They shall eat together in messes and live together like soldiers in camp."<sup>310</sup> .."with nothing to do but perpetual guard-duty."

<sup>311</sup> In the 1950's the Catholic parish was distinguished by its parish and secondary schools, almost totally staffed by the members of the local Religious Order. The reason for this sort of staffing was that State Aid was not available to Catholics. The primary school was therefore staffed by nuns who worked for no wages at all. The secondary school was run as a low-cost business to provide subsistence income for all the nuns and finance for further building and maintenance of the secondary school. Both primary and secondary schools focussed on providing an education similar to the model of Plato. Children were trained in Church

teaching and morality as preparation for full membership of the Church as adults. The “elite” status of Religious Orders was increased by their exclusive separation from the wider world. In fact nuns, even in the 1950’s, were required by Church Canon law to be enclosed. Permission was needed to go out walking or into a shop or even out to to teach in the Primary school each day. Nun’s clothing and lifestyle was radically different from that of other women. There was an abiding focus on a “spiritual,” other-worldly life with its own elaborate language system and literature – literature that was read each day in common and privately. The whole complex of rules which included the daily horarium created and sustained the sense of a “spiritual world” culture. And, at the centre of all this was obligatory attendance at daily Mass.

Ironically enough, despite the historical fluctuations of colonisation, world wars, world depressions, famine and other shifts in the “outside world,” the same form of “religious life” continued unchanged. But then, there was a sudden shift in the Church’s background and thinking in the 1960’s with the Vatican II Council. Suddenly this called into question the removal of Religious Orders from the “secular” world, especially “Active” Religious Orders. Religious and especially nuns, were challenged to lead a more “human” life. A result of the shift was that after a lifetime of submission to the “holy rule” people were suddenly told to exercise their own initiative. It was also around this time that in Australia, State Aid was finally given to Catholic Schools. The schools could therefore afford to pay “lay” teachers and to many it has appeared that Religious Life was no longer relevant or needed. Abruptly vocations to Institutes of Female Religious stopped.

At the same time the Catholic schools have continued and they have apparently flourished (still with a model of education arguably parallel to that of Plato’s *Republic*). . . But the

Church's primary purpose of educating students to be active members of the local parish could be called into question. For instance there are parishes with about six hundred students attending the local Catholic schools. But not a single one of them can be seen at the Sunday Mass.

After the Vatican II Council the Church directed its interest and energy beyond the denominational boundary into the wider world. Since then it has taken particular interest in issues of justice. But even in this changed stance it still reflects the basic thinking of Plato. This is particularly evident in the evolution of "Liberation Theology."

#### **k) Segundo**

A notable liberation theologian has been J L Segundo who, was born in South America in 1925. In the 1980's he was working in Paraguay though he was banned by the government from publishing or teaching openly.<sup>312</sup> As a South American through the C20th he was very conscious of the great gap between rich and poor. He believed that many religious ideas held by poor people caused and worsened their situation. He claimed they tended to think injustice is inevitable and they can do nothing about it because this is the will of God. Segundo's ideas are set out in his book *The Liberation of Theolog*<sup>313</sup>

Segundo's criticisms were similar to that of Marx who claimed religion was as an obstacle to progress. However Segundo and other liberation theologians have claimed that the Scriptures can be reinterpreted to help rather than dissuade people from understanding that they are meant to struggle for more equal social structures.<sup>314</sup> In his book Segundo

says that Christianity has taught over the centuries that Jesus Christ is God. But from this, it also follows that God is Jesus. Thus the Gospels tell us something about the inner life of God Himself as acted out in the life situation of Jesus. The Gospels stories show that Jesus sought out poor people in preference to the wealthy. Segundo said this surely means that God has a special love for the poor and, as in the life of Jesus, he wants their situation to improve.<sup>315</sup>

Segundo claimed that religious faith should not be a static thing but rather it should urge people on to work for justice in their lives and the lives of others. The section on “The Ideological Infiltration of Dogma” in *Liberation of Theology* (Ch 1)<sup>316</sup> sets out a method for doing this. Poor people should make themselves more aware of their present situation and the reality of the problems they are facing. They should reflect on these in terms of their belief that God wants all people to live and work with dignity. They should then commit themselves to doing something practical about their situation and set about trying to overcome it. Whatever action that they take (or fail to take) shows what they really believe rather than the set of ideas that they may have about life. Segundo pointed out that a Church life based on a sacramental system without reference to historical events taking place is not enough. Rather note should be taken of real economic divisions between groups of people. God is involved in day to day reality rather than being removed from it. He points out that much of what has been said and taught in the Church has ignored economic realities.<sup>317</sup>

In the South America of Segundo’s time, luxurious homes could be seen side by side with scrap-iron or cardboard humpies. This gave a clear view of what injustices should be worked at. In Western society however forms of oppression have been less obvious and

more complex. Some have suggested the greatest problem here is anomie or loneliness.<sup>318</sup>

However the approach of liberation theology has been used in a wide range of struggles. It is based on a group in society finding a “voice” which speaks out on behalf of a form of oppression that the group is facing. Such a group may be women suffering violence or the “glass ceiling” of the workplace. It may be people described as “black” or indigenous people. It may be union members oppressed by work structures etc. In such cases it is this “oppressed” class or those who speak up on their behalf who become a different type of “elite.” This “elite” sees reality as it is. They give voice to it and try to impose social structures on the rest of the community in order to deal with it.

While the Liberation Theology approach may reflect aspects of Plato’s *Republic* in terms of the perception of reality and the education of others, there are further ways again in which the ideas of *The Republic* are embedded in society. In fact one can go through *The Republic* chapter by chapter and see close parallels between this book and the structures of industry in the developed world. Consider the following.

#### **I) The Work World - Another Republic**

- In Chapter **One** of *The Republic* Plato says work contribution and justice is based on the use of skills.<sup>319</sup> Skills are used for the benefit of others. They should be paid for.<sup>320</sup>
- One are reminded here that the modern working world is based on the *payment of wages*.

- In Chapter **Two** Plato says jobs should be distributed according to *skills*.<sup>321</sup>
- Chapter **Three** says education should be *specialised*. Generalised stories about life as a whole should be avoided.<sup>322</sup> One is reminded here of the specialisation of skills prepared for and used in the workplace.
- Chapter **Four** talks of different classes of workers in the Platonic *Republic*. The Guardians would administer but not own property in the State.<sup>323</sup> Recall that the vast numbers of people in the workforce *do not own* the property they deal with. This extends to people in managerial positions.
- Chapter **Five** talks of harmony within the *State* and within the *individual*. These two parties are much the same.<sup>324</sup> One recalls that the work world is administered through a law system which applies to everyone and to each one in the same way. In this sense the individual 'party' is answerable directly to the State.
- Chapter **Six** of *The Republic* *opposes family life* as a distraction from the job at hand.<sup>325</sup> Large if not most workplaces are divided off from the relationships of people in their private life and in the home.
- Chapter **Seven** talks of the cave image where people, chained down, can only see reflections of the real world outside.<sup>326</sup> In a way this reminds one of most businesses. People can only see reflections of the realities of the markets that they deal with. These are interpreted for them by *experts* in contact with the facts and figures about money and market fluctuations.
- In Chapter **Eight** Plato stresses the need for a *mathematical* education.<sup>327</sup> In the modern work world an ability to handle and understand the figures of economics is essential, especially for those in leadership positions.
- In Chapter **Nine** Plato describes the inadequacies of a range of Governments according to their effects.<sup>328</sup> At present the power given to a political party depends

mainly on its skill in *handling the economy* for the working world.

- In Chapter **Ten** Plato looks at the inadequacies of art in reflecting the pure truth.<sup>329</sup>  
At present in modern society the art world and the university world of cultural research, whether they like it or not, are constantly challenged by *questions about their relevance* for making profit.
- In. Chapter **Eleven** Plato talks of the eternal and so, in a sense, an infinite life awaiting the individual.<sup>330</sup> The Capitalist work world holds to the belief that the individual has the *unlimited scope* to advance themselves (in a democracy), or (in communist countries insofar as they still exist) to advance the cause of the State. The structure of the work world also recalls the descriptions that have been given by social philosophical writers over the centuries who have followed in a general way, a Platonic view of the world. Consider in summary those that have been discussed in previous pages.

A summary of this Line of Social Philosophers is as follows:

- *Augustine* accepted the world of business as the city of the world which was independent and necessary to those of the city of God. he latter were united by religious faith.<sup>331</sup>
- *Luther* saw the 'work world' and its princes as imposing order to protect and regulate day to day life.<sup>332</sup>
- *Machiavelli* held that the dynamics of the political sphere. and by implication the work world was in accord with a science of cause and effect. This was independent of moral-concerns.<sup>333</sup>
- *Calvin* saw business activity as a direct act of praising God.<sup>334</sup>

- *Hobbes* saw the work world as bound together by rational contract.<sup>335</sup>
- *Rousseau* stressed its corporate spirit.<sup>336</sup> He saw the individual as being alienated from himself when working for somebody else.<sup>337</sup> (Plato claimed that it was because of this, that work should be paid for.)<sup>338</sup>
- *Marx* said that people should be reconciled with themselves through their work, by working for the State of which they were a part. Plato's Philosopher-Ruler worked for the State. In Western-based societies the individual also works for the state, given that the tax system is based on his or her individual's wages.
- *Liberation theology* recalls the need for astuteness and strategies because of an on-going struggle between classes.<sup>339</sup>

### **Summary of a Platonic Approach**

In a conclusion about the teachings of Plato one could see enough parallels between *The Republic* and the developed world to accept the view that the developed world is largely based upon its ideas. Yet a reading also readily shows up the impracticality of relying totally upon it. *The Republic* sets out a “utopia”, that is, an idealised world which by definition cannot exist. For instance in a logical sense it may be a good idea to permanently take children from their parents in order to “totally” educate them. It may be a “good” idea to breed only the best males with the best females and remove the social dynamics between them. But what is logical is not necessarily human. It can lead to a self-contained world that ignores the background evolution of events that goes on beyond it. It may be effective for a time in imposing a “blueprint” on a chaotic type of situation. But it tends to be based on the “here and now.” It can fail to take into account a wider or ultimate reality over time and it can

suddenly become irrelevant.

Plato looked backwards towards the “pure truth” behind material forms. He saw matter in itself as being a step away from such spiritual purity and he saw art (for example the literature of Homer) as being further removed from this again. The idea that matter was removed from pure truth could easily suggest that it was evil. Such a position of course has had far reaching effects for those who have attempted to model societies upon Plato’s ideals, for example in the enforcement of the ideals of communism. Yet such inadequacy in Plato’s teaching was realised within his own time and in his own school of philosophy.<sup>340</sup> His student Aristotle who attended the school for twenty years presented an alternative view and his ideas in turn, have had a far-reaching impact on the shape of Western society.

## **2. Aristotle and Some of his Successors**

### **a) Aristotle**

Aristotle evolved a line of thinking that focussed on where life was heading rather than where it had come from. He called this direction the “Final Cause”.<sup>341</sup> He noted as an illustration of this that two eggs may look the same but one may be destined to be a chicken while the other has the potential to become a snake.<sup>342</sup> What each egg would become, is determined by its form. Thus growth moves a form of life towards a greater reality rather than away from it. Aristotle said that the 'good' or 'final form' of things is contained within them rather than being removed from them. He noted, as a biologist and the son of a physician, that the whole range of life forms and things are interconnected as in a web.<sup>343</sup> He saw differences between life forms and between people as being helpful to

the whole. Therefore people should be allowed to have variety in their lives rather than being coerced into a blueprint of an ideal imposed from above. Also, work does more than provide for people's material and social needs. It is an opportunity for people to improve on their situation.

In time Aristotle set up a library in which he sorted out different branches of learning. He also set up a museum.<sup>344</sup> It is said his own student Alexander the Great helped him to do this.<sup>345</sup> Alexander himself set off on an expedition early in life which led to the Greeks conquering almost the whole of the known world. Ironically there is very little in Aristotle's writing to show that this was going on. But it would have influenced Aristotle in his efforts to grapple with the question of how people can live and work together.

In his work *Politica* Aristotle focussed on what sort of structures would be the best for a city state to operate upon. In this book it seems that he was not thinking in terms of an empire and it did not appear to occur to him that this was what Alexander was forming.<sup>346</sup> Rather, *Politica* provided guidelines as to how a people can go about writing up their own city constitutions and he pointed out the need to clarify the aims of a state.<sup>347</sup> He analysed the good and bad points of a whole number of city constitutions which were around at the time and he claimed that insofar as people work for the aims of their constitutions they are good or bad citizens.<sup>348</sup> This sort of citizenship was distinguished from being either morally good or bad.

Aristotle drew a comparison between people in a city state living and working together and sailors on a ship. The citizen, like the sailor, is a member of an association. Sailors have various duties to perform, one is a rower, another a pilot, another a look-out man and so

on: But it is clear, that while the precise definition of each one's virtue will apply exclusively to him, there is also a common definition applicable to them all. All these people have a common end in view, that is the safety of navigation. In a similar way, in a city-state one citizen will differ from another in some sort of way. Yet the safe working of their association, namely as set out in their constitution, is their common purpose. Civic virtue is thus relative to the constitution" (Book 3 Ch 3)<sup>349</sup> .

Aristotle also saw that Justice as such exists in relation to the moral aim of the state (c/f Book 3).<sup>350</sup> Because his focus was on where things were meant to go, rather than on where they came from, he saw life as moving towards reality rather than away from it. He saw the family as encouraging affection<sup>351</sup> and private property as enabling generosity to develop.<sup>352</sup> Art was a way of giving more meaning to an experience (c/f Bk2).<sup>353</sup> He saw that some people in certain roles would be in a better position to develop the 'virtue' needed for ruling the state. Thus warriors, rulers and priests were seen as eligible for full citizenship in a State rather than mechanics, traders and husbandmen (Bk 7 Ch 9).<sup>354</sup> However he also noted that situations vary. Thus the aim of a whole society and the power that different types of people have within the state, varies from place to place.<sup>355</sup> This is the way things should be.

Just as the idealism of Plato can be found threaded through the social philosophies of Western society, so also, the ideas of Aristotle can be found.

## **b) Aquinas**

Aquinas was born towards the end of the Middle Ages some centuries after the ideas of

Augustine had been established in the Church. This was a time when the Moslems, who had retained the classics of the Greeks, were having a big influence on the Christian world because these ancient pagan teachings were being re-discovered by Western scholars. Questions therefore were now being asked about the use of the elaborate ritual and spiritual order of the Church which was being used to dominate the Christian world. Aquinas, a Dominican monk, embraced the teaching of Aristotle. He showed that this contrasted with the emphases that were taken by Plato and later by Augustine.<sup>356</sup> Aristotle had shown how everything is interconnected. Reality can be found in one's daily experience rather than in a world apart from this one. On the one hand Augustine had focussed on other-worldly motivation for work. In contrast to Augustine but like Aristotle, Aquinas set out the means and ends whereby work can be carried on to develop (rather than hark back to) the sense of God. Aquinas did this in particular by providing a carefully worked-out framework for human law which he saw this as being based on the natural and Divine law. Like Aristotle, Aquinas claimed that these laws can be known through the use of reason.<sup>357</sup> Human laws can be devised and supported by people as an extension of the Divine and natural laws. He taught that such human laws should be aimed at the common good and in accord with the experience of people in a given situation.<sup>358</sup>

Aquinas said God is essentially reasonable and people share in God's use of reason.<sup>359</sup> In this way therefore they can share in God's authority when they make reasonable laws. By their own individual and joint efforts, they can find a way of living and working that will bring their lives closer to God and true happiness. The quest for happiness in fact is a central theme of his book *Summa Theologica*.<sup>360</sup> Aquinas therefore encouraged people to devise ways to help different sectors of society to work in cooperation.<sup>361</sup> He affirmed people in setting up institutions to promote the common good and he saw this as promoting

the overall pattern of God's plan.<sup>362</sup> Aquinas, like Aristotle, stressed how virtues are developed by good living. The basic ones are prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.<sup>363</sup> He went on to claim that the sacraments of the Church will help people to develop a personal relationship with Christ.<sup>364</sup> This helps them in turn to lead lives that are more reasonable and therefore happier.<sup>365</sup> In the framework or rather network that Aquinas puts forward, the Church could claim that because of its links with the life of God, it is very likely to understand God's law best and therefore know what is best for human law.<sup>366</sup> But Aquinas also asserted the right of ordinary people to make their own regulations in working for the common good and he continued to do this despite opposition.

<sup>367</sup>

At the time of Aquinas, many people in the Church felt threatened by his use of pagan classics. They disliked his criticism of Augustine and his claim that the thinking of Augustine was akin to the 'pagan' Plato. They were also upset that he obtained his pagan writings from the Moslems. Some bishops therefore burned the books of Aquinas and tried to excommunicate him.<sup>368</sup> But his Dominican brothers supported him. In fact in the centuries to come his philosophical framework was to become a major base of reasoning for the Catholic Church. Moreover other social philosophers have followed in the wake of Aquinas for instance John Locke.

### c) **Locke**

John Locke was born in England in 1632 and died 1704. The times were still violent and he had to flee England twice during his life time. Yet he retained an optimistic view of human nature. Like Aristotle, he was strongly influenced by a medical approach to life and

its functions.<sup>369</sup> He saw the functions of life as varied yet being closely interconnected and working in a natural harmony.<sup>370</sup> Also like Aristotle and Aquinas, he believed that a reasonable pattern for working together could be designed by a people themselves.

Locke did not believe that people are born with innate ideas (as Plato did). Rather, he claimed that ideas are formed by experience. They then sort out such ideas into categories which they call knowledge.<sup>371</sup> Thus people realise God exists because reasonably they must have come originally from some Source. Such a Source must be from beyond their own realm and must be more life-giving, intelligent, caring and personal than what they are.

Locke set out some of his key ideas in a chapter called "of the State of Nature". in his *Second Treatise on Civil Government*.<sup>372</sup> In this he said that in in his ordinary state of nature, man is peaceful and free. He is able to choose what he wishes to do with his person and his goods, which by his labour, have become his private property. The freedom of man has been given to him as a right and this is according to the law of nature by virtue of who he is. According to the same law other people also have these rights and should be respected and if necessary defended. Also, according to such natural law every person has the right to enforce respect for the private property and person both of himself and others.<sup>373</sup>

Locke reasoned that it is unlikely that if people are unjust enough to steal from others, they will then be so just as to punish themselves for infringing the law of nature. It is therefore reasonable for people to jointly set up a political body that will enforce the law for them and this political body will be answerable to the people.

Locke's rationale for setting up a Government is, at its most obvious, based on common sense. In fact the common sense of Locke's ideas has been a major force of influence in Western Government ever since his time. When he was writing, the American colonies were rebelling against English rule. They took over Locke's political philosophy so completely that many of his phrases in *The Second Treatise on Government*, are repeated word for word both in the American Declaration of Independence and the American Constitutions. Locke's ideas are also reflected in the constitutions of Australia, France and elsewhere.<sup>374</sup> They are reflected in the ordinary processes of democratic government. People elect representatives to make civic laws for themselves and an executive carries these out. Yet the final rulers are the people themselves and if they do not like their government they elect another one.

Despite his later influence Locke was not completely satisfied with his own position. He saw knowledge as coming from experience but he realised that ideas about experience tend to over-stress or over-ride the actual reason of the individual person. Thus they tend to ignore types of knowledge that come more directly from experience and insights and what could be objectively judged as unreasonable behaviour and devoid of common sense is accepted.<sup>375</sup>

Locke was a very religious person and had a great influence on the Anglican Church. In one sense he provided a base for unifying a country. But it would be others such as Durkheim who would provide the tools for analysing what was actually going on in a society.

**d) Durkheim**

Emile Durkheim was born in France in 1858. At that time practically all philosophies were caught up in the fashion of seeing everything in terms of the individual and/or the general social spirit. Hegel described this general social spirit as the 'Gheist' and the State. However, Durkheim's background distinguished him from others in that he had the experience of an intense community life. He was the son of a Jewish rabbi and was trained to be a rabbi. Just as the Hebrew tradition he came from revolved around the law and the will of God, so also Durkheim was absorbed by questions of morality and morale in a community. He believed that morale was disintegrating in France after the 1870 revolution and changes to industrial society. At the same time, as a Jew, he was conscious of the great bond that was felt between his fellows when the public eye at the time was focussed on blatant discrimination against Jews. Such discrimination was shown in the case of a Jewish public servant called Dreyfus who was used as a public scapegoat.<sup>376</sup>

Durkheim believed that a society functions as a community first of all, rather than as a number of individuals bound by contract, or even as an individual writ large. Rather, he claimed that a community is like an organism and everyone contributes in their own special way. He claimed in his work *Division of Labour* (1893) that industrialisation can improve community rather than destroy it. This would be because people take on more specialised roles. They then need to work in more with other people. Because they work in complementary ways, there should no longer be need for restraints and impositions. Rather the interdependence of modern work in itself can create order and harmony.<sup>377</sup>

Half way through the writing of *Division of Labour* Durkheim realised that in fact

harmony in a modern society with its complementary roles, needs to grow first of all out of other binding social networks and forces.<sup>378</sup> He realised that religion and its symbols and family ties, traditions etc. should not be dispensed with. Rather, the long term success of the modern industrial work world depends on the presence of such primary uniting forces. So, the rest of Durkheim's work was spent on proving that these primary, uniting forces do in fact exist. He showed this in his work *Suicide*<sup>379</sup> where he demonstrated that the basic unit in society is the community rather than the individual. *Suicide* showed by statistics that those people who commit suicide do so, not only by their own decision, but also because of their external situation. In Ch IV of *Suicide* for example, he showed that people integrated into community are less likely to suicide than others. For instance wives who have children, suicide less often than wives without children. Women in general, suicide less often than men do, especially unmarried men and men without children. In Ch V of his study he showed that divorcees have a high suicide rate. He also showed that Jews suicide less often than Catholics and Catholics suicide less often than Protestants.

By his use of statistics Durkheim showed scientifically that social facts do exist apart from individual people. And, he showed that such facts can be measured.<sup>380</sup> Thus Durkheim focussed the major part of his life on proving that society exists as a “social organism.” He had intended to show how moral values are found in a social context and then these become universal values.<sup>381</sup> Had he survived to do this, he may well have returned to his first theme in *Division of Labour* and showed how values emerge from within different environments and functions of the workforce. Then such values gradually affect the social whole. However as it turned out Durkheim died of a broken heart when his sons and confreres were killed in the First World war in 1917. But his ideas about society as a social organism that produces specific value systems continued and these

paralleled the work of Max Weber, who is considered to be the first sociologist.

e) **Weber**

Weber was born in Germany in 1864 and died in 1920. He was aware of the writings of Marx and Marx's stress on submerging personal ideas into those of the State. However Weber said that ideas are not secondary but are in themselves driving forces. He said that Marx was 'tone deaf and colour blind' as far as religion was concerned and therefore he did not recognise the importance of ideas. Marx for example, could not explain why capitalists had a profit motive in the first place. Weber did a study on capitalism which was Marx's major subject. He then showed that the religious spirit of the Puritans was a major force in establishing capitalism and its profit focus.<sup>382</sup> He said that religion may, as Marx also said, be a cause of set ideas and so block out people's understanding of the realities around them. Yet Weber also pointed out that such ideas can also be a driving force to create new realities.<sup>383</sup>

In his book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* Weber showed that capitalism is most developed in Protestant rather than Catholic countries.<sup>384</sup> He contrasted the countries of the United States and England with the countries of Spain and Italy which lagged behind in industrialism. He showed that in fact Protestant regions were more likely to be capitalist and protestant individuals were more likely to be successful entrepreneurs. He also showed that amongst Protestants, the Calvinists were more profit-minded than the Lutherans and Evangelists.<sup>385</sup> In the last Chapter of his book, Weber outlines major tenets of the Puritan ethic which explain the Puritan inner drive towards

capitalism. He said these people believed it was activity that gave glory to God and not leisure.<sup>386</sup> Also everyone has a calling towards something they should labour at. .<sup>387</sup> They thought one should follow more prosperous jobs in order to be a faithful steward of God..<sup>388</sup> Entertainments such as sport and theatre were a waste of time and such time should be spent instead on work.<sup>389</sup> They said one should also be mindful of what money is spent..<sup>390</sup>

Weber held that the Puritans were driven towards material success because this was a proof they were destined for heaven. He argued that over the course of time, such a motive has largely lapsed and now many pursue wealth for its own sake. Also, the Puritan self-discipline has largely lost its motivation. But the original impetus of the Puritan ethic has had a major impact on the world.<sup>391</sup> Weber closes his argument by insisting that while there are materialist causes for what happens, there are also spiritual causes as well and these should not be ignored. In his writings Weber also reflected a belief that there are two major types of social structure called “gesellschaft” and “gemeinschaft”. The former was related to a business world, while the latter was related to family relations.<sup>392</sup> On the one hand Marx had focussed on the former model as being the total kind of society. But Weber saw the values and structures of “gemeinschaft” as being more basic. He therefore saw the small community as the basis of society rather than the individual.<sup>393</sup> It was Weber who, as a private scholar, gradually formed the first group of sociologists and he outlined the major points that needed to be studied in coming years.<sup>394</sup>

A sociologist to follow Weber and possibly picking up from where Durkheim left off, has been Talcott Parsons.

**f) Talcott Parsons**

Talcott Parsons was born in America in 1902. He shared the view put forward by Weber that ideas have a pervasive effect on the shape of a society rather than the other way around. He therefore opposed the Marxist view that the material environment and the control of it are the more important realities.

Parsons used the examples of ancient Israel and Greece to illustrate his understanding. Israel had a covenant or contract-relationship with God similar to that of a vassal state with its Lord. Israel would obey Yahweh who in turn would protect it. Such a sense of covenant gave the Israelites a sense of mission to the world. They had a task to do. The covenant gave them a sense of unity and interdependence because they were all bound by the law that Yahweh had laid down. This spurred them on to teach reading to their sons so that their sons could know the law. Thus the Jews were the first people with universal literacy. The covenant idea also gave an aura of authority to state laws and rulers because these extended the authority of God's law. The sense of a covenant also gave the Israelites a sense of importance in showing the rest of the world, over which God reigns, the value of living by the moral law.

Parsons argued that the whole of Israelite society was affected to some extent by its belief that it had a contract or agreement with its God.<sup>395</sup> But he also held that the Greeks had a unique contribution to the world in the realm of ideas. The Greeks believed there was an Eternal Order beyond the world and indeed beyond their many gods. If this Order was to be breached, tragedy would follow. On the other hand if order were maintained, a society could reflect the Eternal Order in its own structures. Parsons argued that the Greeks set up

a democracy of citizens who were equal and could govern their small state in a way similar to the circle of Gods who were part of their religious system. This perception motivated the Greeks to seek out the eternal order of things in the realms of mathematics, philosophy, ethics, biology, science etc. Also the artisans of this society sought to reflect this eternal Order in their art, poetry, music, buildings etc. The effort over all was to pattern in all the activities of the community on a sense of sublime order.

Parsons noted that the covenant idea of the Israelites and the 'Universal Order' idea of the Greeks were both united into the theology of the Christians. St Paul for instance, the first Christian theologian, was both Hebrew and Greek. Parsons recognised that in the centuries to follow its beginnings, Christianity has had an enormous effect on Western Society. It has been in the West, rather than in the East, that the industrial world has evolved. Parsons claimed that modern society has to recognise that its essential impetus has in fact come from Christianity.<sup>396</sup> Yet he also admitted that as a society develops, it tends to differentiate its ideas. Thus religion is expressed in culture but the culture gradually takes on an independence of its own. Modern society tends to look to its culture for its art forms such as literature etc. and for the keys to its motivation.<sup>397</sup> Art forms as such tend to become more generalized in order to reflect codes of ethics and values that allow for more diversity. This sort of generalisation helps society as a whole to adapt more easily to the background changes that it faces.

Parsons contrasted generalised values with forms of fundamentalism of the extreme of right or left. This is because fundamentalism rejects other perspectives.<sup>398</sup> In his book the *Societies*, he provides an organic, cybernetic model for society. The word "cybernetic" recalls the crucial part played by the tiller of an enormous ship. One slight move of the

tiller will re-direct the whole. In Ch 1 of his book Parsons also recalls the role of a tiny gene in a cell (of an embryo). This is the centre which determines what form that a cell and developing organism will take on.<sup>399</sup>

Yet even while he stressed the importance of key ideas and key perceptions of reality for a society, Parsons also said that these need to be institutionalised in some way if they are going to affect the whole.<sup>400</sup> Thus there has to be a channel of communication for key ideas and there needs to be a tight 'cybernetic' control of these as in a ship. He also noted that if key ideas are expressed in cultural art forms they are more likely to survive. Thus, the ideas of Israel have continued on in their influence (through the culture of a community) despite the destruction of the first Israelite state and the comparatively small numbers of Jews. In turn the ideas of Greece have also continued on through art forms and philosophical teaching and social structures.<sup>401</sup>

Parsons claimed that if a key idea is developed and expressed in a society, then this idea gives the society extra scope to adjust to the big changes that it faces in the present, or it will have to face in the future. On the other hand a key idea and its expression could be isolated in some kind of niche or it could be absorbed into the mainstream of society without any real effect at all upon it.<sup>402</sup>

In order to clarify his views, Parsons took a sketchy outline that Weber had made of society as being based on its major functions.<sup>403</sup> He then drew a schema to show that at one level of society is "Ultimate Reality" which, he said, is expressed in the realm of values and cultural art forms. Further down in this functional analysis or further separated from such a cybernetic control, is the society's "community integrating activity". This takes place

in the realm of functions geared to unite people into the whole. Further down again, there is the "personality system" which is geared towards the achievement of goals. Parsons calls this the "polity". Further down again there is the realm of adjustment which is on the lowest level in the cybernetic model". Parsons described this last "adjustment" level as being on the 'physico-organic' level. That is, it is high on physical energy (like the bulk of the ship). But it is low on the generation of seminal or "seed" thinking. This is in the realm of economics and it contrasts with the top realm of "ultimate" reality.

The analysis of Parsons shows that he thought of society as being a "social organism" and in this way he had a similar view to that of Aristotle. Aristotle, as already stated, set up the first museum and put focus on the classification, not only of city constitutions, but the whole range of material things. The extent to which modern society has used Aristotle's approach can be shown in the Bureau of Statistics' *Australian and New Zealand Industrial Classification (ANZSIC)*.<sup>404</sup> This classifies the whole range of industries in Australia and is an essential tool for the collection of employment statistics etc. There are actually close parallels between the outline of this classification and the outline of Parson's functional analysis. The Bureau does not set out its classification with "cybernetic" or cultural or values maintenance activities at its beginning. However the groups of industries parallel that of Parsons functional analysis. Consider the following table that shows Parson's outline in the headings and then the Bureau's major industry groupings.

| <b>1. FINDING VALUES AND DIRECTION</b> |                |
|--|----------------|
|  | Classification |
| Personal and Other Services            | Q              |
| Cultural and Recreational Services     | P              |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>2. KEEPING SOCIETY TOGETHER</b>        |   |
| Health and Community Services             | O |
| Education                                 | N |
| Government Administration and Defence     | M |
| <b>3. PRODUCING WHAT WE NEED</b>          |   |
| Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing         | A |
| Mining                                    | B |
| Manufacturing                             | C |
| Electricity, Gas and Water Supply         | D |
| Construction                              | E |
| <b>4. MOVING PEOPLE AND THINGS AROUND</b> |   |
| Wholesale Trade                           | F |
| Retail Trade                              | G |
| Accommodation, Cafes and Restaurants      | H |
| Transport and Storage                     | I |
| Communication Services                    | J |
| Finance and Insurance                     | K |
| Property and Business Services            | L |

Parallels between the functional outline of Parsons and the Classification outline of the Bureau of Statistics does not imply that one party copied from the other. Rather, the parallels show a common Aristotelian understanding in Western Society that if order is to prevail, classification is necessary.

Just as the work world and other social institutions reflect the thinking of both Plato and Aristotle, so also does the Church. In terms of emphasis there appears to be an oscillation between the two.

#### **g) Vatican II**

The Catholic Church Council of Vatican II began in the early 1960's when Bishops from around the world came to Rome at the invitation of the new Pope, John XXIII. The

uniqueness of Vatican II is shown by its name. That is, it was only the second such council in the 2,000 years of the Church's history. At the time the Catholic Church was in need of new ideas to help it adjust to the modern world. This in itself was illustrated by the dwindling number of ageing cardinals who ruled in the church.<sup>405</sup> When Pius XII died, the cardinals could not agree on who should become Pope. They picked an old cardinal who was, it was said, an interim Pope who would 'hold the fort' until someone more appropriate came along.

But when John XXIII came to power he announced there would be a Vatican Council. The Church was to re-think its basic philosophy from top to bottom. Decades later, the Church continues to grapple with what this all meant.

John XXIII, as Pope, had the power to select the people he believed could herald in a fresh way of thinking in the Church. At that time, in America, there was a theologian named Courtney Murray who had closely based his thinking on that of John Locke. Locke's thinking in turn (as described in previous pages) was akin to the thinking of Aristotle and Aquinas and also Weber and Parsons. Courtney Murray, therefore had an approach which perceived society as being similar to an organic whole. As with Aquinas, Courtney Murray recognised the reasoning autonomy of the secular sphere. But at the time his ideas were so different from the Church's mentality that he had been banned by the Church from publishing any more of his writings.<sup>406</sup>

It caused great comment therefore when the discredited theologian was invited by the Pope to write the Council's Document on "Religious Freedom".<sup>407</sup> In the style of Locke (Aristotle, Aquinas, Parsons etc ) this document claims that people have the right to act in

accordance with their religious belief.<sup>408</sup> Such a right should be expressed in a country's constitution (Ch 1 Par 2).<sup>409</sup> The document says that the divine, natural and human laws are interconnected because they are based on the truth that people can seek out through their own reason. People have the right to act according to their conscience and they cannot be coerced into acting against it (c/f Par 3).<sup>410</sup> Parents have the right to educate their children (par 5).<sup>411</sup> The document says that religion as such is geared towards a social expression. Therefore Governments do not have the right to quash formal religion. The Document also reminds religious communities that neither can they in turn, coerce other peoples. It claims Religious groups have the right to form organisations that are geared towards educational, cultural, charitable and social ends. They have the right to express their insights about social organisation and activity. At the same time, one religious group cannot expect favouritism over others. (par 6).<sup>412</sup>

The document points out that Governments should provide favourable conditions for religion because this helps the common welfare.<sup>413</sup> Religious freedom and free action should be protected. Also, Governments should also maintain public order (par 7).<sup>414</sup>

It may be asked how such a document bears on the understanding of the Church in the world of work. In this document as in others, the Church recognises that working world has validity in its own right. It can classify and analyse its experience and work out its direction and guidelines in terms of this. In fact, business ethics would be largely worked out in the context of business. The working world is the means whereby people can improve the world in general and grow towards a life of happiness themselves. The Church would support them in this.

Prior to the time of Vatican II the Catholic Church had already accepted a position similar to that taught by Thomas Aquinas centuries before. But it had to a large extent slipped back to a two-world view. On the one side there was the Church with its sacramental life, while on the other side was the secular world. At the time it was generally thought that religion required separation from the world rather than involvement in and dialogue with it. A total range of religious language in use at the time as well as customs etc. could illustrate this.<sup>415</sup> For instance a popular hymn used at the time of the consecration of Religious went as follows: “The Empire of this world, I have despised for love of Jesus Christ, whom I adore, towards whom my heart inclineth.” In contrast to this, Vatican II taught that religion should be interconnected with the day-to-day world of work and the efforts of all people.

## **5. Some of the Flaws in Both Dualistic Approaches**

It seems there is a swing that goes backwards and forwards in western society between a Platonic or an Aristotelian approach, a swing that calls to mind a continuum line. And each position carries with it a whole context of approaches. For instance words and phrases related to the Platonic approach could be considered to be ‘gesellschaft,’ socialism and ‘the State is the individual writ large.’ Idealism is another word and in fact all the words “ism” tend to fit here, or according to the grammatical usage all the words that parallel “idealist.” More such words include, or purist, or leftist or even strategist. Of particular relevance is the word “propaganda.” which would have been classed as “re-education” in camps set up for this purpose. Oddly enough some of the people who support the “right” can also be very adept at using “left-wing” tactics. One is reminded here of the methods used by the National Civic Council in the 1950’s which split the Australian Labour Party.

On the other hand words related to Aristotle's approach appear to include 'gemeinschaft' 'organic', 'constitutions', 'rights', 'fulfilment', 'virtue', 'character', 'happiness', 'nurture', 'family', 'creative', 'diversity', 'biology' etc.

There are common threads between the two philosophers which have proved both advantages and disadvantages to a society. Both philosophies view reality in terms of a basic dualism, that is, a division between spirit and matter. They have prioritised rationalism as a means of establishing order and therefore justice in a society. Both approaches claim to endorse equality between the citizens of a society. But both also endorse a "guardian class" to regulate this. It is in terms of the approach of these philosophies to the feminine that inherent deficiencies in particular can be seen. On the one hand Plato viewed his citizens, including male and female, as being equal. But *The Republic* also treats both sexes as the being same and it abolishes family structures. Thus the roles of parenting in terms of the gifts of each sex are negated. In fact it appears Plato was establishing equality between the sexes by negating the feminine. Aristotelian philosophy on the other hand has a different approach here. Rather than viewing the State as being the individual writ large, it sees the social unit such as the family as being basic to society. But Aristotle's view was based on a biological error or "one-seed theory". He considered "only the male carries the live seed."<sup>416</sup> He considered it was the action of the male on the womb of the woman that determined whether a foetus was male or female. Thus Aristotle allowed the woman her femininity. But she was also considered to be inherently inferior to the male. This may seem like a detail. But the ramifications of Aristotle's view are widespread. In fact one wonders if Aristotle's view of "only the male carries the live seed" found its way into a verse of the Islamic *Koran* where it says "women are your fields go to them."<sup>417</sup>

In terms of the environment the attitude of Plato and Aristotle to matter as being either “evil” or lower down on the scale of being has affected the relationship between people and the earth that supports them. There has been an attitude of ownership over material things that implies one may do what one pleases with them.

Further to the above, Platonic type institutions have contributed great vitality to the growth of civilisations but they also have an intrinsic weakness of being “locked into” a single view of reality. They can therefore be unresponsive to the existence of emerging realities and the current and future needs of people they have been set up to serve. At the same time in Aristotelian or “*gemeinschaft*” community appears to have a weakness of passivity about it. One wonders if the communist revolutions taking place during the twentieth century were, historically speaking, a necessary action to impose some sort of order on a situation of chaos. Also, as Parsons pointed out while an Aristotelian system may claim to endorse key cultural, seminal ideas and values these can also be ‘snuffed’ out by inaction. They can of course be “snuffed” in a communist society by violent action.

In the Platonic or “*gesellschaft*” type of society there is a heavy emphasis on paid work and people are valued accordingly. Other types of more basic but voluntary work and social support groups can be ignored. On the other hand the Aristotelian approach recognises the importance of social groups such as family and ethnic groups, sports, neighbourhood etc groups. But the efforts to maintain them slip into a category of “volunteerism,” they can be viewed as less important.

In reflecting on the “pros and cons” of a Hellenistic type of society the question arises as to

what extent these were apparent in the first century CE. And, to what extent did the gospel writers share in the awareness and see it as important to provide a critique of them in the structures of the gospels? One could respond that if weaknesses in Plato's *Republic* were obvious to Aristotle and he tried to resolve these, it is likely that, after centuries of weighing up the pros and cons of Hellenism, the people of a Jewish background were aware of Hellenistic strengths and weaknesses as well.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

In conclusion. The above pages attempt in particular to address two anomalies. In the 1950's female religious orders were flourishing in Victoria, Ireland and elsewhere.

Anecdotal evidence relates that in a graduation class of twelve girls there were at times eleven of them who went on to join a Religious Order. That number has dropped to nil at the present time. If the people of the present time still believe that such a lifestyle is based on the gospels and is intrinsic to the life of the Church, then why the anomaly of no vocations. Another anomaly is that the Catholic Schools teach the real presence of Jesus Christ at the Mass but there has been a massive drop off of numbers bothering to go there.

In terms of Sociology of Religion it seems a considerable amount of work has been done relating to both factors above, though arguably, without changing the status quo. Another anomaly is the anecdotal comment that none of the people who deal with sociology of religion in Australia are interested in the gospel. Have approaches to the gospel to date dominated by methods that discourage people from looking at them in terms of sociology?

The above pages attempt to address current trends in Biblical Interpretation and the extent to which these explore parallels between structures of the gospel and current models of society. According to the Catholic Pontifical Commission a diachronic approach, namely the Historical Critical method of interpretation which continues to dominate Scripture research, fails to consider Biblical works as a whole. The Commission recommends a number of synchronic approaches such as rhetorical criticism, narrative criticism and structural criticism.

These methods look at the aims of a biblical writer attempting to convince his (or her) readers of a particular view. They include looking at the literary techniques being used in the telling of a story that includes, intrinsically, a theological point of view. They explore a “grammar” within the text that carries a logical line of reasoning about abstract concepts.

These synchronic methods are more suited to a sociological study of the type of society, or societies, that the Gospel message portrays. They hark back to the efforts of the first sociologists such as Weber and Durkheim who considered how a key set of beliefs could shape a society and its behaviour. In the case of Weber this related to the Protestant belief that monetary profits could demonstrate the “saved” status of a believer. In the case of Durkheim his studies gave a statistic analysis of the sense of alienation to be found in the societies of Jews, Catholics and Protestants.

Perhaps a further reason why sociologists of religion have baulked away from a study of the gospels is because it has been thought their historical situation has been too obscure for a “scientific” study or a comparison between first century CE society and the present. But historical studies over the past century have given a clearer and different picture of Palestine in the first century. It was in fact heavily influenced by Hellenism and various rulers such as Herod the Great deliberately built Hellenistic structures into the facilities of Palestinian, even while making Jerusalem the centre of the Jewish Diaspora. Thus the living conditions of Palestine could compare with those elsewhere in the ancient world and, sociologically speaking, could be compared with elsewhere.

Further literary studies, especially after the findings at Qumran in the 1940’s have shown how Jewish writings, including those now included in the Christian New Testament, were, on the

one hand largely based on Hellenistic literary structures e.g. II Maccabees. But they also dealt with the attempt of Jewish writers to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of Hellenistic ideas as compared with their own culture which was based on a God-given moral law. These literary studies should enable present-day sociologists to be more aware of the possible exploration of abstract concepts, steps of logic and critical analysis about society which could be found within gospel structures. Namely present-day sociologists can be more assertive in contradicting previous tendencies of thinking and saying that the Palestine culture of the first century was overwhelmingly Jewish. Not so.

In the above pages an exploration has also been made of a key dilemma in the early church, that is, the debate about the need for Gentile converts to be circumcised and observe the details of Jewish law. By the use of narrative criticism it has been shown how the dilemma was dealt with by the Church leaders. This narrative interpretation explored the motives of the characters portrayed and the possibility that the implied narrator and implied reader could be sharing information that, either none of the characters in the story shared, or only some of the characters were sharing. Thus James the leader could be presenting a “solution” to the crisis that appeared to only deal with already-established dietary rules. But in fact such a “solution” was arguably coded in such a way that only those who understood “the way” of Christian interpretation of the Commandments could realise the full meaning of what was being said. Such a code was expressing a Gentile idealisation of the three key social commandments of “thou shalt not kill, commit adultery or steal” and it ties in with the theme of Jesus’ challenge “Go, sell what you have and give to the poor and come follow me.”

In the light of further discussion in the above pages such a challenge could be arguably paralleled with the commitment required of Plato’s “Guardian Class” in Plato’s *Republic*.

The same sort of challenge also connects with the lifestyle and commitment of Religious Orders and also ironically enough, the present-day structures of industry. Both the Orders and Industry have sort to respond to the health and self-determination needs of people, as also their need for social support and material well-being.

For female Religious to put out an educational challenge to the value systems of industry would be against the “enclosure” rules of pre-Vatican II Canon Law. But it seems such rules were based on cultural situations rather than the essentials of the gospel message.

In terms of abstract concepts about society, the above pages consider key origins of Hellenistic society, that is the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. While Aristotle realised there were deficiencies in Plato’s view of society as expressed in *The Republic* and he sort to rectify this, for example in his collection of city constitutions in *Politica* there were inherent difficulties in the society view of Aristotle as well. Both the good and deficient aspects of society as presented by Plato and Aristotle have been handed on through the centuries by social philosophers. And, it seems Western society has oscillated between the two views, possibly as largely determined by the historical situation. A Platonic approach has imposed a blueprint of order on over what could or has become a situation of chaos. An Aristotelian view has insisted on the rights of self determination for a social group. Both approaches continue to coexist in modern society. Thus Industries are structured so there is a class division of owner/ managers on the one hand and paid worker on the other. There is an impersonal “*gesellschaft*” approach that divides off personal life and inclinations from larger work place. On the other hand the overall structure of industry operate and are categorised as a “social organism” and is depicted as such in for example the *Australia New Zealand Industry Classification*.

By the presentation of a number of social philosophers in the stream of either Plato or Aristotle it has been shown that their ideas about the division between spirit and matter have also been passed on. Whether these being in terms of “matter” being evil (and negated) or in terms of it being downgraded. Such dualism continues to have a dangerous effect for instance when money and productivity have been valued above the dangers of global warming.

In the context of global warming the deficiencies of a Hellenised society become more apparent. The question remains. Did or could the Gospel writers provide a critique of Hellenism? Obviously the gospels contain a story about the life of Jesus Christ and the beginnings of the Christian Church. But for the past two thousand years people have asked anew what such a story actually means. Some have said that Jesus was a Jew and the meaning of his life should be interpreted ‘through the lens’ Judaism. But the Jewish writers of the time were grappling with the meaning and implications of Hellenism. The early Church Fathers adopted key Hellenistic ideas and they based Christianity on Platonic philosophy. One could claim that if these early theologians so readily took on Greek ideas, it must have been because they saw the germ of them to be in the gospel texts themselves. Given the background and follow-through of gospel writing, it appears the story of Jesus needs to be interpreted in terms of Greek ideas as well as the Jewish religion. It may be on the one hand that the setting of the life of Jesus is that of Judaism. There is arguably only the hint of an outreach to Gentiles in the gospel stories although this increases in Acts. But if Gentile or Hellenistic ideas are being grappled with and compared with those of Judaism, through the whole of the Gospel texts this sort of rationalising would need to be going “behind” or “beyond” the text. A structural criticism would help to expose it.

**STEP C****SEARCH OF THE GOSPELS****Chapter 5****A weighing up of the likelihood of Historical Criticism or Narrative Criticism revealing a critique of Hellenism in the gospels****1. The gospel Genre and Dominant Methods of Interpretation****(a) The Gospel Genre**

On the basis of a claim that the Gospel writers were aware of Hellenistic strands in their society and the apparent need of both Jews and Christians to assess these, the question of methods of interpreting the New Testament again comes into focus.

However prior to such an exploration there needs to be an assessment of the literary model of the gospel itself. For instance to what extent could this literary genre provide a critique of Hellenism given that its most obvious purpose was to interpret the life and meaning of Jesus Christ? Following on from this there is need to do an assessment of the benefits and limitations of both Historical Critical Exegesis and Narrative Criticism in terms of their ability to detect whether or not a critique of Hellenism exists in the gospels.

Some of the findings of these methods of interpretation could be outlined. Given the vast amount of commentary based on these or similar methods of interpretation, only a few

examples could be dealt with here. The examples would be selected in terms of showing whether there is at least an openness to the assessment and adoption of Greek social norms and models in the gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke-Acts, John. Also, some other findings in the gospels could be outlined and discussed in terms of whether these are likely to be accepted by scholars using historical critical exegesis or narrative criticism.

A demonstration could be made to show how a “socio-rhetorical” interpretation, which is a development of the above methods, shows the letters of Paul were in fact attempting to incorporate the best elements of Judaism and Hellenism into a new, hybrid society.

A proposal to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of the gospel genre of literature must sound as extraordinarily ambitious. It may appear that the gospel of Mark presented a genre of literature which was unique to its time. This implies that in Mark’s creation of this genre, he distinguished himself from other Jewish and Christian writers. On the other hand writers such as Vernon Robbins insist there were multiple influences on early Christian writers and “often subtle intermingling of traditions and conventions “<sup>418</sup> He talks about a distinctness (rather than uniqueness) in writers such as Mark, especially in the challenge thrown out to the reader.<sup>419</sup>

It would be impossible to weigh up a comprehensive assessment of Mark’s genre of literature. But a few points made about it could help to put the range of gospel interpretations into more focus.

An obvious fact is that Mark was writing about the life of Jesus decades after the events and circumstances of his life had passed by. If Jesus and his public life were around the years of

30-33 CE., and if Mark wrote his gospel around the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. there was a gap of almost a generation of 40 years between the events described and the time of writing them into the gospel. Mark and later gospel writers had to rely on stories that had an oral tradition of decades. Moreover a lot had happened in between times. As the stories about Jesus were told and re-told, they were selected, adjusted and interpreted according to the interests of people who were becoming further removed from the situation of 30-33 CE. On the one hand the theological meaning of Jesus' life was being developed over this period. But some or rather a lot of the background details relating to this life would have been changed or lost.

This time warp in the gospels would make the task of Biblical Interpreters of later times, for example the present, even more difficult. For instance the archaeological evidence uncovered since the start of the twentieth century may have thrown light on the social situation of the first century CE. But traditions in the practice of Christianity and even the methods of biblical interpretation continue to be influenced if not dominated by ideas about first century Palestine that pre-date archaeological and other discoveries since then, for example, Qumran. An example of this would be the church's celebration of St John, apostle and evangelist on December 27th. Yet few scholars today would attribute the writing of John's gospel to John the apostle.<sup>420</sup>

A further problem to be faced by Biblical Interpreters has been that of discerning how much of the setting of Mark in 70 CE. was being grafted into a text about Jesus Christ in the 30's CE. On the one hand Mark was obviously trying to re-create a setting of the 30's. But his own background the priorities of his own community and the wider church would be either consciously or unconsciously added into his story. There was also a matter of the

influence of Hellenistic thought in terms of understanding who Jesus actually was. Thus interpreters would need to deal with issues relevant to the struggles of the historical Jesus and also issues relevant to the times of the writer. And, obviously, the witnesses of what actually happened in the life of Jesus were dying off.

A history of Gospel interpretation would consider a period when there was an effort to rediscover “the historical Jesus” for example as undertaken by Albert Schweitzer in 1906.<sup>421</sup> But eventually it was realised this task cannot be achieved. In any case scholars have realised the gospel writers were not attempting to present “the historical Jesus.” For a start there are too many contradictions between their accounts of apparently the one, single event. For instance there are four versions of how a woman washed the feet of Jesus, each with a different perspective given., (Mark, 14:3-9, Matthew 26:6-16, Luke 7:36-50, John 12:1-11).

Even while pointing out the problems of trying to interpret the gospel in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as written by a writer in 70 CE., who was writing about events around 33 CE., the advantages of the gospel literary genre cannot be over-estimated. The genre allowed the writer to actually re-create a world and to focus on a figure there that comes alive to a reader of any time or place. Methods of interpretation continue to evolve and diversify in order to “tap into” the significance of this world and the people there that the gospels present to us.

**(b) Historical Critical Exegesis and Narrative Interpretation**

**(i) Terry Curtin's Thesis on Development of Interpretation in the Catholic Church**

Steps in the acceptance by the Catholic Church of the now dominant method of interpretation which is Historical Criticism have been summarised in a thesis by Terry Curtin.<sup>422</sup> At the start of his conclusions he states:

The search for the right way to interpret Scripture over the twenty-five years between the death of Pius XII in 1958 and the fortieth anniversary of his encyclical on the interpretation of Scripture in 1983 has been difficult and at times dramatic.<sup>423</sup>

The thesis touches on the key features and problems facing interpretation as such and it also presents traditional aspects of interpretation which could be seen as parallel to those elaborated upon by James Kugel.<sup>424</sup> Kugel has claimed that traditionally, even before Christianity, Scripture was understood as being cryptic, relevant, perfect and the Word of God.

Curtin begins this thesis by picking up on emphases taken by the Catholic church before its Vatican II *Dei Verbum* document of 1958-1964. As the following points have been taken from the summaries at the end of each section of the thesis, they are set out here in point form.

1. In the lead up to *Dei Verbum* it was considered there was need to recognise that “scientific exegesis now amply demonstrated the historical character of the Bible.”<sup>425</sup>
2. There was a need to clarify the relationship between the literal sense of Scripture and the faith of the Church.<sup>426</sup>

3. Interpretation should be seen as being more than translation and “there was a need to interpret the Scriptures in accordance with the Church’s understanding of divine revelation.”<sup>427</sup>

4. Historical writing would be seen as doing more than making an objective report, listing factual details. It (also) had an interpretative function.<sup>428</sup>

The thesis goes on to describe developments in the understanding of interpretation that were shown in *Dei Verbum*. It says:

5. The final text (of *Dei Verbum*) removed the “living instruments” description in earlier schemata. Instead the Scriptural writers are “true authors” in the sense of their literary composition and with their own limitations and individuality.<sup>429</sup>

6. Also, “there is a need of biblical interpretation to find Scripture’s salvific message for the present moment.”<sup>430</sup>

7. In further reflection on *Dei Verbum* Curtin notes that “the Council’s full recognition of the human character of the divinely inspired Scriptures also created a question which the commentaries failed to resolve.”<sup>431</sup>

8. He recalls that “Modern exegesis emphasizes the importance of the text itself when seeking to understand the meaning of Scripture.”<sup>432</sup>

9. Curtin draws attention to “the ecclesial context as a setting for biblical interpretation.”<sup>433</sup>

10. In the final summary and conclusions for this section the the thesis he recalls how the *Dei Verbum* document:

Points to the divine initiative and the mystery which underlies the Scriptures. It also describes the Scriptures as an act or action of God who still desires to communicate with men through his written word centred on Christ.<sup>434</sup>

11. Curtin also notes that Article 12 in *Dei Verbum* points out that “scriptural interpretation was to use every possible method to discover the literal sense.”<sup>435</sup>

In the above points, number ten in particular recalls Kugel’s understanding of Scripture as being cryptic, relevant, perfect and the word of God. At the same time point eleven indicates the recognition in *Dei Verbum* that further methods of interpretation were likely to evolve and the document encourages this.

In the next part of Curtin’s thesis he goes on to outline the discussion of Historical Critical Exegesis amongst American, English, French and German Exegetes over 1965-75. Arguably the main points of their discussion appear to have already been touched upon in *Dei Verbum*. This would have probably been because much of their discussion would have been sparked by the *Dei Verbum* document. Topics amongst exegetes ranged from historical consciousness, theological concerns, tensions and crises, a defence of Historical Critical Exegesis and a reappraisal of exegetical priorities. Also there was an acceptance of historical critical exegesis, an appeal for hermeneutical reflection and a review of Catholic biblical interpretation. The last section of Curtin’s thesis covers comment (1976-1983) which included the necessity for and limits of Historical Critical Exegesis, which was now being viewed within a broader perspective. Finally notice was paid to “a new element in the exchange (which) is the hermeneutical role of the community of faith.”<sup>436</sup>

**(ii) Joseph Fitzmyer's Description of Historical Critical Exegesis**

It was against the background outlined in the Curtin's thesis that Historical Criticism has come to be accepted as the dominant method of interpretation at the present time.<sup>437</sup>

However, as already noted, the Pontifical Commission's document of 1994 describes it as a diachronic method. The Commission has pointed out the need to complement this as a tool of interpretation with some of the synchronic methods of interpretation which have evolved more recently. These include narrative criticism, rhetorical criticism, structural criticism and sociological criticism.

Thus on the one hand Historical Critical Exegesis, as described by Joseph Fitzmyer, takes into account the following lines of research.

- (1) The consideration of introductory questions about:
  - (a) authenticity
  - (b) the unity of writing
  - (c) the date and place of composition
  - (d) the outline, style and literary form
  - (e) the occasion and purpose of the writing
  - (f) influences in the background of the writer
  
- (2) Textual criticism which is concerned with the transmission of the biblical text in its original language and in ancient versions.

Refinements of the Historical Critical Exegesis method, which relate to historical judgement about a text include:

- (a) Literary criticism cf. Poetry, rhetorical devices, argument in a definite way from cause to effect, from effect to cause.
- (b) Source criticism
- (c) Form criticism
- (d) Redaction criticism<sup>438</sup>

Some of the above e.g. literary criticism, have been developed into a synchronic method of interpretation to such an extent its meaning has shifted from the time Fitzmyer described it in 1989.<sup>439</sup>

However the Commission still indirectly connects this, and for that matter, virtually all methods of interpretation to Historical Criticism. Its document states, “The historical-critical method is the indispensable method for the scientific study of the meaning of ancient texts.” It goes on, “(Holy Scripture’s) proper understanding, not only admits the use of this method but actually requires it.”<sup>440</sup>

### **(iii) Mark Powell’s Description of Narrative Criticism**

The evolving synchronic method of Narrative Criticism attempts to rectify some of the deficiencies of the historical-critical method. In his book *The Eclipse of Biblical narrative* Hans Frei attempts to show how “Historical critics were concerned with specific texts and specific historical circumstances (rather than) the unity of the bible across millennia of differing cultural levels and conditions.”<sup>441</sup> The extent to which narrative criticism actually rectifies such a deficiency in practice is arguable. Even so, writers such as Mark Allan Powell have set out parameters for the narrative method as in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*.<sup>442</sup>

Powell talks about the following in headings

1. basic principles of the method such as:
  - 1.1 Implied author
  - 1.2 Implied Readers

- 1.3 Normative process of Reading (that is sequential and complete reading with all parts being related to the work as a whole).
2. Narrative Analysis
  - 2.1 Ordering of Events
  - 2.2 `Duration and Frequency of Events
  - 2.3 Causal Links
  - 2.4 Conflict
  - 2.5 Characters
  - 2.6 Characterisation
  - 2.7 Empathy
  - 2.8 Point of View
  - 2.10 Symbolism
  - 2.11 Irony
  - 2.12 Intertextuality
  - 2.13 Structural Patterns

Powell provides the narrative criticism of a sample text – Mark 7:24-30 (the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman) with reference to the ordering of events, settings, symbolism, irony, intertextuality and the relationship of the story to the narrative as a whole. However in doing this he also demonstrates that the method, like the historical-critical method, looks at sections of the text rather than providing a general sweep of the whole. Powell concludes that used properly, narrative criticism is able to open some doors to interpretation but it will not open all the doors.<sup>443</sup>

#### (iv) Overview of Above Methods

A reason why a more than casual consideration has been given to the basics of interpretation (as set out in Curtin's thesis) and the need for and limitations of Historical Criticism (cf. Fitzmyer and the Biblical Commission) and narrative Criticism (cf. Powell), is that both these methods are used in gospel commentaries such as Moloney's *Mark, Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*<sup>444</sup> and Byrne's *A Costly Freedom" A Theological Reading of Mark's Gospel*.<sup>445</sup> If, in the pages to follow, consideration is to be given as to what extent the

Gospels may have set out a critique of Hellenism and indeed a hybrid social structure for both Judaism and Hellenism, then the methods of interpretation that gospel commentators are using need to be kept in mind.

Also, as noted above, in the genre of the gospel, writers were trying to create a “paradigm world” with the background of Jerusalem and its temple, which, at the time of writing no longer existed. Thus the writers were “juggling” with two major backgrounds, that of the world they were re-creating and their own. In doing this they were trying to interpret the significance of the life of Jesus both in his “world” and in their own. It is not surprising therefore to find that if, in fact, they were attempting to structure the gospels so as to provide the blueprint of a “hybrid” society which incorporated both the world view of Judaism and the world view of Hellenism, then such an attempt would have to be “buried” somewhere within and/or beneath the text.

Nevertheless some of the “glimpses” of such an agenda will be considered in a quick look at the gospels in the pages to follow. The findings of two writers in particular, Brendan Byrne and Francis Moloney will be considered.

Thus in a limited overview as to whether or not the gospels contain a critique of Hellenism and whether or not dominant methods of interpretation have uncovered this, the findings of historical criticism and narrative criticism largely overlap. Moloney for instance says he has a narrative critical approach to interpretation in *Mark as Story* but it appears he is using historical criticism to look at each section of the text. It could be said while historical criticism is being used to explore the historical background of a setting or the meaning of words, narrative criticism is referring to these findings as well, even while looking at larger

sections of the text, for example, in an analysis of the whole. Put another way, even while some narrative critics claim the method looks at the text as a whole, in practice the 'whole' that is being talked about is a whole episode in the gospel rather than the actual whole gospel.

## **2. The Gospels**

### **(i) Mark, the Deaf-mute and the Credibility of Extended Chiasmus:**

Would the Historical Critical or Narrative Methods of Interpretation be likely to "unveil" a critique of Hellenism in Mark's Gospel?

The following pages weigh up the likelihood of the two dominant methods of interpretation, Historical-critical analysis or Narrative criticism detecting whether or not the gospel outlines a critique of Hellenism. On the one hand the methods show an interest on the part of the writer in reaching out to a Gentile mission. But both methods are limited, for instance in terms of picking up a convincing reason as to why the ointment woman' triggered the betrayal of Jesus. Such limitations would also extend to picking up a background structure in the gospel that deals more comprehensively with Hellenism.

Historical Critical Exegesis is a "diachronic" method of interpretation. Its advantages lie in detailed research into the details of the Gospel text - the historical credibility of such details and the literal meaning of the text. A metaphorical criticism of this method is, that it has a "focus on the ants while the elephants walk by." Still, to retain the metaphor, the ants are important.

### **Exegesis of the Deaf-Mute story in Mark**

Consider the merits of the Historical-critical method as set out in a description by Joseph A Fitzmyer in his article "Historical Criticism: Its Role in Biblical Interpretation and Church Life."<sup>446</sup> One of the striking things about the passage of Mark 7:31-7 in terms of what Fitzmyer describes as "the occasion and purpose of the writing," is that this passage is omitted in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. The detail about Jesus actually using his own spittle in the cure of the deaf-mute man could have been considered by later writers as rustic and "unclean" (Mk 7:33). But it could also fit in with Mark's intention, as stated at the start of his gospel. He intended to present a full picture of Jesus as the "Son of God" (Mk1:11) and this included showing that he was "in touch" with material creation as also the social environment around him.

The outline of the story of the Deaf-mute presents Jesus as being a person of authority.<sup>447</sup> It shows how people believed Jesus had authority over the "satanic" dimensions of this world and he could "tap" into the power of the world's Creator.<sup>448</sup> It was this saving power of God which Jesus was using to bring health and wholeness to others.<sup>449</sup>

The incident with the Deaf-mute occurs in a Gentile area in the region of Decapolis. The story episode follows a cure that has been begged for by a Syro-Phoenician woman (Mk 7:24-30). The woman had pleaded that her daughter be cured of being possessed by an unclean spirit. And, even though Jesus at first rebuffs her, he does cure the daughter (Mk 7:30).

When Jesus cures the deaf-mute the people are "amazed". A literal translation of the text here is "And most exceedingly they were astounded." (Mk 7:37) In terms of the unity of Mark's writing, the faith of the Gentiles that was expressed after this cure, contrasts with the lack of

understanding that is shown by the disciples of Jesus. This is a re-occurring theme on the part of those who are frequently described by Mark as "the twelve"<sup>450</sup> At the same time Jesus warns the bystanders about broadcasting what he has done. This implies that despite their "amazement" they do not understand the significance of the cure. As Gentiles they could be prone to speaking about Jesus as (7:36) as a "magic man." In terms of a more abstract interpretation of what is at play here, it appears that Jesus does not consider that either the disciples or the Gentiles can fully understand him. In a sociological interpretation of this, his doubts about them could be interpreted as being in large part because of the limits of their own social background (whether this be Jewish or Hellenistic). However the text does not explicitly state that his command to keep silent is because of the preconceived ideas of his audience. Therefore a Historical Critical method of approach is unlikely to explore the basic positions and influence of either a Judaic or Hellenistic social system on the matter any further.

After the cure of the deaf mute, the Gentiles, in a continuing contrast with "the twelve," echo the words of Isaiah in the Old Testament c f "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped." (Isaiah 35:5-6). Brendan Byrne notes how Mark's gospel shows the fulfilment of all that Isaiah promised.<sup>451</sup> In this case it is a Gentile audience that notices the fulfilment. In some ways their praise and "voice" also echoes that of a Greek chorus" and they were likely to understand such a comparison. In terms of Historical-critical approach, this echo shows some of the influences in the background of the writer. Mark would have been conscious that the readers of his gospel had been influenced by the Hellenistic culture and its literature for example Aeschyles. Further indication of the influence of Greek culture and language is that Mark found it necessary to explain the Aramaic word *ephpatha* (be opened) to his readers.

When considering Mark's background, one can note the cure of the deaf mute man in Mark 7:31-7 is positioned between the feeding of the 5000 (6:34-44) and later the feeding of the 4,000 (8:1-10) which was in a Gentile location. Mark's own background would have included tensions about the Eucharistic meal in which both Jewish and Gentile converts were sharing a meal. (Acts 6:1) The story of the deaf mute in the wider context of Mark's community, shows that Jesus wanted Gentiles to be deliberately included in community activities. Such a positioning of material also shows deliberation on the part of the writer and this contrasts with the view of critics such as Bultmann who suggested that the positioning of material in Mark's Gospel was haphazard.<sup>452</sup>

Besides Mark contrasting the receptivity of the Gentiles with the inability to understand Jesus on the part of the twelve disciples, he also contrasts Gentile receptivity with the hostility of the Pharisees (8:11-13). In terms of the date and place of the composition of Mark, it appears that such hostility not only existed in the life of Jesus but it also continued on into the years beyond, when the Christian community was trying to establish its own credibility. Many scholars now consider that the gospel was written around the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 70 CE.<sup>453</sup> As a result of this, of all the Jewish groups that had existed at the time of Jesus, it was the Pharisee group who were emerging as the major leaders of Judaism.

In his article about Historical Critical Exegesis, Fitzmyer says a refinement of this method is literary criticism. A focus being taken by a gospel writer would be influenced by their historical background.<sup>454</sup> Thus, on the one hand scholars may have long since let go of a search for the historical Jesus, which may have ruled that Mark was only talking about

Pharisee opposition in the time of Jesus. But on the other hand with Historical Criticism, suggestions about the influence that later situations had on the text arguably remain sketchy. For instance in his book *A Costly Freedom* Brendan Byrne says “I will focus primarily on Jewish ideas and beliefs.”<sup>455</sup> Also, as Hans Frei points out in his book *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, those using the method tend to concentrate on the sections of text that can be subjected to a scientific approach relating to either historical or textual research. Users of the method also tend to focus on the texts that more easily appear to have some relevance to the present.<sup>456</sup>

An Historical Critical interpretation of the Deaf Mute (Mk 7:31-7) shows an interest on the part of Jesus to reach out into the Gentile world. It reflects the interest of Mark as well in doing this. It also shows an awareness on Mark’s part of the Gentile background. But one could hardly say that the method reveals that Mark was exploring or setting out an outline or critique of Gentile social ethics. If Mark were in fact doing this, the Historical Critical method of interpretation would be unlikely to uncover it.

### **Narrative Criticism and the Story of the Deaf-Mute 7:31-7**

Narrative Criticism is a synchronic method of interpretation. The discipline of Narrative Criticism of Scriptural texts has come into more general use more recently. It became more acceptable after the publication of *The Story of Mark* written by David Rhoads and Donald Mitchie.<sup>457</sup> Narrative Criticism provides for a wider view of influences that may have shaped the writing of a gospel. Powell says it is more open to *polyvalence* (plurality of meaning) than historical criticism.<sup>458</sup> Thus on the one hand it considers what was going on at the time

of the events described. But it also considers the background and intentions of the writer, for instance it takes into account the "implied writer" and the "implied reader."

The method looks at the overall story and its literary attributes. In his book *A Costly Freedom* Brendan Byrne provides an outline of the general story of Mark:

1. The Early Galilean Ministry 1:14-3:6
2. Later Galilean Ministry 3:7-6:6a
3. Jesus extends his ministry 6:6b-8:21
4. The "Way" to Jerusalem 8:22-10:52
5. The Messiah in Jerusalem 11:1-13:37
6. Jesus' Passion and Death 14:1-15:47
7. Epilogue 16:1-9 <sup>459</sup>

Byrne's overall opinion of the gospel in this book appears to be that Jesus has set out to establish the rule of God - a rule that God has meant for the world from its beginnings.<sup>460</sup>

Jesus has to overcome demonic influences in the world and such influences can even be found in his disciples.<sup>461</sup> Such an overview fits with a "Narrative" approach. It also fits in with a sociological question as to whether Mark saw an imbalance in the social ethics and society of the time and his gospel aims to show how Jesus set out to provide a balance to these. But arguably, within the limits of Byrne's method of interpretation, he cannot venture into such an abstract description of the gospel's aims.

Byrne's approach, whether it be Historical Criticism or narrative criticism or a combination of both, is deliberately limited when looking at the background of the text. As noted above he says,

"It is not my intention here to provide anything like a comprehensive survey of the worldview behind the gospel.... without excluding the wider cultural world, I will focus primarily on aspects of Jewish ideas and beliefs presupposed in the gospel."<sup>462</sup>

Only so much can be covered in a single book. But a more generalised view can thereby be omitted.

If one were to use the narrative criticism method of interpretation the story would be considered in its wider context and in terms of cause and effect. In terms of the story of the deaf-mute, the narrative critic David Rhoads puts the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman in a wider context.<sup>463</sup> He shows that her impact on Jesus was such that a shift took place in terms of a mission to the Gentiles. So, even though Jesus had been banned from the Decapolis after the pigs rushed into the sea (5:17), after meeting this woman Jesus returned there and worked miracles such as with the Deaf-Mute and the feeding of the 4,000 (7:31-8:10). Rhoads sets out to show how the plot of such an incident was tightly fitted into a narrative about the extension of God's kingdom.

The "implied writer" of the story is showing the "implied reader" that the Gentile community was both receptive to the power of Jesus and ready to listen and believe in him. There is an implication here that there were aspects of the Gentile background which helped them to become receptive to Jesus while such "aspects" did not appear to exist amongst the Jews, including Jesus' disciples.

The story of the deaf mute is followed by a miracle in which Jesus feeds 4,000 largely Gentile people in the desert. The text relates, that rather than trusting in the power of Jesus, the disciples want to send the people away (Mk 8:4). Further parallels of incidents (which is a literary form common in Mark) include the event of a previous miracle when Jesus fed 5,000 people (Mk 6:34-44). Jesus then came walking to the disciples on the water. Again the disciples could not understand how he could exercise such power over nature. A reason for this, Mark explains, is that "their hearts had been hardened." (Mk 6:52)

The feeding of the 5,000 was in a predominantly Jewish area (c f 6:1) while the feeding of the 4,000 was in a predominantly Gentile area (in the Decapolis region). In the overall narrative therefore the writer is placing both groups of people side by side. A structural method of interpretation, as distinct from either Historical-criticism or Narrative criticism, could explore whether or not the basic value systems of the two groups of people are also being placed side by side in this gospel. But the narrative critical method is unlikely to go that far.

Even so, despite the limitations of both the methods outlined above as for example, in the healing of the deaf mute in Mark 7:31-7. they do show Mark's interest in Hellenism.

### **Narrative Criticism and the Ointment Woman**

In his book *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* Powell admits there are limitations to Narrative criticism as a method of interpretation.<sup>464</sup> Such limitations are in evidence when the narrative critical method is used in an exegesis. A problem about this is that the Historical-critical and Narrative critical methods are the major methods used in interpretation. The limitations of the methods mean that dimensions of the gospel text can be by-passed. Other, more recently developed methods of interpretation are arguably a focus on one or more aspects of the two main methods. For instance a rhetorical interpretation fits with the purpose of telling a story. So when using this method there is a tendency to fit it within the general approach of the Narrative critical method. And, with this method, questions may be raised about what may be happening in the background of a story. But that does not mean the method provides a "credible" answer to a question that it raises. One is reminded here that narrative criticism is a "synchronic" method of interpretation.<sup>465</sup> Exegesis on the other hand is particularly suited to the "diachronic" method of Historical Criticism.<sup>466</sup> So perhaps

there is likely to be conflict in the two approaches when an attempt is made at a “narrative exegesis.”

Consider a "narrative exegesis" of Mark 14:1-11. In this passage tension mounts as the chief priests look for a way to seize and kill Jesus. Then, while the disciples and Jesus are at the last supper a woman enters and washes the feet of Jesus and anoints his head with oil (Mk 14:3-9). Jesus defends her action. The woman's action and Jesus' acceptance of her, appears to trigger the resolve of Judas to betray him. Judas therefore seeks out the chief priests in order to do this.

Structurally this section of text has been described as having a "sandwich" form because the narrative is interrupted with an apparently unrelated incident.<sup>467</sup> But according to such a literary construction, the inserted incident in fact holds the key to interpreting the development that takes place between the first and third parts of the "sandwich."

Narrative criticism, according to Powell, considers structural patterns.<sup>468</sup> One could therefore set out to explore the structural patterns of text around this incident in order to find out why the action of a woman, apparently a stranger, could trigger the betrayal of Jesus by Judas. What was the wider or background context? In fact the entrance and action of the woman is arguably at the centre of an extended "chiastic" pattern of inverted parallels. Such a chiastic literary form does in fact have precedents in Greek literature such as Homer's *Odyssey*.<sup>469</sup> Arguably, in the case of Mark 10:31-16:8, there appears to be a chiastic structure relating to responses being made to Jesus. Parallels between the matching paragraphs extend much further and can be seen in the textual details of the parallel paragraphs. For instance a paragraph may mention Peter James and John while its parallel paragraph also mentions Peter

James and John. Or, both paragraphs constantly repeat the phrase “watch ye.” However it is the one set of “word hooks” that deal with the responses to Jesus that define the paragraphs.

Consider the following:

|    |             |  |          |  |
|----|-------------|--|----------|--|
| 1  | 10:32-34    | Afraid 10:32-34<br>(disciples following)                 | 16:8     | Afraid 16:8<br>(women leaving tomb)  |
| 2  | 10:35-45    | Place on right<br>(James and John)                       | 16:1-7   | Place on right<br>(Angel at tomb)  |
| 3  | 10:46-47    | Asks to see<br>(Bartimaeus)                              | 15:42-47 | Asks for body of Jesus<br>(Joseph of Arimathaea)   |
| 4  | 10:48-52    | Son of David title<br>(people object)                    | 15:22-41 | King of Jews title<br>(people object)  |
| 5  | 11:1-8      | Colt helps to carry<br>(coerced into helping)            | 15:21    | Simone of Cyrene helps to carry<br>(coerced into helping)                                      |
| 6  | 11:9-26     | “Hosanna in the highest”<br>(people)                     | 15:16-20 | “Hail King of the Jews”<br>(soldiers)  |
| 7  | 11:27-12:12 | Whose authority?<br>(chief priests, scribes elders)      | 15:1-15  | ‘Are you King of the Jews?’<br>(Pilate, chief priests, elders, scribes)                        |
| 8  | 12:13-17    | “what belongs to Caesar”<br>(Pharisees, Herodians)       | 14:53-72 | Usurps civic role in condemning<br>Chief priests, elders, scribes                              |
| 9  | 12:18-27    | ..if brother should die cf angels<br>(Sadducees)         | 14:51-52 | .. nightgown and fled naked cf shroud<br>(young man)   |
| 10 | 12:28-44    | Love neighbour and<br>Crowd heard gladly                 | 14:44-50 | One betraying and<br>all fled  |
| 11 | 13:1-2      | Temple building - destroyed<br><br>(cf one of disciples) | 14:42-43 | Integrity Temple system - destroyed<br>Chief priests, scribes, elders<br>(cf one of disciples) |
| 12 | 13:3-37     | “watch ye”<br>Peter, James, John on mount                | 14:12-41 | “watch ye”<br>Peter, James, John at Gethsemene   |
| 13 | 14:1-2      | Priests, scribes sought to kill                          | 14:10-11 | Judas sought to betray   |

14. 14:3-9 Woman anoints Jesus

Despite the apparent parallels here, possible acceptance of such a chiasmic structure, within the limits of the narrative critical method of interpretation is unlikely. On the one hand the critic

Francis Moloney has said in a lecture at the Broken Bay Institute that there a chiastic pattern of responses to Jesus in this part of the gospel and at the centre of the pattern there is a meal.

<sup>470</sup> However in his book *Mark, Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*. Moloney says he is deliberately avoiding consideration of chiastic structures. He inserts a quote that says,

"No doubt ancient authors wrote in this way, but readers do not read in chiasms. One needs a printed page and a scholar's desk to "lay out" a chiasm. Readers come to the end of a passage and are aware of a *reprise* of an earlier passage, its thought and its language. It may be better to call these literary patterns "ring compositions." The reader becomes aware of having come full circle <sup>471</sup>

It would appear from this statement that he does not see chiasms as being included in the kind of Narrative Criticism method that Powell describes.<sup>472</sup> However, if narrative criticism raises a question, such as, why did the "ointment woman" trigger the betrayal of Jesus by Judas, then how can a further exploration be made of this question? Powell himself arguably tends to treat the identity of the woman in question too lightly. In his book *What is Narrative Criticism* he says,

The woman, of course, is a prostitute, but even this recognition is short sighted if the reader evaluates it in terms of modern ideas about prostitution.<sup>473</sup>

Whatever about his qualification here about modern prostitution, he still assumes that the woman who anoints Jesus is a prostitute.

In his description of Narrative Criticism, Powell mentions there is a focus here on intertextuality. One assumes this includes comparisons between the gospels. If in fact the ointment woman episode is compared with the gospel of John, then we find out that John claims in his text that this woman was Mary, the sister of Lazarus. And Lazarus was described to Jesus as "the man you love" (Jn 11:4) If one uses the narrative critic's interest in characterisation one can only surmise that the family of Lazarus was very loving and surely very exemplary in terms of conduct. Again, given the emphasis in the Narrative Criticism method on cause and effect, one has to ask what Mary, the sister of Lazarus, could have

possibly done that would result in her being presented as an apparent sinner in the gospels of Matthew (Mtt 26:6-16) and Luke (Lk 7:36-50). Tradition has tended to side-step this sort of question. It has associated the "ointment woman" with Mary Magdalen from whom seven devils had been cast out (Lk 8:2). Mary Magdalen is mentioned in the gospel of Luke fairly soon after the anointing incident and this helps to explain the association. But John insists that the woman was Mary, the sister of Lazarus (11:2) and the other gospels do not contradict this.

According to Powell, Narrative Criticism has an interest in conflict and conflict situations.<sup>474</sup> One such situation that must have existed in the background of the gospels would have been inter-marriage between Jews and Gentiles. But both the gospels and commentaries appear to avoid mentioning this. On the one hand in the gospels, there is frequent mention and/or implication of a conflict situation that was caused when Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians were challenged to share in a Eucharistic meal. Such tension between Hebrews and Hellenists is recorded at the early in Acts (Acts 6:1). The early church was almost split because of the conflict about circumcision as described in Paul's letter to the Galatians. But surely a much greater conflict situation would have arisen in the case of intermarriage between Jewish and Gentile converts. One wonders if this is another case in which there is "focus on the ants while the elephants walk by." But in this case the Gospels themselves were avoiding mention of a likely area of tension.

In the case of Mary, sister of Lazarus, and in terms of the narrative critic's interest in causal links, it may be that this kind of conflict situation resulted in Mary's elopement with a lover to the city. Luke said she was in the city (and not Bethany) in Lk 7:37. If this sort of drama was going on in the background of Jesus' life, before the evolution of Christian communities,

and if Mary did elope with a "Gentile," then her action could justifiably be considered a "sin". Such an action would have ripped at the fabric of Jewish society. Recall that the female children of Jewish women were, and still are, automatically classed as Jewish. But in the case of inter-marriage it was likely the children would be raised without an education in the Jewish law and Torah. So there was and still is, an on-going pressure on Jewish women to marry Jewish men and vice versa.<sup>475</sup> In terms of the story as told by Luke, Jesus could have told Mary, sister of Lazarus, to "sin no more." This was implied in his statement "Your sins are forgiven." (Lk 7:48) In saying this he sent her back home to live with her family in Bethany. Hence in a later part of Luke (Lk 10:38-42) we find that Mary and her sister Martha are in Bethany. But at the same time Jesus asks for understanding of Mary's situation and he literally says "she has loved much." (Lk 7:47).<sup>476</sup>

An exploration between the gospel texts of this incident fits in with the intertextuality aspect of narrative criticism as described by Powell. But there is a tendency for biblical scholars to dismiss such "causal links" in the background of the story as speculation. Thus narrative criticism may throw up a question as to why "the ointment woman" who was an apparent stranger, may have triggered the betrayal of Jesus by Judas? But there are limits to the extent to which this method can credibly answer the question.

To pursue the limits of narrative criticism further. Powell speaks of empathy and consideration points of view as being a feature of narrative criticism.<sup>477</sup> The early Christians would have worried about the impact of inter-marriage and they would have wondered about the views of Jesus on this matter. At the times of Jesus and in terms of his enemies trying to show he was undermining Judaism, a possible elopement by the sister of his close friend would certainly have put the lives of Jesus and his disciples and indeed their whole mission at

risk. Little wonder Jesus condemned the ointment woman's action as a sin (Lk 7:47). But Jesus' acceptance of her apology, in the same sort of historical context, could have been seen by Judas as "the last straw." The action of the ointment woman thereby triggered the action of Judas who then betrayed Jesus.

In a Narrative Exegesis of this same text, a further question could be thrown up as to the significance of the anointing of Jesus. Again, Narrative Exegesis, according to Powell takes into account the significance of actions and background c f causal links.<sup>478</sup> If in fact this anointing action is at the centre of an extended chiasm and if, as most scholars agree, the gospel ends with the women who go away in fear (Mk 16:8), then the action of anointing fits at the end of the gospel. How so? In an extended chiasm, the fear of the women matches the start of the chiasm with the fear of the disciples who unwillingly follow Jesus to Jerusalem (10:32-34). If the parallel paragraphs were memorised together by ministers of the word, then the anointing could be recalled as coming at the end of the gospel, if only in terms of the memorisation of parallel paragraphs. The anointing of Jesus therefore could be seen as the final response to Jesus who will now enter the Kingdom where God's Rule is to be established. The writer Brendan Byrne may not agree with the chiastic construction of this section of the gospel as described above. But he does point out, the theme of God's Rule being established is central to the preaching of Jesus.<sup>479</sup>

The question needs to be raised as to whether the above reflections answer the beginning question of this essay as to whether or not a critique of Hellenism is embedded in the gospel of Mark. Having assessed some of the limitations of the Historical-critical and Narrative Criticism methods it is considered unlikely they could "unveil" such a critique. So the first

question has to remain unanswered. To explore the question further, it would be necessary to clarify and use a quite method of interpretation. Structural analysis is a possibility.

## (ii). **Matthew and Internalised Law**

### **Exegesis of Matthew 5:17-20 and 10:5-15**

#### **Matthew 5:17-20**

The gospel of Matthew is traditionally understood as coming from a Jewish Christian background.<sup>480</sup> One could wonder to what extent this gospel could contain a critique of Hellenism. One of the ways it could do this would be through a critique of Judaism. With a clarification of the limitations and potentials of Judaism there would be a base for comparison with Hellenism and this indirectly would form a critique.

If one were to approach this question by using the interpretation method of Historical Critical Exegesis a consideration of some of the most disputed verses could pick up on Matthew's key ideas. The verses of Matthew 5:17-20 present in summary a key point of tension in the history of the early Church which included the community of Matthew. Jesus is saying he did not come to abolish the law or the prophets but to fulfil them (Mtt 5:17). He endorses this statement by warning people (such as scribes) who may give the wrong teaching about the commandments to the next generation. Teaching the commandments was a work of the scribes.<sup>481</sup> Jesus is giving a warning that his approach to the commandments differs from that of the scribes and Pharisees. In Matthew's time these people were taking on the role of leadership in the Jewish world.<sup>482</sup>

Scholars such as Francis Moloney say the gospel of Matthew was written between 80-90 CE.<sup>483</sup> The Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 CE and the remnants of Jewish leadership would have fled to places such as Antioch where there was a large community of Jews. It is thought Matthew's gospel was written in the same locality.<sup>484</sup> It had a large membership of Jewish Christians.<sup>485</sup> Their background meant they were familiar with the Old Testament and Matthew shows a familiarity with the Greek Septuagint.<sup>486</sup>

Matthew's gospel shows the Jewish Christians believed Jesus had indeed fulfilled the prophets.<sup>487</sup> Some scholars, for example Ulrich Luz say that by this time these people were no longer attending the synagogue. At the same time more people of a Gentile background with limited knowledge of Jewish heritage were joining the community. This would have meant the Jewish Christians were feeling and were being viewed as being more cut off from their own heritage.<sup>488</sup>

When a closer look is given to the text of 5:17-20 it is realised these sentences rely on a fuller context if they are to be understood. Luz points out such a need for reading a passage in its wider context is a characteristic of Matthew's writing.<sup>489</sup>

There is an anomaly in Matthew 5:17-20. On the one hand Jesus is putting a stress on the detail of the commandments, "not one letter, not one stroke of a letter,..."(5:18). But in his disputes with the Pharisees he upbraids them for their burdensome focus on the detail of the law cf. "They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders" (Mtt. 23:4). He accuses them of failure to keep the real law. "You brood of vipers. Who warned you to fly from the retribution that is coming?" (Mtt. 3:7)

The fuller context of the passage leading on from the Beatitudes (5:1-12) shows there is a connection in 5:17-20 between the detail of the law and the spirit of the law. The intermediate point about the people being addressed being like “salt” (vv. 13-16) fits with this. Like good salt affecting all the food, so a strong spirit in a community affects everyone there.

The verses that follow 5:17-20, give a clarification about what is meant by keeping the spirit of the law. First there is mention of murder cf. “You shall not kill...” (v. 5:21) This extends to the attitude one has towards others cf. ““Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment” (5:22) Then following this segment in verses 27-32 Jesus deals with the attitude needed for observing the commandment of “You shall not commit adultery.” He accuses “everyone who looks at a woman lustfully.....” (v. 28) In the next group of verses (5:33-37) there appears to be an elaboration on the attitude needed behind “You shall not steal.” In relation to this Jesus says “if any one would sue you and take your coat let him have your cloak as well” (v. 40). He continues “Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you” (v. 42). There is a challenge here about letting go of one’s material goods even if they are needed. The verses follow the exhortation “Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (v. 39) On the level of practicality one could wonder about this behaviour. It appears rhetorical hyperbole is being used here. But at the same time, given the context about an “eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth” (v. 38) the hyperbole provides an effective prohibition against revenge and pay back. Instead it endorses the constant theme in the gospels about forgiveness. Forgiveness is primarily about attitude. Harper’s commentary argues these verses are about love, which is also about ‘attitude.’<sup>490</sup>

Luz points out, Matthew has an approach that groups things into three's.<sup>491</sup> In 5:20-42 one is reminded here of the first three commandments listed by Jesus in Mark 10:19, "Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal." In Mark's text Jesus challenges a man who had observed these commandments from his youth to go further. He says "You lack one thing, go, sell what you have and give to the poor.... and come follow me." (Mark 10:21). There is a parallel here, in that both Mark and Matthew require followers of Christ to push beyond external observance of the commandments. As regards "You lack one thing" (Mk 10:21) one could ask if people unable to follow through with such a literal challenge would also be lacking in something?" This comes back to the question as to whether or not Jesus is talking about the spirit and attitude behind observance of the commandments.

The verses of Matthew 5:17-20 have particular relevance to the historical situation Matthew's Church in Antioch. Antioch was featured in the Council of Jerusalem in about 51 CE.<sup>492</sup> Acts 15 tells of Paul's close association with the Church there. But in the letter to the Galatians, which included Antioch, Paul tells of how he is now estranged from this community. "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you...?" (Gal 3:1a.) He upbraids Peter (and Barnabas) about eating apart from Gentile Christians (Gal. 2:11)

The scholar Jerome Murphy O'Connor considers the group of people exerting pressure for eating apart were separate from those persuading the Galatians to undergo circumcision.<sup>493</sup> Historical background shows the Emperor Nero came into power in 54 CE. Carl R. Holladay estimates Galatians was written shortly after this in 54-55 CE.<sup>494</sup> Paul implies "the circumcisers" were apparently trying to avoid potential persecution by getting Gentile Christians to join mainstream Judaism (Gal 6:12). After 70 CE the situation had shifted. It

was now Jews who would have feared persecution and death. Around 80-90 CE. the pressure towards circumcision in Antioch was likely to be more relaxed. Therefore Matthew could now deal with the antinomianism accusations that had been levelled at Paul and indirectly at Jesus.

Matthew could now elaborate on the meanings of “fulfilment” (v. 17) and “righteousness” (v. 20) and show their connection to “attitude.” The theme of fulfilment stretched from the first Chapter (cf. Isaiah 7:14) until Chapter twenty-four (Amos 8:8-10) and so pervaded the gospel and was intrinsic to its themes.

The use of the word “righteousness” reflects the efforts of groups such as the Pharisees and Qumran members at the time of Jesus to distinguish themselves favourably from others. But Matthew’s use of the word “righteousness” in the context of 5:17-20 has a dimension of irony to it. The word does not describe external observance at all.<sup>495</sup> Jesus is redefining the word in terms of attitude and, the verses to follow 27-20 elaborate on what sort of attitude is needed for “the kingdom of heaven.”

Scholars such as Benjamin Bacon view the text between 5:1 “And he opened his mouth and taught them saying ” and verse 7:23 which says “After Jesus had finished these words” as all being all part of the one gospel section.<sup>496</sup> The meaning of 5:17-20 is to be found in the whole of this section.

Ironically Luz argues for a fuller reading of Matthew’s text. But he appears to consider 5:17-20 on its own when comparing Matthew’s approach with that of Paul. He says “The Matthean principle of fulfilment of the Law and the Pauline principle of freedom from the

Law, are mutually exclusive.”<sup>497</sup> In fact he suggests in the large metropolis of Antioch, Matthew barely knew of Paul.<sup>498</sup>

Luz may see Matthew and Paul being at odds with one another. But in the full context of the section from 5:2 to 7:28 Matthew is putting forward an interpretation of the law which clarifies Paul’s teaching rather giving an opposite viewpoint.

In terms of the on-going question as to whether or not the gospels contain a critique of Hellenism one finds in 5:17-20 a critique of Judaism at the time of Jesus and at the time of Matthew. In the wider context Matthew pushes for a more internalised adoption and practice of the commandments, especially three key social commandments about “killing”, “adultery,” and “stealing.” If the Jewish Christians of Matthew’s Church put a greater focus on internalisation of the law they would find it easier to co-exist with the influx of Gentile converts. There would be a greater emphasis on the concepts behind behaviour and a greater openness towards forgiveness of what Jewish Christians may see of inadequacies in their Gentile counterparts.

Historical Criticism shows an openness in Matthew towards the type of society based upon Hellenism. But 5:17-20 also shows an expectation that the spirit of the commandments should pervade all behaviour. The insistence given here shows a firm stand is being taken on this issue. This in itself is an indictment of the tendency towards moral relativity that appeared to be characteristic of the Hellenistic Greco-Roman Empire.

### **Exegesis of Matthew 10:5-15**

Matthew 10:5-15 is in the middle of a gospel section in which Jesus sends his twelve selected disciples to “the poor of Israel” . He warns them not to go to the Gentiles and not to go into Samaritan towns and villages (v.5). He provides a “check list” of the ways in which they are to travel (v.9) and respect any hospitality given to them (v.12-13). He tells them to “shake the dust off their feet” if people do not want to hear their message (v.14). He gives a warning about those who reject the message (v.15). This passage goes on to warn the disciples of the conflict which is likely to occur when they preach (v. 17), even between family members (v. 21). Matthew concludes the instruction to his twelve disciples with the words “And when Jesus had finished giving instructions to his twelve disciples he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities (Mtt 11:1).

Most scholars consider the text is based on Mark, a source called Q and material peculiar to Matthew (M).<sup>499</sup> The verses of Mtt. 10:5-15 appear on a cursory reading, to describe the directions of Jesus on a “one-off” occasion. Yet right through this passage there are constant references to a much wider context. This includes the socio-economic situation in which Jesus, and later Matthew, found themselves. It appears Jesus himself was using Hellenistic social models and this implies that in the long term, his message would be applicable to Gentiles. The passage also includes allusion to the historical friction that Jesus faced and a somewhat different historical conflict that was faced by Matthew and his community.<sup>500</sup> In terms of the immediate text, one can note the redactions that Matthew was making of Mark’s text and their relevance to these points. For instance Matthew uses Mark’s text of 6:8-11 as a base for his text of Mtt 10:5-15. But the follow-up to both texts has a significant difference.

On the one hand Mark follows up with the statement “So they went out and preached that men should repent” (Mk 6:12). But Matthew puts a focus on the need to be “wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Mtt 10:16). The implication here, is that the disciples would be preaching about something more likely to arouse hostility than preaching about repentance. There is also an implication that the disciples are therefore more advanced in being “able to penetrate the mystery of Jesus’ identity” than the disciples in Mark’s gospel.<sup>501</sup> One is reminded here of the wider context and the words of Jesus after the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:2-10. He said “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets,” (5:17) and he put out challenges that go beyond the external observances of the law.<sup>502</sup> An example of such challenges would be as follows, “If your right hand causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away” (5:30). Even if hearers were to take this sentence metaphorically, there is still the implication that severe self-discipline is part of the culture the disciples were being told to spread. Such challenges were likely to arouse hostility amongst those who wanted to downplay the commandments as also those who only wanted detailed external compliance with Jewish law. Thus not only righteousness would be required of followers of Jesus but a ‘greater righteousness.’<sup>503</sup>

This in itself is a critique of current Judaism and its focus on external observance of the law.

In his book *The New Moses*, Dale Allison points out a comparison between Matthew’s text and the Hellenistic tradition that stressed the need for teachers “to live as they taught.” Allison notes how Socrates was the great model for Hellenists. Philo (a Jewish philosopher) transferred the motif to Moses. Matthew “gives the palm” to Jesus. The key point being made here was to establish congruity between word and deed. Thus in Matthew Jesus is presented as the Torah incarnate and animate law.<sup>504</sup> At the same time there is a shift being taken from a ‘holiness code’ to a ‘mercy code.’ Such a shift would apply to both the

situations of Jesus and the social context of Matthew.<sup>505</sup> The parallel that can be drawn between Jesus and Socrates is in itself a commendation of a Hellenistic social model.

The statement in Mtt 11:1 that Jesus “went on from there to teach and preach in their cities,” provides a background social context for the instructions given in 10:5-15. In verses 10:5-6 Jesus says “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” This not only implies the disciples were to go to Jewish towns. It also implies they would go to towns and villages where they already had social networks. These places were “their” cities and Jesus would follow them there (cf. 11:1).

Right through the passage of Mtt 10:5-15 one can detect the voice of Matthew and his problems. But one also needs to be conscious that a specific methodology of mission is being taken by Jesus himself here. An article by K. C. Hanson “The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition,” has special relevance to such a methodology. She points out that the social setting of the fishing industry around the sea of Galilee has been underestimated in importance amongst biblical commentators.<sup>506</sup> Consider. Of the twelve disciples sent out, (Mtt 10:5), Simon, Andrew, James and John had a fishing background. Also, Philip came from the same town of Bethsaida and he knew Nathanael (John 1:43-50). Also the gospel shows Jesus moving around the Sea of Galilee and crossing backwards and forwards across this sea (7 miles by 12.5 miles). As well, for a while Jesus was living at the fishing town of Capernaum.<sup>507</sup> Within the Roman Empire at the time, the fishing industry involved a complex system of networking, not only amongst family members who usually worked together but including labourers and people in other sub-industries. Fishing was regulated by the State. Thus when Jesus was moving amongst a network of acquaintances, many of

whom were known to his disciples, he was also moving within the State-regulated environment of the Greco-Roman Empire. Hanson points out that the sorts of people involved in such the industry included fishing families, tax collectors, toll collectors, hired labourers, suppliers of raw goods, fish processors, shippers, carters etc.<sup>508</sup> In other words the first area of mission for the disciples was in their own established networks of people and these operated on an economic as well as a family base. This industry functioned within the advantages as well as disadvantages of the Hellenistic Greco-Roman Empire. Yet Jesus himself was using this social framework.

It made strategic, missionary sense for the disciples to give the message of Jesus to people they knew first of all. For a start the disciples could find out there who was interested in their message. Thus, Matthew adds a sentence to Mark's text by saying "Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy," (presumably of their message) (v. 11b). Thus in terms of the mission of Jesus, the twelve disciples were building a base of 'believers' from the economic community from which they came. Then Jesus himself went around these same towns and villages (11:1). He was addressing the communities where the disciples had already done a ground work of preparation. This throws a different perspective on the assumption that the disciples "only" followed Jesus.

Matthew 10:5-15 gives further indications that this missionary journey of the twelve key disciples is a "step" in the wider context of the gospel. As well as it being a logical strategy for Jesus to send the disciples to those people they already knew, (v. 5) it was also unlikely that they had the skills or maturity to face people in either a Gentile community or in Samaritan villages. That is, the twelve disciples were not yet ready to move outside the circles of Judaism.

Matthew, the writer was likely to consider his own community to be in much the same situation. While the narrative of the mission is about the twelve disciples, there are hints that Matthew's community is being addressed here as well. For instance he makes an addition to Mark's text of Mk 6:8 and says "take no gold or silver" (v.9). This reflects a more affluent background on the part of an "implied reader" rather than the background of the twelve disciples themselves.<sup>509</sup>

One of the problems of the people in the fishing sub-industries in the time of Jesus was an unjust tax system which kept workers at a subsistence level.<sup>510</sup> The economic pressures of people in the fishing industry at the time also throws light on the meaning of the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." The system of governance was biased towards wealthier families and the Roman Emperor and there was widespread discontent about this<sup>511</sup> Thus the word "lost" as used by Matthew (v. 6) was likely to include the lower classes of the fishing industry whose economic poverty was having a negative affect on their religious identity. At the same time their common plight would have been a factor of bonding amongst them.

An understanding of the fishing social context at the time of Jesus, allows one to accept the likelihood that the wording of the text Mtt 10:5-15 goes back to Jesus. This also challenges the idea that the sentence about the "lost sheep of Israel" was added by Matthew's community to refer to a mission to the Jews and the idea that its meaning was later changed to a mission to the "lost sheep" amongst the Gentiles.<sup>512</sup>

In any case, whether the phrase about the lost sheep of Israel was added by Matthew or not, this would have a different meaning for the implied reader of the gospel as distinct from the

twelve disciples. The implied reader would also understand it in terms of their own historical situation. Scholars such as Jack Dean Kingsbury point out that the gospel was probably written between 85 and 90 A.D. well after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.<sup>513</sup> This was a time of crisis for “Israelites” as they attempted to clarify their identity. It is considered that the gospel could well have been written in Antioch where there was a large Jewish population.<sup>514</sup> At the time the Pharisees were emerging as leaders within the Jewish mainstream. Other leadership groups such as the priests and Sadducees had been wiped out around 70 A.D., as also the Qumran community. The Pharisees were gradually replacing the rituals of the Temple with observances in the home and local Synagogue.<sup>515</sup> This same period, when the gospel was being written, was also a time of tension between the Pharisees and the Jewish Christians. Matthew and his community believed they could provide the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” with an identity by centring on the teachings of Jesus. They believed they were the true inheritors of the promises of the Old Testament and Matthew constantly referred back to the prophets of the Old Testament to show that Jesus fulfilled their promises.<sup>516</sup> For Matthew’s Jewish community, identity would pivot around the Jesus event and righteousness would be defined as fidelity to the teachings of Jesus.<sup>517</sup> Thus on the one hand the Pharisees were referring back to the leadership about external observance given prior to the destruction of the Temple. Matthew on the other hand shifted instead to a “mercy code” with an emphasis on love and justice.

Conflict with the Jewish leadership both at the time of Jesus and the time of Matthew was inevitable. Around 85 A.D. the Jewish leadership in Jamnia put out an edict that required those in the Synagogue to curse Christians. This therefore banned Jewish Christians.<sup>518</sup> There is disagreement amongst scholarship today as to whether Matthew’s community considered themselves to be still within Judaism or whether by this time they had been

expelled from it. In any case, in such a situation, “the lost sheep of Israel” could also refer to the Matthew’s community. Scholars such as Saldanarini hold that the gospel was written from within Judaism and for a community that was well acquainted with the Old Testament.<sup>519</sup> This is apparent in the reliance on Isaiah’s Servant Songs (Isaiah 50)<sup>520</sup> There are obvious parallels with a sense of failure.<sup>521</sup> At the same time Daniel Ulrich points out (in any case) that Matthew did not expect the missionaries to be welcomed by all Jews.<sup>522</sup>

This expectation is echoed in Mtt 10:17 with the verse, “they will deliver you up to Councils and flog you in their synagogues,” The phrase “their synagogues” suggests Matthew and his community did not consider themselves to be within Judaism at all. But it is more likely that they thought themselves to be one group of Jews as distinct from other groups of Jews.<sup>523</sup>

Douglas Hare says it is apparent that in its past history, Matthew’s community experienced a painful rupture with Judaism.<sup>524</sup> The community would have been feeling increasing isolation from mainstream Judaism. At the time most Israelites were opting for leadership from the Pharisees rather than from following the line of Jewish Christians. Senior points out that besides being rejected from synagogues, there was also an influx of Gentiles into the community who had little knowledge or understanding of the Old Testament.<sup>525</sup>

At the time of Matthew the Jewish Christian leadership needed to clarify and strengthen the identity of their own community. The instructions given by Jesus in 10:5-15 have particular relevance here. In his book *House of Disciples*, Michael H. Crosby says a key to understanding Matthew’s context is to recognise the importance of the household structure in the first century Greco Roman world. The disciples were establishing a community that extended beyond the family and they (and their recruits) were in effect members of the

household of Jesus.<sup>526</sup> The missionary task given in Mtt 10 was also an opportunity for the disciples to bond more closely. In terms of Mtt 10:5-15 it appears the standards of asceticism “take no gold etc.” (v. 9) were directed towards the twelve disciples. But the culture of asceticism and the sense of mission applied to all, just as identification with Jesus and his mission extended to all.

Just as the community structure set up by Jesus extended beyond family and would eventually include Gentiles, so Jesus’ style of evangelisation had Hellenistic parallels. The model of itinerant preaching described in Mtt 10:5-15 was not an innovation for the time because it had parallels with that of the Hellenistic Cynics. Harrington points out that these philosophers, who preached a form of Stoicism, were well known for their street corner oratory and their ascetic lifestyle.<sup>527</sup> In the multi-cultural setting of first century Antioch, people would have been familiar with the Cynics and their methods and they would have seen parallels here. At the same time, Matthew adds a sentence to Mark’s text in saying “You received without payment; give without payment.” (Mtt 10:7). The sentence is a reminder that religious begging was common at the time and it was also considered a great evil.<sup>528</sup> Also, Jesus had distinguished the mission of the twelve because their mandate included “cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons” (v.8).

Thus, even if the twelve disciples were told not to go to the Gentiles or Samaritan cities (v. 5), those Jewish people in the fishing industry, in the Greco Roman Empire (as later in multi-cultural Antioch), would not have felt so threatened by a style of preaching similar to that of the Cynics. At the same time both the disciples and the later Matthean community would be reminded that the power of Jesus himself was at work in the miracles that the disciples worked.

Parallels with the Cynics in the missionary model chosen, would show Jesus was not only prepared to use an economic environment regulated by a Hellenistic government as a base for his missionary outreach. He was also prepared to use the approach of Hellenistic philosophers. Also, as in the case of Socrates, there was a close connection being made between preaching and the standards of conduct that were observed by Jesus and those who wanted to be identified with him.<sup>529</sup>

In the passage of Mtt 10:5-15 there appears to be some contradiction in the statement “You received without pay, give without pay.” (v. 7) and then the statement “the labourer deserves his food.” (v. 10). This in fact draws a fine line between the acceptance of hospitality and the abuse of it. Sensitivity was required here, and the disciples were urged to move on if they realised they were not welcome (v. 14).

All of these factors show that the apparently "one off" mission of the twelve disciples was in fact a stage in the progress of the disciples in establishing a missionary base and obtaining a greater bonding and a greater competence and maturity. This step would help prepare them for being given the much larger mission of going out to the whole world. Thus there is not a contradiction between Mtt 10:5 and Mtt 28:19 when Jesus commissions the disciples to “make disciples of all nations.” John Meier describes the two texts as showing “difference within continuity.”<sup>530</sup> Vicky Balabanski claims the gospel as a whole leads into the “Great Commission” delivered by Jesus to the disciples in Matthew 28:19.<sup>531</sup> This development runs parallel to the narrative of the gospel.

When Matthew 10:5-15 is read as a “stage” in a process of disciple maturation the reading alters frequent interpretations of the gospel, that claim Jesus (and Matthew the writer) at first wanted to convert the Jews to a following of Jesus. But then later friction as indicated in Chapter 23, resulted in a change of viewpoint and it was then thought any sort of future for the good news was to be found instead in a mission to the Gentiles. Amongst scholars there still appears to be some equivocation about this interpretation. For instance Harrington implies that he agrees with this interpretation when he talks of the “rejection of Jesus resulting in inclusion of the Gentiles.”<sup>532</sup> This can imply in turn there was a rejection of Jews (or Israelites) on the part of the Matthean community (cf. “shake off the dust from your feet Mtt 10:14). A further inference could be made that the promises of God in the Old Testament would now go to the Jewish Christians and not the Jews. This would apparently fit with the verse of Mtt 27:25 “And all the people answered. “His blood be upon us and our children.” But, as Allison points out, “content demands context,”<sup>533</sup> Balabanski as well as a majority of other scholars now refute a view about rejection of the Jews.<sup>534</sup> In fact Harrington himself contradicts this view when he says Christians are obliged to share the message of Jesus with others including and especially the Jews.<sup>535</sup>

One of the ways the text of Mtt 10:5-15 can be understood as describing a “stage” in the development of the disciples, can be demonstrated by looking at the structure of the gospel as a whole. For some time, starting with Benjamin Bacon, scholars have been aware of the proposal that the gospel is structured by sections of narrative followed by sections of a discourse. Bacon pointed out the repetition of the words “after Jesus had finished (these words)” is a break in this gospel structure.<sup>536</sup> He also suggested the gospel was written as a “new Pentateuch.” Though the latter view has not been widely accepted, his observation of a break in the text “after Jesus had finished” has generally been used as a starting point when

attempts are made to work out its structure.<sup>537</sup> On the other hand some have seen this as a transitional statement.<sup>538</sup>

An observation to support the idea of “transition” is to consider description, apparently of a disciple, just before each statement of “After Jesus had finished.” Such descriptions appear to be steps being taken by a disciple in the process of becoming more identified with Jesus, “the suffering servant.” Consider: Just before the first statement of “after Jesus had finished” in Mtt 7:28, there is reference to “a prudent man” (v.24). The next “break” or transitional clause in Mtt 11:1 is preceded by “one of these little ones” (10:42). The next break in Mtt 13:53 is preceded by a reference to a “householder” (v. 51). (David Orton suggests that the description about a householder (13:52), which also involves the description of a scribe, may have referred to Matthew himself being a converted rabbi.<sup>539</sup>)

The next break in Mtt 19:1 is immediately preceded by a reference to forgiveness of one’s “brother” (18:35). Just before the next break in Mtt 26:1, Jesus says failure to help one of these “least ones” (25: 45) is a failure to assist himself. These five transitional descriptions lead to the final commission given in 28:19 when the disciples are challenged to go out and “disciple” others. In such case they could be described as “disciplers,” especially as the word “disciple” is in the imperative (v.19).<sup>540</sup>

The descriptions given before each structural break suggest in themselves a transformative process is going on amongst the disciples. By inference the same process is going on within the implied readers themselves. Ulrich also points out that Matthew’s gospel was written for what in the first century, would have been “oral reading” or performance which was repeated.

<sup>541</sup> . Alexander John Shaia’s book *Heart and Mind* points out the early liturgical use of the four gospels involved such a transformative process being undertaken by early Christians.<sup>542</sup>

Around the passion narrative there is a more sudden transformation of the disciples taking place. At the start of this Matthew says (all) the disciples were indignant about waste when a woman anoints the head of Jesus (26:8). He leaves out Mark's description of "some" being critical (Mk 14:4). Then soon, despite their claims of loyalty (Mtt 26:35) the disciples all deserted Jesus and fled (v. 56). Matthew omits reference to the two thieves crucified with Jesus, apparently to stress this stark aloneness. Yet ironically immediately after the death of Jesus, a disciple called Joseph of Arimathea comes from the "edge." He asks for and provides the body of Jesus with a respectful burial. Only Matthew records this. This initiative is important to the narrative. Michael Trainor points out, that what happened to one's body was important in the historical situation of the time though this has been downplayed amongst commentators.<sup>543</sup> Trainor says a better focus on the body of Jesus "reinforces the presence of God's *basileia* active in his being."<sup>544</sup>

The same sort of focus on God's *basileia*, would help give a consciousness of the presence and power of Jesus when he tells the twelve disciples in Mtt 10: 8 "Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons."

Within the narrative of the passion, the initiative of Joseph of Arimathea appears to trigger the emergence of the other disciples and their readiness to assume similar responsibility. For instance in Matthew's version of the story the women do report back to the disciples (28:8) who in turn put up with lies (Mtt 28:13) and criticism (Mtt 28:15) and readily go to Galilee. There is a sense here of an awakening amongst the disciples.<sup>545</sup> This connects with the theme of forgiveness (cf. when Jesus instructs Peter in Mtt 18:21.<sup>546</sup> After the death of Jesus forgiveness of the disciples, on the part of God, is very apparent. They are soon invested with

the role of discipling the whole world. By this time their process of maturation, (of which 10:5-15 is a part) is such that they can be entrusted with this role.

At the end of Matthew 10:5-15), Matthew adds in a reference to Sodom and Gomorrah (v.15). In doing this he adds an apocalyptic dimension to the mission of the twelve. According to Harrington, after 70 A.D. an apocalyptic response amongst Jews (as well as a rabbinic one), helped provide them with a sense of identity and destination.<sup>547</sup> The inclusion of the reference here suggests Matthew wanted to warn mainstream Jews that their rejection of Jesus could spell the end of Judaism. This Old Testament reference is one more indication of the way Matthew constantly harks back to the early history of Israel and views Jesus as the fulfilment of it.

In an article by the Catholic Pontifical Commission, it is said it would be an anachronism to contrast Jews and Christians in the Gospel of Matthew or to view them as two separate streams.<sup>548</sup> On the other hand, a distinction between Judaism and Hellenism should be acceptable here. The way Matthew brings in figures from the outside of Judaism (like the Magi (2:1) and the women in the genealogy(Ch 1) to show outsiders have a role in the story of Jesus shows his own awareness of the distinctions between Gentile and Jew.

At the same time use is made of Hellenistic social models. In Matthew 10:5-15 it is shown there was a reliance by Jesus on the networks of a state regulated industry of fishing. There was a reliance on the Cynic style of evangelisation. There is at least some parallel between the “Kingdom of Heaven” (Mtt10:8) and Hellenism, even though this is a Jewish-like phrase.<sup>549</sup> How so? Plato’s *Republic* is largely about the “philosopher ruler” and his “elite’ who govern on his behalf.<sup>550</sup> Matthew may not have identified Jesus with Plato’s philosopher-

ruler in the text. But some of the Jews amongst his opponents were likely to see a parallel. According to Saldani, “It must not be assumed dispute over Jesus was peripheral to the conflict”<sup>551</sup> In fact centralisation of authority in Jesus and the understanding that he was the Interpreter of the New Torah, would have been the major stumbling block against mainstream Judaism taking on Jewish Christianity.

An underlying rhetoric throughout the gospel sets out to show that Jewish Christianity has originated from and is steeped in Jewish traditions. Even if it is using and arguably incorporating Hellenistic social models, it remains rooted in Judaism. Mtt 10:5-15 demonstrates this.

## **Conclusion**

Methods of Interpretation such as Historical Criticism and Narrative Criticism show Jesus was using Hellenistic social models and this implies he appreciated the value of these. Matthew and his community continued the positive evaluation. Matthew also continued a harsh criticism of over-stress by Pharisee leaders in Judaism of external observances.

These factors add up to some extent of a critique of Hellenism in the text of Matthew’s gospel. But it would take another method of interpretation to show that the gospel was structured with this critique in mind.

**(iii) Luke and Missionary outreach from Nazareth into the Book of Acts:**

Can Historical or Narrative Criticism uncover a Critique of Hellenism in the Gospel of Luke?

The gospels were written at a time when the church was established amongst Gentile members. Church leaders, such as Paul, had been weighing up the value system of Hellenism and gospel writers would have continued doing so. But the interpretation methods of Historical-criticism and Narrative criticism are limited in their ability to discern the process. The methods show the outward moving action of God when Jesus is rejected from Nazareth. But an illustration of their limitations is the lack of awareness in commentaries etc. of an extended chiasm that reaches from the Acts of the Apostles back into Luke's gospel.

One of the anomalies about the gospels is that they were written after New Testament letters such as those of Paul. But in terms of a history of the first century C.E. the letters come afterwards. This makes it easy to think that the developments in theology that were taking place in the letters was a follow on from the life of Jesus into the time of the early Church. This of course is true. But it is easy to overlook that the theology that was being developed through the letters, also became embedded into the theology of the gospel writers and their interpretation of the life of Jesus.

One could ask if Paul's thinking would have particular impact on the writer Luke, given that the two are mentioned together in the New Testament, for example, "Only Luke is here with me." 2 Timothy 4:11. One could also assume that if it was this Luke who wrote Luke-Acts then a transference of ideas would have taken place before Luke's 'double' book was written. However, when using the interpretation methods of Historical Criticism or Narrative Criticism it is not so easy to trace such connections. Thus leaders in the early Church may

have been weighing up the value system of the Greco-Roman Empire where the bulk of the early Church membership was now to be found. But to detect a “critique” that was likely to be going on amongst gospel writers with the dominant tools of interpretation is not easy.

The focus of the dominant methods of interpretation is on the “paradigm world” of the environment and story of Jesus rather than the rhetorical intentions of the writers.

Joseph Fitzmyer takes notes of some of the criticism of the Historical Criticism method. The criticism:

castigates the method with being overly preoccupied with the prehistory of the text and consequently neglecting its final form, its literary features, its canonical setting and especially the theological meaning of the text.<sup>552</sup>

Hans Frei notes:

The split between the explicative meaning and the historical estimation of biblical narratives had crucial consequences for the principles of interpretation...Now the sense of such a passage came to depend on the estimate of its historical claims, character and origin.<sup>553</sup>

What of Narrative criticism? Mark Powell says that “Narrative Criticism is more open to *polyvalence* (plurality of meaning) than is historical criticism.”<sup>554</sup> This method largely deals with the stories relating to the life of Jesus. It does give some consideration to the situation of the “implied writer” and the “implied reader”.<sup>555</sup> But such a reach does not mean the method can adequately deal with a comprehensive overview of the material that is being dealt with by an “implied writer” or the “real writer.” Also, the Catholic Pontifical Commission has pointed out, “the distinction between the real author and the implied author does tend to make problems of interpretation somewhat more complex.”<sup>556</sup>

In terms of Narrative Criticism, Powell notes, “The order in which a narrative relates events is important because readers are expected to consider each new episode in light of what has

gone before.”<sup>557</sup> Such an approach would provide a more comprehensive picture of the action in the gospels. However the approach would also discourage a reader away from the search for literary features such as extended chiasmis (circular structures), as for example, in Mark 10:31-16:8. A chiastic structure would imply that the writer had arranged the sequence of events in order to fit in with the circle. Thus the narrative effects of the events would be compromised. In contrast to this opinion one wonders how the great classic of Homer’s *Odyssey* could provide so many stories yet continually use circular structures.

The limitations of the narrative method (which accents the linear structure of the gospels) are accentuated further when taking into account the theology of the “real” writer who is behind the “implied writer.” As noted above, the two are not necessarily the same. For instance, the “real” writer would surely be well aware of the historical situation of the ointment woman in Mark 10:31-16:8. John says was Mary the sister of Lazarus (John 11:2). But the “implied writer” of Mark’s gospel is careful to tell the “implied reader” a certain amount about the anointing of Jesus’ head and the fact that this appeared to trigger Judas into the betrayal of Jesus. But the implied writer also deliberately leaves out the woman’s biographical details.

Despite the limitations of the Historical-critical and Narrative Criticism methods of interpretation, these can show how an interest in the value system of the Greco-Roman world had already begun within the lifetime of Jesus. Showing an interest in a Hellenistic value system is not the same as providing a critique of it. However it does show the possibility that such a critique may be there. One of the themes in Luke-Acts is to show how there was an outward-moving, missionary action of God from the beginnings of Jesus’ ministry. This action continued on into the life of the early Church as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.

Frank Moloney for instance talks of “the imminence of the reigning presence of God in the person, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus”<sup>558</sup>

An exegesis of Luke 4:16-30 using both historical and narrative criticism, shows such a theme. It implies an exploration into the value system of the world into which the gospel was to be spread. Luke 4:16-30 relates the story of Jesus’ return to Nazareth. Jesus goes into the Synagogue, (v. 16) reads from the prophet Isaiah,(v. 17) claims the time that Isaiah prophesied has now come to pass and he pleases the people there (v. 21). However Jesus then says he will not be performing miracles in his hometown as expected (v. 23).. He says that he, like other prophets is not recognised as a prophet in his own country (v. 24). He points out that Elijah, the great prophet of Kings 1 and 2 in the Old Testament, was not sent to Jews, but rather to an outcast widow in Sarepta (v. 26) (c/f 1 Kings 17: 9-24). These words of Jesus enrage those in the synagogue (v. 28). They hustle him out of the town to the brow of the hill where the town is situated and they attempt to throw him over this (v. 29). However Jesus passes through their midst and goes away (v. 30).

The tightly written, dramatic story is set near the beginning of Luke’s narrative of Luke-Acts. It is apparent that Luke has deliberately taken the story from a later section of Mark’s gospel (Chapter 6:1-6a), and put it at the front of his narrative.<sup>559</sup> Matthew on the other hand, who also lifted the story from Mark, left it well back in his gospel (c/f Matt 13:53-58).

One wonders why Luke would put the story into an introductory position for his Gospel and Acts. L. T. Johnson writes that this was in order to present Jesus as a specifically prophetic Messiah.<sup>560</sup> Parsons notes that Jesus is heralding a Jubilee Year (c/f Lev 25) and the start of a new society.<sup>561</sup>

In the wider context of the Nazareth story there are references to both the Holy Spirit and to bad spirits. Leading up to the story, in Lk 4:16-30 Jesus “was full of the Holy Spirit”. Then, after the temptations by the Devil he returned from the desert “in the power of the Spirit”. In the Nazareth episode he reads from Isaiah “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me” (v. 18). Later, in the passages to follow this episode, there is a further suggestion of the Spirit because Jesus teaches with authority. (Lk 4:32) Then Jesus confronts an unclean spirit (Lk 4:33).

Before and after the event at Nazareth, Jesus is preaching in synagogues. On the one hand it cannot be claimed that this wider section of the gospel shows a clear “sandwich” literary structure as found in Mark and described by James Edwards.<sup>562</sup> The Nazareth event does not interrupt a wider story, as for example when the journey to cure the daughter of Jairus is interrupted by a woman with a bleeding problem ( Mark 5:21-43). But there are some parallels here with a ‘sandwich’ construction. The Nazareth event occurs between episodes of preaching in synagogues. Also, there is the sense of Jesus being “impelled by the Spirit,” prior to his trip to Nazareth and this appears to continue later on when he is curing all those who are brought to him in Capernaum (Luke 4:40). Overall, one gets the sense that the Holy Spirit is very much part of the action and the movement of the story. This compares with the view of Parsons who considers that the main actor in the Lukan narrative is in fact God.<sup>563</sup>

In terms of Narrative Criticism, the Nazareth story is tightly constructed and has the hall marks of a standard narrative as described by Daniel Marguerat.<sup>564</sup> There is the introductory setting of a synagogue on the Sabbath and the sense of an ordinary meeting taking place there. Even the action of Jesus in taking and reading from a scroll has a sense of normality about it. Then complications (a necessary component of a story) are introduced. Jesus reads from

Isaiah showing Isaiah's preference for an outreach to the marginalised and Jesus identifies with the preference (v.22). In terms of the story structure and its wider context, one would expect an implied reader to think that tensions in the synagogue were increasing at this point. The mention of all eyes being upon Jesus (Luke 4:20) adds to the tension. But it also appears the Nazareth people were thinking that they themselves fitted the categories of 'poor,' 'captives,' 'blind,' and 'oppressed.' as mentioned in the Isaiah reading. There was acceptance and praise of Jesus. But at that point Jesus told the crowd he did not intend to meet their expectations of performing the same miraculous deeds they had heard that he performed at Capernaum (c f 4:23).

In the context of the story it appears that the people in Nazareth felt entitled to have miracles performed there because of their prior connections to the family of Jesus. They also thought of themselves to "more deserving" than the people in Capernaum and certainly more deserving than someone such as Naaman the Syrian who was cured by Elijah (4:27) In fact they were not ready to accept Jesus for who he actually was, nor were they ready to accept his authority. In a dramatic turnaround, it appears that Jesus in a sense, rejects these people before they reject him. He refuses to conform to their expectations. For the implied readers of the gospel (which would have included Gentile Christians, for example in Syria) they themselves are also challenged at this point to consider their own position. They may think of themselves as poor and marginalised as compared with their Gentile neighbours. But they cannot think this puts them in a privileged position and they cannot expect 'instant' miraculous action. Rather they should accept the true role of Jesus and be prepared to wait for the saving action of God as this unfolds.

In terms of this exegesis approach to interpretation of 4:16-30, which considers the “implied reader” one is given the sense of people of Gentile origin, beyond the boundaries of Israel, who are being addressed here rather than, or as well as, the Jewish people in Jesus’ home town of Nazareth. But so far, the narrative method of interpretation does not reveal that the value system itself of the Greco-Roman world is being assessed and critiqued in the gospel. Rather, the scene at Nazareth appears to be mainly providing a critique of the attitudes of Jewish people in Nazareth even if there is a shadow of the attitudes of Gentile Christians as well.

In the dialogue of Luke 4:16-30, Jesus identifies with the situation of previous Old Testament prophets who also refused to be ‘defined’ by the people around them. He recalls Elijah the great prophet of Kings 1 and 2 who is a key figure whose presence is threaded throughout both Luke’s Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>565</sup> For instance later on, Elijah is pictured at the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-13) and he is also mentioned in relation to Herod who worries that Elijah has returned through Jesus (Luke 9:18). Again in Acts, at the time of the Ascension, the disappearance of Elijah is recalled when Jesus ascends into Heaven.(Acts 1:9). One is also reminded of the Theophany with Elijah at the time of Pentecost. The focus on dialogue in the Narrative Criticism method of interpretation allows for the theme of Elijah being continued on in the story of Jesus. Jesus is conscious of Elijah’s importance in doing the work of a prophet. He mentions him at the start of his ministry. At the end of his earthly ministry, when he is taken up into Heaven there is again the sense of Elijah’s role being continued through the gospel and reaching its conclusion with the Ascension of Jesus – like the Ascension of Elijah.<sup>566</sup>

The theme of Elijah has other connections as well. A large part of the Elijah story is taken up the question of his succession by Elisha (1 Kings 19:16). The theme of succession is important for Luke as he needs to show that the action of God, and the authority given by God to Jesus, is continued on into the mission of the Apostles and early Church. There is the implication that Gentile converts will need to carry on the mission of Jesus into the future and their background and their own value position will help them to do this.

Such a finding, based on references to Elijah as in the rejection of Jesus from Nazareth, implies that in terms of succession the value system of Hellenism would have some role to play. But so far the Narrative Critical method of interpretation only implies that a critique of Hellenism needs to be carried out. It doesn't show how or where such a critique is to be found.

In the mention of Elijah in 4:16-20 there is a clarification that the Jews in Nazareth will not be the "successors" of Jesus' mission. In the immediate aftermath of the Nazareth incident the idea of 'succession' to the mission of Jesus was carried over to people in Capernaum. In the two scenes, Luke deliberately draws a contrast between people in Nazareth and the people in Capernaum. Those at Nazareth may at first have heard him with praise. But it was the people in Capernaum who would recognise his authority (Luke 4:32) In the scene at Nazareth Jesus tells the people bluntly, even though he has grown up with them, that what has happened at Capernaum will not be happening in Nazareth.

After his rejection from Nazareth Jesus goes to Capernaum, teaches in their synagogue and performs there the sorts of miracles that there he refused to perform in Nazareth. Soon, in Chapter Five Luke's gospel, he begins to single out those specific people who will be the

successors to his mission. Capernaum was in fact the town of Peter and Andrew, James and John. As far as the 'Jewish Establishment' was concerned Capernaum was on 'the outer' as it was also situated near the highway of the Roman Empire. However it was here that the authority of Jesus and the action of God working through him was accepted.

Again we can be left wondering what there was in the Gentile-setting of Capernaum that helped people to be more accepting of the message of Jesus.

In terms of a narrative the rejection from the Nazareth synagogue could be described as a "transformative action" because after this Jesus was 'free' of his previous community at Nazareth. It could also be described as a "pivot" in the story because the people there turn on Jesus so suddenly. Again it could also be described as a story kernel as described by Allan Powell.<sup>567</sup> It has an essential, causal impact on the events that are to follow. Jesus leaves Nazareth and goes to preach at the place where he will be recruiting his successors.

In this passage Luke also clarifies the type of tension that will continue to exist in his books of Luke-Acts between Jesus and the people who expect privilege. Such a tension will continue to be a cause of action and conflict, e.g. in the later debates about circumcision which almost split the church community. In the Nazareth rejection story, Luke shows that people cannot expect privilege. Rather they will be expected to both participate in the mission of Jesus and be part of its succession.

The undercurrent of moving outwards in the passage of Luke 4:16-30 fits with the gospel as a whole. Jesus is on a journey and the story here picks up on that. When he passes through the midst of the townspeople on the brow of the hill at Nazareth, there is a sense of direction in

his movement and it triggers an on-going theme of moving towards Jerusalem. A similar sense of movement is continued on in the Acts of the Apostles where there is a focus on Paul as he heads towards Rome and the world at large. The implied reader is challenged to identify with the movement, join in with it and carry it on themselves.

A feature of a biblical exegesis (whether Historical Critical or Narrative Criticism) is to consider whether or not it appears to have relevance to the present time. At present in developed countries and amongst some ethnic groups such as Anglo Saxons, there appears to be a rejection of participation in the life of the Church, for example in terms of attendance at Mass. But other ethnic groups from the developing countries, for example Asians, appear to readily this. A comparison between the situation of Luke the writer and the present time throws some light on the nature of the gospel message itself. When people with a quite different world view background, for example Buddhism, “discover” the gospel they find it complements (rather than contradicts) the best features of their own traditions.

### **Reaching Back from Acts into the Gospel Life of Jesus**

It has already been noted that in Narrative Criticism “The order in which a narrative relates events is important because readers are expected to consider each new episode in light of what has gone before.”<sup>568</sup> Thus the method appears to conflict with a search for chiasmic patterns in the text. On the other hand, given the outward movement by the action of God that is shown in particular, by a narrative interpretation, one could use the methods to explore and show how the story of God’s action of outreach to the world is continued on into Acts.

But there appears to be some division amongst narrative critics themselves about the unity of the two books. Robert Tannehill has written a book called *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*.<sup>569</sup> But Powell notes “Narrative critics debate whether Luke and Acts should be read as one continuous story or as two related stories by the same author. See Mikeal C. Parsons and Richard I. Pervo, *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).”<sup>570</sup>

Perhaps because the narrative method has a focus on story rather than the wording of the text, narrative critics overlook what could be taking place within the text itself, in terms of the writer trying to show an authentic transition between the “world” of Jesus and the “world” of the Gentile-Christian Church.

Consider the following pattern.

#### Parallels Going Backwards from Acts into the Gospel

“the day when he chose to be taken up (to the heavens)” **Acts 1:2**

“and he led them to Bethany and he withdrew from them.” **Luke 24:50**

“on meeting with them he told them not to leave Jerusalem” **Acts 1:4**

“and to be proclaimed .. repentance .. beginning from Jerusalem” **Luke 24:47**

“Lord are you going to restore the Kingdom of Israel?” **Acts 1:6**

“we were hoping that he was the one being about to redeem Israel” **Luke 24:21**

“beyond there were two men standing by them in white garments” **Acts 1:10**

“behold two men stood by them in shining clothing.” **Luke 24:4**

“Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount, which was called after the olive grove.” **Acts 1:12**

“he went according to his habit to the mountain of the olives.” **Luke 22:39**

“they went into the upper room Peter and John and James and Andrew, Phillip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas the brother of James.

“supper room.. when the hour came he reclined with his apostles”

**Acts 1:13**

**Luke 22:13-14**

“Judas . . . He was the one who became  
guide to those who took Jesus”  
**Acts 1:26**

“and going he (Judas Iscariot) conversed with  
the chief priests and captains about how he  
might betray him (Jesus) to them.”  
**Luke 22:3**

“But standing up Peter with the eleven  
lifted up his voice and spoke out to them.”  
**Acts 2:14**

“Now during the day he was in the temple  
teaching”  
**Luke 21:37**

It is unlikely narrative critics would be looking closely at the above parallels as they are in the shape of an extended chiasm. At the same time it is also unlikely that Historical Critics would make a study of the parallels either, as they fit into a literary pattern, almost like a “textual weaving” rather than pointing to an historical background of the gospel or the meaning of its words.

One could object that the parallels are either there in Luke-Acts or they are not there. One could say the writer either created the parallels without realising this or he did so deliberately. And if he did this deliberately, to what end? It would take another kind of interpretation method to explore how the value system of the Jewish world where Jesus found himself, was to be incorporated into the value system of the wider Greco Roman world.

#### **(iv) The Gospel of John, the Samaritan Woman**

##### **and the Unification of a Hybrid Community**

It is generally assumed amongst scholars that the Gospel of John was written towards the end of the First Century C.E., possibly at Ephesus.<sup>571</sup> Writers such as Frank Moloney believe the gospel came from a community which was largely centred around the one dominant figure.<sup>572</sup>

In the overall picture of the early Church, we are told in Acts that after the Council of Jerusalem (Ch. 15) the church moved outwards into Gentile regions and Gentile converts.

After this meeting the apostles are barely mentioned and focus is put upon the mission of Paul to the Gentiles. The letters of Paul also show the Church (especially his communities) mainly existed amongst Gentile converts. That being the case, there are some apparent anomalies about the Gospel of John.

If by the end of the century most Christians were of a Gentile origin then why is there such a focus in the Gospel on “the Jews” (mentioned seventy times).<sup>573</sup> The Gospel itself is described as being essentially Jewish and the writer was steeped in Jewish tradition.<sup>574</sup>

It appears that by this time in the life of the Church, it was realised that despite advances amongst Gentile populations, there was a need to incorporate Judaism more securely into the theology of the church. How were they to do this? The writer of this gospel puts a special emphasis on the identity of Jesus, and this culminates in a number of *eigo eimi* (“I am”) statements that link his identity with that of the “I am” of the Old Testament who revealed himself to Moses (Exodus 3:14). A general interpretation of the “I am” phrase in this Exodus context is “the one who causes all things to come into existence”. Closer to the text this means, “I am who I am”.<sup>575</sup> Thus the ‘I am’ statements in John’s Gospel directly link Jesus to his Father and the Source of Creation itself. By putting a major focus on the identity of Jesus and the identification of believers with Jesus, the writer demonstrates that Christianity incorporates the best of Judaism without having to impose the intricacies of Jewish law.

Even though the circumcision question and its implication of a detailed practice of Jewish law appeared to be resolved at the Jerusalem Church Council in Chapter Fifteen of Acts, it appears from the letters of Paul and later in the Gospel of John that the basis of the question and conflict did not go away. Should Jews who converted to Christianity let go of their ritualistic observance of Judaic law and the Torah?

A range of literary methods were adopted by the writer to address this question. Firstly there is a strong focus on the identity of Jesus.<sup>576</sup> He is presented as the fulfilment of the Jewish heritage. Also the writer appears to address in particular Jewish people who wanted to remain Jews even while being Christian.<sup>577</sup> For instance, as compared with the Synoptic gospels, the whole range of social sectors that existed within Judaism at the time of Jesus are no longer mentioned. Raymond Brown points out classes and divisions so prominent on the Synoptic scene have disappeared for example, Sadducees, Herodians, Zealots, tax-collectors, scribes, sinners, righteous, poor, rich etc.<sup>578</sup> These groups were largely annihilated at the time when the Jerusalem Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E. On the other hand, the Pharisees emerged after this catastrophe as the leaders of Judaism and they play a major role of confrontation with the Johannine Jesus. The conflict with the Pharisees in the Gospel reflects the position of the Johannine community itself. They were also in a situation of confrontation with the Pharisees who inherited their legacy from those who were around at the time of Jesus.<sup>579</sup>

Another literary method employed by the writer was to limit the number of stories in the Gospel and also there are fewer miracles. When John does provide a story about Jesus he provides an in-depth and individualised characterisation of the people involved. In particular there is a focus on their response to Jesus and their faith in him.<sup>580</sup> The writer also uses allegory and imagery to focus on the identity of Jesus. In fact B. Ehrman claims that the gospel was based on an original "Book of signs".<sup>581</sup> In any case, even though the writer was likely to be aware of the synoptic gospels, his own gospel was written largely independently of these.

## **Gospel of John and Dominant Methods of Interpretation**

In previous pages there has been an assessment made of the extent to which the dominant methods of interpretation, mainly Historical Criticism and Narrative Criticism, have uncovered key aspects of the Synoptic gospels and Acts. It has been pointed out that there are limits to these methods. For example, as R. Collins points out, “As Catholic exegesis entered into the twentieth century and adopted the historic-critical method, it largely abandoned the allegorical method of interpretation..”<sup>582</sup> This omission put the major approach to interpretation at variance with the interpretation methods of people such as Philo (c 20 BCE – c .50), a Jew who was steeped in Platonism and who influenced the early church, as also a Father of the church, Origen. (184-253 CE). Philo had an allegorical approach to interpretation. Given his influence on the early Church, it is possible his approach influenced the writer of John and/or his community. They would in turn have expected that at least some of the material in the gospel would be interpreted in terms of allegory.

Narrative criticism, as described by Alan Powell, explains there is an emphasis here on story. When using this method, structures such as extended chiasms (inverted literary circles) would be less likely to be observed given that they break up the flow of the narrative. Powell explains that “Narrative criticism is best understood as one key amongst several that are available to biblical interpreters.”<sup>583</sup> In fact writers such as B. Ehrman claim that they have used a whole range of approaches in their interpretation of John’s gospel, that is, literary-historical, redactional, comparative, thematic, and socio-historical methods.<sup>584</sup> It may be observed that some of these methods could be seen as being included in the general ‘diachronic’ approach of the Historical-critical method or the synchronic narrative method but a particular emphasis. But in the context of these observations, it is apparent that Scholars

admit that no one method of interpretation is going to provide a “final word” on the meaning of John’s gospel.

Even so, despite their limitations (as admitted by both Powell and the Catholic Pontifical Commission), both of the major methods of interpretation (Historical-critical and Narrative) do show up the undercurrents in the gospel of tensions between Judaism as such and a Gentile dominated church. Such an undercurrent can be discerned in the story of the Samaritan woman in John Chapter Four.

### **The Samaritan Woman**

Historical Criticism shows that a background of tension for John’s community would have been triggered by what was called the *Eighteen Benedictions* (ca. 85 CE).<sup>585</sup> These were promulgated from the centre of Judaism which, after the destruction of Jerusalem, became located in Jamnia.<sup>586</sup> Although there are a number of variations of these *Benedictions* that have been handed down, the general thrust of them was to curse the people who were Christians. Jewish people who had Christian leanings and who were still attending the local Synagogue were required to pronounce these curses aloud.<sup>587</sup> Thus they found themselves in a situation of crisis. On the one hand they wanted to remain Jews within Judaism but they also found they were cursing themselves and were being cursed by those around them.

Another historical factor was the emergence of the Pharisees who in turn were succeeded by Rabbis who required a strict adherence to Judaic law. Thus rituals of purity that had been practiced within Temple precincts were extended by the Pharisees who expected all Jews to practice such rituals in their own home.<sup>588</sup> Under pressure from such “Torah fanatics’ (as

described by J. Ashton ) people who failed to exercise this sort of diligence would have been considered to be “impure”.<sup>589</sup>

In both lines of research outlined above, the Samaritan Woman could be seen as a ‘type’ with which Christian Jews could identify. Like the Samaritan Woman they found themselves to be on the fringes of what they thought was their community. ( It was not common for a woman of the time to go to a well on her own in the middle of the day). At the same time these Christian Jews, in their failure to keep the details of the law, felt they were impure (like the Samaritan woman who had had five husbands).

The tools of Narrative Criticism, provide a comprehensive reflection on this story. Again there are parallels here with the Christian Jews. These people remained undeclared in the synagogues.<sup>590</sup> The woman is wondering, who exactly, is this Jesus who is challenging her and wanting something from her. She makes claims that she is a descendant of Abraham, despite the doubts that have been raised about this from mainstream Judaism. She comes to a partial faith in Jesus, as compared with Nicodemus.<sup>591</sup> When the disciples return they are wondering why Jesus should be interested in someone such as herself. Perhaps those Christian Jews who feel ostracised from Judaism and yet feel outside of the predominantly Gentile Christian church would be wondering much the same. Why would Jesus be interested in them? Another angle to this question would be that the disciples are being reminded that the mission of Jesus is not theirs to control. It is the mission of God as demonstrated throughout the gospel of Luke-Acts. Sandra Schneiders says the story could be designed to establish full equality in the community between Samaritan Christians and Jewish Christians.<sup>592</sup> But it could also encompass an effort to establish full equality in the community between Gentile Christians and Christian Jews, recently thrown out of the synagogues.

The question of the Samaritan woman's five husbands still appears unresolved amongst scholars. On the one hand Schnieders says these are symbolic rather than literal and they represent the five gods that the Samaritans had worshipped in the past (2 Kings 17:1-34).<sup>593</sup> But J. H. Neyrey says such an allegorical interpretation has been primarily made in terms of Samaritan tradition. Neyrey takes a focus instead on the Jacob tradition and he says that Jesus replaces the former "husbands" with the true ba'al, namely himself.<sup>594</sup> A key reason for Neyrey's focus on Jacob is the identification of Jacob with the nickname of "Supplanter". He notes that Philo, an influential Platonic Jew of the First Century C.E. repeatedly used this nickname for Jacob in his writings.<sup>595</sup> Philo also maintained that while Jacob may have been truly called "Israel" he did not see God. In this sense it was expected he was to be "supplanted."<sup>596</sup> Another angle here, if the Samaritan represents the "type" of Christian Jew, is to consider the range of sectors in Judaism that existed in the past, for example the Sadducees, the Zealots, the Essences, the priests, the Herodians etc. At present the Christian Jews were aligned with the Pharisees. But this was not working for them either. The writer shows that now Judaism itself was being supplanted by the presence of Jesus. His on-going presence into the future was signified by the background setting of a well. There was a general symbolic linkage between well water and special knowledge to be found in in the writings of Philo who explicitly ties these associations to Jacob's well.<sup>597</sup>

In the remaining part of the Samaritan woman story, we find that she returns to the city and brings out a number of the townsfolk who hear Jesus and come to faith in him. If an interpretation of the Samaritan woman as a "type" of Christian Jews who are outsiders, is continued, then the townsfolk she brings out to see Jesus could also be understood as a 'type'. They have some parallels with the largely Gentile Christian communities that by that time,

existed in the Church. Gentile Christians had come to a full faith in Jesus. Also, in terms of a “type” interpretation, they tell the Samaritan woman that they have come to such faith through direct contact with Jesus, rather than a reliance on her description. Allegorically, many Gentiles had, in the time of John, come to a faith in Jesus, independently of the witness of Jews or Christian Jews.

The description of the townsfolk in this story would have some resonance with Gentile readers of the Gospel. The behaviour of coming out of the town to greet Jesus paralleled that of other historical situations in which townspeople came out of their city to welcome a Roman ruler. In the case of the city of Tiberias during the Jewish revolt, the people opened their gates and came out of the city to meet Vespasian. A related practice was to invite such a Roman ruler into their town and call him Saviour. In the story of the townspeople in John, they welcomed Jesus as “the Saviour of the world”. The Greek word of *o* meaning “the” has significance here. As noted by C. H. Talbert, “Sebaste, the dominant city in Samaria, contained a large temple in honour of Caesar Augustus for whom the title Saviour was used.”<sup>598</sup> By addressing Jesus as “the” Saviour the people demonstrated their belief that Jesus had supplanted the Emperor in importance and power.

One wonders to what extent both the Historical Critical method and Narrative Criticism can further explore the images being used in this Gospel incident as also the theology behind the ‘I am’ statement used here, “I who speak to you am He” (John 4:26). P. Harner explains that there is a added significance to the “I am” statements in John, because the phrase can be used in terms of absolute unity of the Son and the Father. But the writer can also take advantage of the opportunity to use these words in a second sense, as an abbreviated form of *ego eimi* with a predicate.<sup>599</sup> as with “I am the bread of life” (6:35) In such cases the statement is given a

human connection because it ties in with the material experience of the Son of Man. Harner says It would be impossible, John implies, to make one assertion (re unity with the Father) without the other (re Son of Man.)<sup>600</sup>

On the other hand scholars do not necessarily pick up on the link between the “I am” statement and the images of water to be found in the Samaritan woman episode and elsewhere in the gospel. In fact J. Painter says “But the ‘water’ symbol is not used in an “I am” statement.”<sup>601</sup> Also, B. Ehrman notes there are seven “I am” sayings in the John’s Gospel in which he speaks of himself symbolically for example “I am the bread of Life” (Jn 6:35). But it is interesting to note that Ehrman does not list the “I am” statement in John 6:21 when Jesus comes to the disciples, walking on the water. Another example when 6:19-21 appears to be overlooked is when Francis Moloney devotes an article to the interpretation of John 6. But the verse of 6:21 is barely treated in terms of its relevance to what comes before or after.<sup>602</sup> On the other hand, Gail O’Day says “The seeming detachment of this passage (6:15-21) from the larger context leads most commentators to read 6;15-21 as supplementary to the main themes of John 6 at best, irrelevant to those themes at worst.”<sup>603</sup>

A closer look at the images of water being used in the Gospel of John needs to go outside the methods of Historical Criticism and Narrative criticism. It has already been noted that neither method encourages the exploration of extended chiasmus. It may be possibly for this reason, that a closer look at a possible chiasm structure for 6:21 has not been taken. For instance Narrative Criticism may consider chiasms that exist within the one sentence or the one paragraph. But the construction could also stretch over a very long literary work, as with Homer and the *Odyssey*.<sup>604</sup>

In another article, Moloney does outline a semi-chiasm and he shows this in relation to the Samaritan woman. He says in the Cana to Cana passage of Jn 2:1-4:54 there is a “frame” being used in the Gospel structure so that Mary, the mother of Jesus is shown to have complete faith in Jesus (2:1-11) and on the other side of the ‘frame,’ there is the official at Cana who is shown to have complete faith in Jesus in a non-Jewish context 4:43-54).

Within this frame we see the “the Jews” who have no faith and the Samaritan woman who at first has no faith. Then there is a parallel between Nicodemus who has partial faith and the Samaritan woman who comes to partial faith. Finally there is the example of John the Baptist who has complete faith, paralleled with the Samaritan villagers who have complete faith..<sup>605</sup>

While Moloney does not describe this structure as a chiasm, it is partly so, in the case of complete faith to be found at the start and end of the section. C. H. Talbert also finds a chiasm in this part of the gospel. He sets out this to show:

- A. Jesus goes to Galilee (4:3)
- B. Jesus needs a drink (4:7)
  - C. Jesus’ witness to the woman based on her experience (4:16-18)
  - D. True worship explained by the Messiah (4:20-26)
  - C. The woman’s witness to Jesus based on her experience (4:28-29)
- B. Jesus needs to eat (4:31)
- A. Jesus goes to Galilee (4:43).<sup>606</sup>

It should be noted that in both constructions described above, the frame or chiasm relies on an interpretation of the text being made here. Another reliance on interpretation to detect a structure in the text is that of Brendan Byrne for John 20 when he develops a structure already set out by Moloney. He shows this as:

*Beloved disciple*

“Sign’ faith

(Believing, yet not seeing risen Jesus)

*Mary-Disciples-Thomas*

‘3-Stage’ faith

(Seeing Jesus and believing)

*Later Community*

‘Sign’ faith

(Believing, yet not seeing risen Jesus)

Again there is a reliance here on interpretation of the text rather than its actual wording. A problem with this approach is, as Schneiders points out, there are as many interpretations of a literary piece as there are readers. Thus what one person interprets as a parallel is not necessarily seen as as parallel by another interpreter.<sup>608</sup>

In contrast to this approach, and in terms of looking at the water images in John's gospel, there is not a reliance on interpretation to determine whether or not a literary pattern exists here. In looking back to previous discussions on the "ointment woman" in Mark and the weaving of references from the Acts of the Apostles backwards into the Gospel of Luke, there is not a reliance on interpretation to discern structural patterns in the text either. .

In the discussion of Mark, an extended "chiasm" at the end of the gospel that appears to reflect responses to Jesus, was largely based on the wording of the text rather than an interpretation of the text. For instance there were the words about "fear" or "place" or "Hail" or "carry" or "see" or "Peter, James and John" etc.

The next extended "chiasm" discussed was noted to extend from the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles back into the end of Luke's gospel. Again this was based on the actual wording of the text rather than an interpretation of it. Chiasms that are based on the technical wording of the text and not on an interpretation of the texts, should arguably have their own description. Thus there are the expressions of "simple, compound and complex chiasmus."<sup>609</sup>) But there could also be the description of "technical chiasms" or "literal chiasms."

These exist independently of interpretation as such and the conflict of opinions that inevitably arise from different interpretations and methods. Such existing chiasms in the text have been put there directly by the writer (whether intentionally or not). Perhaps some

comparison could be made here with the inside/outside chiasm noted by I. De la Potterie when Pilate was consulting with the Jews between Jn 18:28 and 19:16:

|          |                         |
|----------|-------------------------|
| 18:28-32 | outside                 |
| 18:33-38 | inside                  |
| 18:38-40 | outside                 |
| 19:1-3   | coronation              |
| 19:4-7   | outside                 |
| 19:8-12  | inside                  |
| 19:13-16 | outside. <sup>610</sup> |

With this approach in mind, a closer look at the water images that are traced throughout the gospel of John is as follows. Though there may not be the literal word of “water” mentioned here every time, there is the material image of water that is associated with each incident or reference. The chiasm is not reliant on abstract ideas.

- |    |       |  |
|----|-------|--|
| 1. | 1:26  | Immersion in water (Initiation to mission)                 |
| 2. | Ch 2  | Jesus serves meal using water (to make wine)               |
| 3. | Ch 3  | Nicodemus taught re new birth through water                |
| 4. | Ch 4  | “Give me a drink” request to Samaritan woman               |
| 5. | 4:11  | “pail” mentioned for collecting water                      |
| 6. | 5:2   | Pool of Bethesda sign                                      |
| 7. | 7:38  | Sea of Tiberius (c f Emperor claim to divinity)            |
| 8. | 6:19  | Walks on water “I am” destination gained                   |
| 7. | 7:38  | Rivers of living water (c f claim re living God)           |
| 6. | 9:8   | Pool of Siloam sign  |
| 5. | 13:8  | “bowl” mentioned re vinegar                                |
| 4. | 19:28 | “I thirst” plea on cross                                   |
| 3. | 19:34 | Water from side of Christ (symbolises new birth of Church) |
| 2. | 21:1  | Jesus serves meal using water (to obtain fish)             |
| 1. | 21:7  | Immersion in water (Initiation to mission)                 |

These water images exist within the gospel, whether one wants to interpret them or not. They are there in a structural capacity. It might be said for example that “Give me a drink” is not the same, literally as “I thirst”. But one can realise that in both cases there is a request for a drink of water without any need for an interpretation.

At the centre of this circle of images is the enigmatic statement in 6:21 . The literal translation of the verse in the Revised Standard Version says “They wished therefore to take him into the boat, and immediately was the boat at the land to which they were going.”

This follows the “I am” statement in verse 20 which is also in the centre of the water circle. P. Harner sees the use of the phrase here as a “culmination” of the “I am” statements. It is a declaration of sovereignty over creation. It also combines the sense of the everyday with the absolute. It parallels Mark ;6:50 and Matthew 14:2;7. Harner says “As we suggested earlier, this incident may have been the source in synoptic tradition from which John derived the absolute *ego eimi*.”<sup>611</sup> In contrast, and as already noted, other critics have different opinions which tend to reflect the opinion of some older commentaries that claim the *ego eimi* in 6:20 does not fit with the *ego eimi* statements elsewhere in the gospel. In Moloney’s article on “The Function of Prolepsis in the Interpretation of John 6” he only devotes a few lines to these verses, and the rest of the article is about what comes before and after<sup>612</sup>.

With diverse opinions about the importance of 6:20 it is likely the significance of 6:21 is likely to be overlooked. But a closer look at the verse is warranted. It says ”and immediately was the boat at the land to which they were going.” (6:21)’ The word “prolepsis” which Moloney uses in his title of his article has some connection to 61:21 even though he does not mention this. “Prolepsis” means “a figurative device in narrative, in which a future event is prefigured.”<sup>613</sup>

It would appear that literally, something strange happened here in this incident, recalled in 6:21, in relation to both time and place. In a literal sense it appears there was some sort of time/place warp that took place. Some writers, as noted by C. Koester, suggest that the boat

was already close to its land when they saw Jesus.<sup>614</sup> But if so, why would the writer bother to record the incident. Koester says “Some interpreters think this means that the boat was magically whisked the remaining miles across the lake.”<sup>615</sup> But something more eerie than a “magic carpet” episode could have taken place here. It could have been like a dimensional shift.

The verse appears to lend itself to an allegorical interpretation. We find Jesus walking on water – an action reflecting his connection with the Creator. Then, as soon as people want to take him on board the boat, they immediately reach their destination. Consider the verse in terms of the purpose of the gospel. Its readers, including Christian Jews who find themselves “adrift” and alone, are being challenged to take Jesus “on board” into their lives. Then, immediately they decide to do this they find themselves at their destination. In an allegorical sense there is the implication that “If you take Jesus on board now, he will take you to your destination into the future.” This is an example of “prolepsis”.

There is a further level of meaning being brought into focus here. The word “immediately” is a reminder of the dimension of “time”. The word “destination” is reminder of the dimension of ‘place’, and, not only “place as a location” but the place to which people want to go. A link is being made with their purpose in life. As a result, just as the control of Jesus over water has an added significance in terms of the connection between Jesus and Creation, so too is there an inference about his control over both “time” and “place”. Again, there is a connection here with the word “prolepsis.”

Again this reflection on a water chiasm reverts to the question as to “Who is Jesus?” The literal chiasm, which reaches from the first to the last chapter of the gospel, has a power to

pull the whole literary work of the gospel together. And, at the same time the image structure “hones” in on its central focus, that is the identity and power of Jesus. In the case of John 6:19-21 a “technical/literal” approach to the wording of the gospel does not contradict the findings of Historical Criticism or Narrative Criticism. Rather it develops them further.

One could ask to what extent do these methods and the story of the Samaritan and even the image chiasm of water, throw light on the possibility that John’s gospel incorporates a critique of Hellenism in its structures. One could say, “Not much.” On the other hand there is an implication in the story of the Samaritan woman that by this stage, when the gospel was written, the Church was already established in Gentile environments. Gentile Christians were making up the bulk of the church members. The writer is looking back towards the Jewish people who are feeling on the outside of both Judaism and Hellenistic Christianity. The writer is trying to encourage them to join in, even while he is angrily rebuking those “Jews” who try to impede such a move towards Christian unity. There is the shadow shown of two distinct perspectives existing within the boundaries of the Church. People, especially Christian Jews, are exhorted to put their faith in Jesus (rather than ritual) and believe in the on-going presence and power of Jesus to take all of them forward. This does not mean a difference between a Judaic or Hellenistic perspectives will go away. Rather, these two world views would remain in a ‘dialectic tension.’ The time/place warp presented in John 6:21 shows that Jesus has control over both.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Historical Critical Exegesis and Narrative Criticism point towards an interest on the part of Gospel writers in a mission to the Gentiles. However their prime focus is the text at hand in terms of the historical situation which this is describing, that is the life and death of Jesus

Christ. The two methods of interpretation do show up the interests of the writers in a post-Temple environment of Jews trying to re-invent themselves and Christians trying to assert that they carry the full weight of the Jewish heritage. There are also indications that by the time the gospels were written the bulk of Christians came from a Gentile background. There was a realisation that it was in the Gentile social arena that the future of the Church was most likely to lie.

However the two methods of interpretation can only hint at this orientation. They are too limited to show how the gospels may contain an assessment of the merits and disadvantages of the whole Hellenistic culture, its value system and the type of society that is based upon it. One could wonder if the life and death of Jesus Christ was set out by the writers like a “paradigm” base for an evolving society. There would be echoes here of Plato and his *Republic*. But in such case these two methods of interpretation focus on the way in which the paradigm is set out without appearing to explore whether or not this is what the story actually is.

## Chapter Six

### Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation and the incorporation of Hellenistic literary methods in Paul's letters and Mark's gospel

#### 1. Effectiveness of Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation

Socio-rhetorical Interpretation is a relatively new approach to interpretation. The method has been largely developed by Vernon K. Robbins. He introduced the term 'socio-rhetorical' in his book *Jesus, the Teacher* (1984). In his book *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse* he explains the term was introduced

to describe a set of integrated strategies that would move coherently through inner literary and rhetorical features of the Gospel of mark into a social and cultural interpretation of its discourse in the context of the Mediterranean world.” for example in his book <sup>616</sup>

Robbins stresses the need for scholars using the various methods of interpretation and their findings to be in better communication with each other. Some of the hallmarks of the method is to consider current literature and social conditions of the time in which a text was written and look at the inter-connections between them.

In the following three sections there is a study made of social conditions and the efforts of writers to influence the conduct of the people being written about in the texts. Paul is trying to influence his converts from a Hellenistic background to understand and practice the spirit of the commandments. In the next section, Robbins shows how the interrelationship between Jesus and his disciples had strong parallels between Socrates and his disciples. The third section shows the inter-connections between the rhetorical chreiai (statements/actions) as

described in Hellenistic educational handbooks and the statement/actions of Jesus in the gospels, especially the first section of Mark..

**(i) Paul and a Hellenistic Understanding of the Commandments**

This section describes how Paul defined the role of Christ in the prose hymn in Philippians 2:6-10. In this letter he showed them an understanding of the spirit behind “Thou shalt not steal.” In the letter to the Corinthians he explained reasons for the commandment “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” In the letter to the Galatians he explained the need for people to assert their self-determination (cf. “thou shalt not kill). In the letter to the Romans he explained how the letter of the law as practised by Judaizers was now replaced by its spirit, especially in terms of the three commandments above. In these letters Paul develops a transition from a Jewish approach to law to a Jewish/Hellenistic approach to it.

The key elements of the identity in Christ that Paul encourages in the Philippians relate to their understanding of the spirit of the Commandments. Paul avoids listing these in order to avoid the legalism that some itinerant preachers were spreading amongst his converts. Instead Paul has a focus on a rationale behind the commandments, especially three social commandments, “Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal.”

In the letter to the Philippians he warns against people who go against these, saying “Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame.” (Phil 3:19)<sup>617</sup> Metaphorically these parallel, “Thou shalt not kill” (in terms of their own destiny). “Thou shalt not steal” (in terms of giving priority to material benefits). “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (in terms of shameful conduct).

According to David Horrell in his *An Introduction to the Study of Paul* even though there may not be a “story” in Paul's letters there is in fact a "narrative which appears to underpin his varied statements and arguments on specific topics.”<sup>618</sup> In this sense it could be argued he develops his theology across his letters. Thus the Philippians deals in particular with an understanding of the spirit behind “Thou shalt not steal.” He does this by praising the generosity of the Philippians to himself. In Corinthians Paul deals in particular with “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” He does this by presenting a theology of concern for one’s own body and the body of Christ – the *ekklesia*. In Galatians he deals with “Thou shalt not kill.” In this case he challenges the Galatians because they have allowed people to interfere with their own self-determination. They have allowed themselves to be manipulated. In the letter to the Romans, Paul deals with all three of these commandments in a clarification about his understanding of law.

In his letter to the Philippians Paul expressed a special relationship of trust with the people there (Phil 1:5-6). They had helped him financially at a time when other churches did not appear to recognise the need for this (Phil 4:15). On the other hand when a church such as at Corinth was ready to help Paul financially he would not accept their help (1 Cor 10:14- 15). It appears that this refusal was not a matter of the money itself but the attitude with which the Corinthians were offering this to him (1 Cor 3:10). Paul recognised an immaturity about the Corinthians which suggested that they as a group, and definitely some people amongst them, were likely to misinterpret any sort of money offering given to him. By contrast, the Philippians had shown Paul that they were concerned about his welfare and it was this motivation that prompted them to support him. Paul appreciated not only the money but the spirit in which it was given. In this sense their gift was a polar opposite of the law

requirement of the commandments "Thou shalt not steal" (Mark 10:19).

Paul not only expressed his gratitude to the Philippians but he cited what could have been an already established "prose-hymn" which was used in Emperor worship. But in this case he adapted it to clarify the role of Christ. <sup>619</sup> "but emptying himself, taking the form of a servant, .....And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross." (Phil 2:7-8).

Throughout the letter to the Philippians Paul elaborates on the meaning of this hymn. He emphasises that the true gospel invites people to adopt the mind of Christ and be prepared to sacrifice one's self interest for the benefit of others, for instance "Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others." (Phil 2:4-5).

It would be in this way that the "body of Christ", the community or *ekklesia*, would be strengthened. Jerome Murphy O'Connor, in his book *Paul: A Critical Life* explains how Paul had to face, in his travels, the dangers of being on the road. There was a constant fear of bandits, despite the *pax romana* imposed by the Roman Empire. Murphy describes the difficulty of sleeping in taverns, apparently with some protection, but with the fear that those beside you would take what little money you may have. Murphy says that Paul would have realised such people would steal, not out of malevolence, but rather for their own survival. The values of the society around were such that it meant they had to inflict theft and even violence on others for their own welfare. Paul realised the need to build up communities where the self-giving of members was such that it meant this sort of need for violence to survive, was no longer there. <sup>620</sup>

Paul's interpretation of the prose-hymn in Phil 2:6-11, as with all his teaching, was strongly influenced by the revelation he had received on the way to Damascus (Acts 9:3- 5). He was going there to imprison Christians. Then Jesus suddenly appeared to him saying "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4). Paul spent the rest of his life trying to understand and explain how it was that the Christians he was pursuing were identified so intimately with Christ that Christ in this revelation, was telling him it was Jesus Himself that he was persecuting.<sup>621</sup>

Paul's letters, as in the case of the letter to the Philippians, addressed a group rather than a large number of people and they were a deliberate literary composition.<sup>622</sup> The letters largely consisted in trying to influence the behaviour of the people who received the letter.<sup>623</sup> In the case of Philippians, the letter could be viewed as a family letter with strong parallels with other letters written in the Greco-Roman culture at the time.<sup>624</sup> Like Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, it has the standard, Greek format which included a greeting, thanksgiving, the body of the letter and a greetings/farewell.<sup>625</sup> The very framework of the letter shows how Paul was trying to communicate with his readers in the terms and using the ideas that his readers were familiar with.

Paul's letter to the Philippians has particular parallels with what was known to the Greeks, and would have been known to the church at Philippi, as a "protreptic letter. Such a letter, as described by Richard Earl in *The first and Second Thessalonians*, was written to influence and guide the behaviour of members of a Philosophical school.<sup>626</sup> At the time, members of such a school, were not only expected to agree with the thinking of the school, but also to adapt their behaviour to it. Thus their behaviour and not just a way of thinking distinguished their identity. A protreptic letter would be encouraging newer members to

stand fast in their new lifestyle, especially in this case, the concern of the Philippians for Paul's material welfare. In his letter Paul shows a "softer" side and he is encouraging the members of this church to imitate, like himself, the self-giving of Christ.<sup>627</sup>

Paul and his co-workers including Timothy who is co-writing the letter, realise they form only one group of a number of groups that have been going around preaching the gospel and/or philosophy (cf. Gal 1:6-10).<sup>628</sup> He is conscious that there are more interpretations of the gospel than his own. Some "preachers" to which a church at Philippi would offer hospitality, would not necessarily be preaching the gospel of Christ crucified.<sup>629</sup> He says, "Look out for the dogs, look out for the evil-workers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh" (Phil 3:2) At the time there were itinerant Hellenistic Cynics who travelled around in a way way to Paul.<sup>630</sup> But some of these people were also over-permissive in their behaviour and they could have been included in Paul's warning. There were others again who wanted to impose circumcision on Gentile believers so that external law, rather than the mind of Christ, would determine their behaviour (cf. Gal 6:12-13). Warning against these sorts of people and the 'gospel' they preached was a theme through Philippians, Corinthians, Galatians and Romans.

Paul is trying to nurture church members into a "mind of Christ" attitude towards the commandments so he "side steps" talking about them literally. It is in this "mind of Christ" attitude and behaviour as expressed in the hymn to the Philippians (1 Phil 2:6-11) that the identity of a Christian is to be found.<sup>631</sup> The hymn links this identity in with creation itself. (1 Phil 2:10).<sup>632</sup> Christians also need to believe that by the adoption of such a "mind of Christ" that they will be able to "break through" into a new life as a "body of Christ", and into a new type of society. As Murphy O'Connor outlines "What Paul wanted

to get across was that society in its most basic elements, the very structure of society, was oppressive.”<sup>633</sup> Paul wanted to form a new type of society.

Paul's "family" attitude as expressed in the letter to the Philippians" stands in contrast to his approach as recorded in the first letter to the Corinthians cf. “And you are arrogant. Ought you not rather to mourn?” (1 Cor.: 5:2) On the other hand, in this letter, Paul continues to develop his efforts to train people into keeping the spirit of the commandments and in the case of the Corinthians he develops a theology about the body and the implications behind the commandment "Thou shalt not commit adultery".

Corinth was at the crossroads of a very busy commercial centre in the Roman Empire. It had two ports. There was a wide range of people there which included both the wealthy and poor.<sup>634</sup> While Paul had warned the Philippians against visiting preachers, it was apparent these types of people, as described in Philippians, had already been influencing the community in Corinth.<sup>635</sup> The standards of community conduct had slipped and Paul reprimands them about one example in particular in which a man was living with his father's wife. Paul points out that even by pagan standards this was unacceptable (1 Cor. 5:1). He says such a man should be expelled from the community (1 Cor. 5:13). Paul's emphasis in 1 Corinthians, as in other letters, is primarily related to the behaviour of a group people, largely as reported back to him by others, for example, as reported back by Timothy of the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 3:6). As Ronald Fung points out, the sexual morality of the society of the time was “sheer chaos.” This was not only noted by Christians but even by the pagans.<sup>636</sup> While Paul's letters are mainly about behaviour rather than preaching, in 1 Corinthians he also develops and elaborates upon his own theological understanding of the "body of Christ." Again, this is ultimately based on his experience of Christ's revelation to

him "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4).

In the outlining of his ideas about "the body of Christ" Paul warns against the use of prostitutes. He says the Christian is part of the body of Christ, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?" (1 Cor. 6:15). He uses the image of the sacred Temple to describe one's body as a temple of the Holy Spirit. By being joined to a prostitute this sacred Temple is being defiled "For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are." (1 Cor. 3:17).

He reprimands the community because of their behaviour at the Eucharist "It is not the Lord's supper that you eat." (1 Cor. 11:20). This should be a time in which the body of Christ finds expression and is strengthened by the "self-giving" of its members. But in Corinth it was not a genuine sharing of love.<sup>63721</sup> The Eucharist, as Paul recalls, "is the re-enactment of the crucifixion of Christ (1 Cor. 11:26). It is a time when members of the body of Christ express and re-affirm their readiness to give of self for the benefit of others—even to death on a cross, cf. "you proclaim the Lord's death." (1 Cor. 11:26). Paul notes that some people are bringing food to the Eucharistic service and eating it amongst themselves rather than sharing it with all of the people present. He says in a practical way. "What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?" (1 Cor. 11:22).

Paul chides the wealthier members of the Corinthian community elsewhere in his letter as well, "You are held in honour but we in disrepute." (1 Cor. 4:10). . Apparently, because he has been earning a living as an artisan rather than relying on payments from the Community, some of the wealthy members of the community look down on him (1 Cor. 4:10). This attitude fits with the ideas of some philosophers of the time who despised

manual labour.<sup>638</sup> The wealthier members are more likely to have an education and it would be mainly to them Paul issues a warning about people wanting to leave Christianity in the realm of ideas.<sup>639</sup> Rather they should apply themselves to developing a mindset and lifestyle that is based upon the giving of oneself to others. Paul puts himself forward as an example to imitate here (1 Cor. 4:17) – even if he is identified as a lowly artisan.<sup>640</sup>

He insists unity in the community needs to be based on mutual respect, regardless of one's background. Paul contrasts his own position with that of the more sophisticated members of the community who would have preferred to align their thinking with that of Apollos (1

Cor. 1:12) who was strongly influenced by the Jewish philosopher Philo.<sup>641</sup> In any case, it seems Apollos, with all his brilliance as an orator, has himself joined Paul's mission. Later in the letter to the Corinthians Paul says he Apollos was not prepared at that stage to return to Corinth (1 Cor. 16:12). One could wonder if this was because Apollos knew of the divisions within the community and he did not want people aligning themselves behind him in opposition to Paul.

Paul insists he has deliberately taken on the position of being poor and vulnerable because that is what is required of him. He is not asking the Corinthians to readily go without food and drink and clothes, or be beaten and not have a home. But he is asking them to have the same mind set. Murphy O'Connor describes this as follows: "It was up to each believer to discern how in any given set of circumstances the creative, self-sacrificing love demonstrated by Christ should be given reality."<sup>642</sup>

In 1 Cor. 7:7 Paul says he would like people to avoid marriage altogether, as he himself has done. But, he insists, this is only a suggestion (1 Cor.7:6). As elsewhere he is careful to allow people to make their own choice. He also aligns their choice, to the various gifts that they may have. He points out some people have one gift and other people have the opposite (1 Cor. 7:7). Paul reminds the Corinthians that all varied gifts are needed by the one body or community and should be directed to the benefit of all. Thus it may be one thing to have the gift of tongues. However unless these gifts can be interpreted for the benefit of all, there is little point in displaying them (1 Cor. 14:26). Towards the end of his letter to the Corinthians Paul talks about the "spiritual body" He reiterates the need for faith in Christ, that is, the belief that by adopting a Christ-like lifestyle, one will win out in the end and share in the resurrected life of Christ "but we shall all be changed." (1 Cor. 15:51). This sort of resurrected life in Christ will continue on, even beyond death. Ultimately this is why the hymn to Christ in Philippians 2:6-11, as *kyrios*, presents Christ in such stark contrast to the Emperor.<sup>643</sup> *Kyrios* is a Hellenistic term.<sup>644</sup> Use of the hymn in the letter shows Paul's efforts to present his message in a way that will appeal to and challenge people in a Hellenistic culture and which had its own mind set. He uses the whole framework of meaning relating to the Emperor and he transfers it instead towards their understanding of Christ.

Paul's letter to the people of Galatia, differs from both the letter to the Philippians and the letter to the Corinthians. At the same time Paul is elaborating further on his initial presentation of Christ in the *Kyrios* hymn of Philippians. Again, Paul is addressing an explicit group of people. This includes people who not only have views that are different from those of Paul and have been involved in "back-biting" as at Corinth. His Galatian opponents have also taken explicit action that has undercut the good standing and even

leadership position that Paul has had in this church, especially the church at Antioch.<sup>645</sup> According to Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas had been sent as a delegate from Antioch to a Jerusalem Council that was largely about the need for Gentile converts to be circumcised. The Council sent them back to Antioch. to give a report and the Antiochene church welcomed both Paul and the Council outcome (Acts 15:31). But in the letter to Galatians, Paul shows his relationship with this church has been changed.

In a reading of the letter, especially Paul's attack on people from Jerusalem including Peter who do not eat with the Gentile converts, one may wonder if the Jerusalem Council came after Paul's public confrontation with Peter rather than before it. If the Council came after the confrontation and it later resolved the situation, then this would fit with Luke's positive description of the Council's outcome, especially in Antioch (Acts 15:32). In the letter, if the Greek word *de* in Gal 2:11 were translated as "on the other hand" rather than "but," this could suggest that the confrontation with Peter about eating with Gentiles could have come before the Council, even if the Council is mentioned before the confrontation. However later on in the text, in Gal 3:1, the abrupt statement of Paul "Oh foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you." shows the confrontation with Peter (Gal 2:11) as coming after the Council.

The question arises. How long after the Council did this take place and what led to the change in approach. Murphy O'Connor says the Jerusalem Council was in 51 CE.<sup>646</sup> Carl Holladay says the letter to the Philippians, 1 Corinthians and Galatians were written 54-55 from an Ephesian prison.<sup>647</sup> Fitzmyer agrees with this date.<sup>648</sup> However Ellis says Galatians was written late in Paul's life.<sup>649</sup> The time of writing has relevance to the points Paul was trying to make as it puts the letter into its historical context.

Why were people wanting Jewish converts to eat apart and why did people want Gentile converts to be circumcised? There is mention of “certain men came from James” (Gal 2:12) and these influenced Peter and even Barnabas against eating with Gentiles. However Joseph Fitzmyer says it was not necessarily this same group of people who were insisting on the circumcision of Gentile converts. Fitzmyer also notes that Lightfoot had suggested that the people insisting on circumcision may have been connected to the Essenes. He also notes that Lightfoot's suggestion was made before the discovery of the Qumran manuscripts. But the manuscripts appear to endorse the view.<sup>650</sup>

Murphy O'Connor provides a reason why James and his friends thought Jewish converts eating apart from Gentile converts was not so important. This was because of the political background of the time. On the one hand the Temple at Jerusalem may have appeared very established and busy at the time. It was the centre of the Jewish diaspora which numbered from four to eight million people.<sup>651</sup> But there were insecurities for Jewish people, especially in Jerusalem in the 50's CE. For instance in 39-41 CE the Emperor Gaius ordered the legate of Syria to erect a giant statue of the Emperor as Jupiter in the Holy of Holies. Agrippa persuaded Gaius to change his mind.<sup>652</sup> But there was a realisation amongst Jews in general that their position could be precarious. They could have thought a protection against such vulnerability would have been for Jews to "stick together." James could have wanted to strengthen the identity of Christians of Jewish origin by insisting on a more exacting observance of Jewish practices.”<sup>653</sup> In the churches of Galatia, people would have attended house-churches. So, in any case, people were likely to gravitate towards those places where people shared a similar background.

At the end of the letter to the Galatians Paul dwells on the reasons why some people had

been trying to impose circumcision on Gentile converts. He says it is so “that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ” (Gal 6:12). Again, consider the political background here which may fit with the letter’s later date as proposed by Ellis. .

The burning of Rome under Nero and the savage persecution of Christians was not to take place until 64 CE. But by 54-55 CE Nero was in power. His reputation for savagery would have increased over time and Christians would become more aware they were a tiny and therefore vulnerable minority. Some Gentile converts, including those in Galatia, may have thought it safer to identify themselves as circumcised Jews. Thus they readily accepted the influence of “Judaizers.” As a prisoner Paul was keenly aware of "the wild animals at Ephesus" as he put it to the Corinthians (1 Cor 14:33). However he insisted that by undertaking circumcision, Gentile converts were side-stepping the challenge of "living in Christ." They were allowing themselves to be manipulated. He says “to them we did not yield submission even for a moment, that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.” (Gal 2:5). This same truth of the gospel meant they had to be prepared to face death for it. As set out in the hymn to the Philippians, just as Christ was ready to accept death, so they were challenged to do the same in imitation of Christ. The challenge applied both to Jewish converts eating apart and/or to Gentile converts who underwent circumcision.

In both the above cases, Paul opposed what was happening in Galatia. He viewed the Eucharistic unity of eating together as being essential to the on-going self-giving amongst community members. He challenged the Gentile converts for failing to realise that if people thought themselves justified by circumcision and their adherence to the law, as practiced by Jews, then the death and resurrection of Christ was in vain (Gal 2:21). If they underwent circumcision then this was making a statement that it was the law that justified

them rather than their living in Christ (Gal 2:16). Paul recalled the faith of Abraham who was justified because of his faith in the promises of God rather than adherence to the law. Indeed the "law" as Jews knew it came "four hundred and thirty years later" (Gal 3:17). Paul says the law was introduced so people would know what was wrong (cf. in particular thou shalt not kill, commit adultery or steal) But now that Christ had come, they no longer need the stipulations that had been added to the commandments over the years so that it was, in Paul's time, a whole network of laws. In the letter Paul reminds the Galatians that if they adopt circumcision, then they need to adopt the Jewish law in its entirety. And yet he reminds them, that the law itself according to Scripture is under a curse (Gal 3:10) when people do not keep the whole law. Peter pointed out in Acts 15:10, it was impossible to carry out the Law in full.

In the letter to the Galatians it is the interference and manipulation in the self-determination of the Gentile converts that appears to annoy Paul in particular. Again we are reminded here of one of the three key social commandments, that is, "Thou shalt not kill." "Killing" in the wider, metaphorical sense includes manipulation of people to the extent that their self-determination and their "freedom" is denied to them. Paul writes of "false brethren secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage." (Gal 2:4). Such people were trying to take this freedom and self-determination away from community members. As Murphy O'Connor says "freedom is a property of the community, not a possession of the individual."<sup>654</sup> Taking away such a freedom would destroy the authenticity and identity of the community. But again, as in the letters to the Philippians and Corinthians Paul avoids explicit mention of the commandments that the content of the letters is dealing with.

In his approach Paul has to deal on the one hand with the claims of critics that his preaching of the gospel is an invitation to licence.<sup>655</sup> Yet as a Jew his approach has been to teach the commandments.<sup>656</sup> In the case of Paul, his letters show that he was trying to do this in a way that Hellenists would understand.

In the letter to the Romans Paul accuses the Judaizers of their failures in false education, stealing and adultery (Rom 2:21-22). It is only in Romans 13:9, after Paul has given a more logical clarification of the Law, that he apparently thinks it opportune to name the commandments explicitly, that is, "You shall not commit adultery. You shall not kill. You shall not steal." (Rom 13:9). It seems by this time he does not have the same worry about being misinterpreted. As Brendan Byrne has said "Paul's problem with the law lies in its incapacity to address human sinfulness at sufficiently radical depth."<sup>657</sup>

Paul's re-interpretation of the Commandments, and his avoidance of a literal interpretation of them, calls to mind challenges at the present time to make the teachings of the Church more relevant and arguably more simple. His teaching develops and stresses a mindset of self-giving to others in order to build up a society in which people can be secure without having to steal, commit violence or lapse into immorality. One often hears the dictum that social problems today are caused by "money, sex and power" which fit these three key commandments. The same "threesome" of commandments come up in other dictums as well, for example "The world, the flesh and the devil," or "poverty, chastity, obedience." Paul has provided reasons to be wary of the temptations connected to the three key social commandments which were which were just and arguably more troublesome in his own day. He encouraged reaching out to people in material need, respect for and commitment to people's social support structures and encouraging the self-determination of others. He

even opposed people who were allowing themselves to be manipulated.

These three key social commandments are also listed by Jesus in Mark 10:19. The repetition here was not a matter of Paul copying from Mark, but the other way around. Mark was probably writing just after 70 CE.<sup>658</sup> When he was compiling his text he could have been influenced by Paul's efforts to re-interpret the key social commandments in the light of the revelation of "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4)

The interpretation of the key commandments as given by Paul in the letters to the Philippians, Corinthians and Galatians are reflected even today in a modern society. There are whole industries geared to produce and distribute material goods for the well-being of others. There are associations geared to protect and mend social relationships. Whole industries provide for promotion of health. Self-determination is helped by education.

But at the same time there is also an on-going need to re-assess the extent to which society conforms to the social commandments. Questions need to be asked. For instance how is the self-determination and health of others helped when advertising encourages people towards 99% fat free foods and at the same time the advertisers know such foods are full of sugar? To what extent does society support social support systems when mainstream entertainment promotes uncommitted sex between people? To what extent is material support encouraged and promoted when the whole economy relies on a consumerism that is destroying the planet?

In the present times, people wonder about the relevance of the Church to modern society. Yet ironically both Church and industry are structured around the key ethical concepts

relating to “money, power and sex.” It would be helpful if Christians became more aware of such parallels and they took on the challenge of showing others how to deal with them.

## (ii) **Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation and Mark’s Dependence on Socrates**

In his book *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark*, Vernon K. Robbins has given an outline of a comparative method of analysis called socio-rhetorical criticism.<sup>659</sup> He says “This method mediates between traditional forms of criticism and *avant garde* literary and structural criticism, providing a means for biblical scholarship to move beyond its present limitations without breaking radically from its previous achievements.”

The book was written in the 1980’s and one assumes shifts have taken place in dominant methods of interpretation since that time. However, it is arguable as to whether enough shift has taken place for these present, dominant methods of interpretation to pick up whether or not there is a critique of Hellenism in the Gospels.

At the time of writing the book Robbins said “The standard commentaries show little attempt to glean information from Greco-Roman literature.”<sup>660</sup> Yet he points out both traditions and conventions from both Judaism and Hellenism are exhibited in the New Testament. “There is an intermingling of Jewish and Greco-Roman patterns of thought and action.”<sup>661</sup> Robbins point out that both biography and epistle literary forms were common in the culture of the first century CE and both were suitable for being gathered into a broader literary framework.<sup>662</sup> Commentators have described the gospel of Mark and other gospels as “unique.”<sup>663</sup> But Robbins argues Mark does not look especially strange amongst the range of biographical

compositions during the Hellenistic era.<sup>664</sup> In his book Robbins is aware that Biblical commentators may avoid the use of parallel literary, Hellenistic forms because they do not come under the “banner” of sacred writings as does the Old and New Testaments. However he argues that it was from the secular literary forms that the newly founded group of Christians were able to equip themselves to establish their own identity and break away from Jewish society.<sup>665</sup>

Robbins says the use of socio-rhetorical analysis allows for the emphasis of “the wide range of strategies, “both overt and covert, that constitute persuasive communication.” Thus this method of interpretation can explore how a speaker within the New Testament can draw on “an identification of interests to establish rapport between himself and his audience.”<sup>666</sup> Robbins says there are four kinds of form that play a role here, that is, (a) progressive form, (b) repetitive form, (c) conventional form and (d) minor form. The use of such forms enable a reader to become an active participant so they can anticipate sequences, gain familiarity through repetition and identify with certain people and causes.<sup>667</sup> There is both logical progression and qualitative progression in these forms. Unlike the usual analysis of repetitive forms, Robbins investigates a repetitive pattern that spans the whole document and which provides a formal structure for the Gospel of Mark.<sup>668</sup> He makes on-going reference to a conventional form of literature about Socrates which, since the fourth century B.C.E. had become well-known and popular in the Greco-Roman society. Robbins claims that the author of Mark skilfully interrelated both progressive and repetitive forms in the narrative.<sup>669</sup> Thus through the gospels, as with the story of Socrates, there is a gradual progression. In the case of Jesus, his identity moves from messiahship to that of King.<sup>670</sup>

Robbins relies heavily on Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.) to show the parallels between the life and style of Jesus and that of Socrates. He says "The repetitive forms in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* reveal the role of the religion-ethical teacher who gathers disciple-companions in order to transmit to them the system of thought and action that he himself embodies."<sup>671</sup> He notes a revival interest in the *Memorabilia* amongst Cynics and Stoics of the first and second centuries.<sup>672</sup> Also, the Greek word for *Memorabilia* is *apomnemoneumata*. In the early centuries Christians referred to the gospels with this word and Eusebius in the fourth century (ca 300-340 C.E.) was still using it.<sup>673</sup>

Robbins notes the itinerant dimension of Jesus' activity which contrasts with that of an emphasis on the "school" of the Israelite rabbi. Also, it was standard practice for the potential pupil of a rabbi to ask permission to join him.<sup>674</sup> But in the case of the itinerant Jesus, he, like Socrates invited people to become his disciple-companions, "In mark the teacher seeks, summons and commissions people to be his disciple-companions, promising to make them into people who are able to seek, summon and commission people in a manner similar to himself."<sup>675</sup> Moreover in the range of situations to be faced in his travels, the disciple-companions were challenged to adopt his system of thinking and acting.<sup>676</sup>

The dynamics of teacher and disciple-companion shown between Jesus and the disciples in the gospel of Mark have parallels with much of the dialogues of Plato between Socrates and his disciples.<sup>677</sup> On the other hand this interaction contrasts with Old Testament parallels for example between Elijah and Elisha. In these cases Yahweh remains the summoner and the prophet remains the intermediary.<sup>678</sup> Robbins notes like Socrates, Jesus found authority within himself. "Jesus repeatedly points to himself as an authority without referring to the Lord as the source of his speech and action."<sup>679</sup>

Robbins outlines four stages in the relationship between Jesus and his disciple-companions. In the first stage they are introduced to the basic details of his system of understanding. In the second stage they show they are unable to integrate this system of thinking with behaviour. In the third stage there is a full scale of interaction. In the fourth stage they face the ramifications of Jesus' system of thought and action in the public setting.<sup>680</sup>

A similar dynamic is found in Plato's dialogues such as *Meno*. In this case Socrates asks "What is virtue?" Meno describes this in the tradition of the sophists by citing a virtue and saying there are numberless virtues. Socrates attacks this procedure of listing virtues" indicating that the goal is to arrive at a definition that describes what is common to all virtues."<sup>681</sup> There is an ironic interplay between understanding and not understanding here so complete understanding of a concepts escapes people. Robins says "Both Socrates and Jesus are engaged in a cycle of interaction in which the answer to the questions lies somewhere in the future... the information is never entirely clear either to the student or to the reader."<sup>682</sup>

There is an integrity presented that transcends obedience to the established customs of society. In both cases of Jesus and Socrates, they had given themselves up to death because of the pressure of those established people who opposed their system of thought and action. The portrayal of Jesus as a wise disciple-gathering teacher who was portrayed as a suffering, dying King actually fitted with the Greco-Roman culture where there was a popular understanding of other kings being in the same situation. He provides a quote from 1 Clement as recorded in Martin Hengel's book *Atonement: the Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament*, "Many kings and rulers, when a time of pestilence has set in, have followed

the counsel of oracles, and given themselves up to death, that they might rescue their subjects through their own blood.”<sup>683</sup>

In the cases of both Jesus and Socrates they were relying on the perpetuation of their system of thinking and acting on those disciples were were called to a role that was part of an elite or ‘elect’ and into which a person could only be initiated through a lengthy association with a teacher.<sup>684</sup> Robbins points out a feature of the Gospel of Mark which is “likely to have contributed to a conclusion that this document is unique among the literature of its time. The text asks the reader “to respond with greater resolution and sustained commitment than anyone featured in the narrative actually did.”<sup>685</sup> In this sense there are parallels between the companion-disciples and the reader.

Robbins frequently refers to an intermingling of both Greco-Roman culture and Jewish society and culture. He demonstrates that both can be found in the Gospel of Mark and an understanding of the gospel requires an awareness of what both types of societies were thinking at the time the gospel was written. He points out the emerging Christian group “found an integrated life as they focused their identity and energy in mission by means of a particular selection of values and patterns of action from both Greco-Roman and Jewish society and culture.”<sup>686</sup>

### **The Usefulness of Socio-Rhetoric Interpretation in Detecting a Critique of Hellenism in the Gospels.**

A socio-rhetorical approach to interpretation shows the close interconnection between the New Testament writings and the Greco-Roman culture of the first century C.E. In the case of

the letters of Paul, the method shows how his letters were set out in the standard format of Greek culture. The method, which includes a study of contemporary literature, also shows how the approach he took to his readers was similar to that found in protreptic letters in which newcomers to a specific lifestyle were encouraged to persevere in it.<sup>687</sup> Also, the method of studying archaeology of the time and its affect on the population, shows the influence of the cult of the Roman Emperor as reflected in the many statues to be found in more densely populated areas. The purpose of the statues was one of propaganda about the virtues yet exacting might of the Roman Empire. One can therefore pick up the irony that Paul was using when he called Jesus the Saviour (Phil. 3:20). This title was associated with a Roman Emperor<sup>688</sup> At the time that most if not all of Paul's letters were written, the Emperor Nero was in power. (Paul's letters roughly spanned 50-63 CE.<sup>689</sup> Nero ruled from 54-68 CE.) On the one hand Nero's statues depicted the sophistication and virtue idealised by Greek culture. But the people being addressed by Paul were also aware of his atrocities. Paul presents Jesus as the true Saviour. His meaning is highlighted when emphasis is placed on an understanding of the word in its social context. The Socio-Rhetorical method of interpretation shows how Paul was using the Gentile patterns of thinking in order to present his own teaching about Jesus Christ. His approach could be compared with other Jewish writers for example who used Hellenistic literary structures to assert the identity of Judaism. The Second Book of Maccabees is an example of this approach.<sup>690</sup>

However it could be argued that Paul was going further than this. He was incorporating Hellenism into his understanding of Christ and Christianity. His teaching is inextricably linked in with Hellenistic thinking and imagery. If one remains conscious that the gospel of Mark was written after the Pauline letters, one can see a continuity of thinking and a development in approach being taken here especially when using a socio-rhetorical approach

to interpretation as taken by Vernon Robbins. The portrayal of Jesus and his disciple-companions can only be understood in terms of the relationship that Socrates had with his disciple-companions.

Robbins repeatedly says that there is an intermingling of Jewish and Greco-Roman tradition in the presentation of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. He demonstrates how this can be found in a study of Jesus and his disciple-companions. But this does not mean that Robbins thinks there is a “critique” of Hellenism in Mark’s gospel or other gospels. Rather the operative word that is being used in his book is ‘intermingling’.

However a closer look at some of Robbins’ observations about the method of socio-rhetoric interpretation show that the method may throw light on other aspects of the gospel of Mark that Robbins is **not** dealing with. For instance he says that “repetitive and progressive forms ... provide a formal structure for the gospel of Mark.”<sup>691</sup> Robbins shows there is a heavy reliance on the tradition of Socrates for the formulation of the identity of Jesus. Indeed, the writer of Mark is relying on the figure of Socrates to explain the identity of Jesus. Thus a socio-rhetorical interpretation shows that the Socrates tradition is intrinsic to the gospel.

In his discussion of Socrates, Robbins describes the interaction between Socrates and a disciple called Meno. Socrates asks the latter what is the meaning of virtue. When Meno attempts to define virtue by providing examples of it, in the tradition of the Sophists, Socrates criticises him. He says he should provide a definition of virtue that can apply to all virtues. A closer look at the the text of *Meno* shows that the definition that Socrates is asking for remains elusive and Robbins says “In Plato's dialogues and the Gospel of Mark there is a rhetorical play upon the reader so that the teacher appears to have the information toward

which he leads the student, but the information is never entirely clear either to the student or to the reader.”<sup>692</sup>

On the other hand there is an approach to questions such as “What is virtue?” being established here, as a compromise between the method of Socrates and the method of the Sophists. . For instance, in a parallel question that one may ask, “What is authority?” One could expect that a definition of authority might be presented by listing a range of attributes that authority has (cf. the approach of the Sophists). Thus the definition is built up by the list of attributes. In a following of Socrates’ requirement it would be expected that the list would present an understanding of authority which, in a sense, would move beyond the sum of its parts.

Also, the approach could be applied to further questions such as “What is needed for a Sense of Direction”, or “What does the individual in a society have to cope with?” etc.

Robbins says the text of Mark relies on repetition for its formal structure. He also mentions parallels and chiasmus.<sup>693</sup> If the writer of Mark’s gospel was trying to build up an understanding of abstract principles, one could expect him to use repetition and parallels. For instance paragraphs with parallels could have a point in common that in turn could be included in a list of attributes of, for instance, “What is authority based upon?” Such attributes and definition could be buried at the base of the text structure without, in the Socratic tradition, a reader being able to readily discern them.

### (iii) Rules of Greek Rhetoric Applied to the Start of Mark's Gospel

In their book *Patterns of Persuasion*, Burton L. Mack and Vernon K. Robbins do not only point to the possibility of a critique of Greek philosophy taking place amongst the early Christians.<sup>694</sup> Rather they assume this. Mack points out that a critique of both Judaism and Hellenism must have taken place to justify the emergence of a new movement.<sup>695</sup> Both social systems that dominated in Palestine at the time were considered inadequate.

In their book Mack and Robbins demonstrate that the gospel was written along the lines of the rules of Greek rhetoric.<sup>696</sup> However they also acknowledge that "to regard aphoristic speech as rhetorical performance may seem strange to many New Testament scholars."<sup>697</sup> They therefore put particular emphasis on a study of the responses of Jesus and the definition and rules relating to the Greek rhetorical form of the *chreiai*. On the one hand according to Robbins, many scholars admit the presence of the literary forms of *chreiai* in the gospel. But only a few studies have explored the logic at work in the abbreviation or expansion, or arrangement of units in a sequence to interpret or defend a particular point of view. In his chapter "Chreia and Pronouncement Story in Synoptic Studies" Robbins is particularly interested in the "inner logic, development and function of stories and sayings about Jesus in earliest Christianity."<sup>698</sup>

Mack and Robbins differentiate themselves from the general approach of Scholars who have considered gospel writers set out "to craft an original composition in keeping with sound rhetorical principles".<sup>699</sup> Rather they have studied the rhetorical exercises set out in the works of Theon's *Progymnasmata* and Hermogenes *Progymnasmata* and *Peri (on Staseon)*.

<sup>700</sup> In particular they look at the elaboration pattern as a compositional structure in the literature of the period. <sup>701</sup>

Robbins points out that to some extent scholars have been led astray by the works of Martin Dibelius and Rudolph Bultmann. Dibelius "presupposed that the stories and sayings functioned within a larger rhetorical unit, namely, the early Christian sermon." <sup>702</sup> Dibelius assumed that the narrative forms in the gospels served as examples that supported the main argument of the early Christian sermon. <sup>703</sup> The stories were only incidental to the central message. <sup>704</sup> These were described as pronouncement stories. <sup>705</sup> Moreover he considered rhetorical discussions about the text only applied to speeches. <sup>706</sup>

Against these ideas, widely held, a study of the simplified exercises in the elaboration of chreiai rhetoric in Hermogenes, shows that the actions of Jesus are on a par with his words in terms of a central Christian message. Indeed the pronouncement stories could be redefined as chreiai in keeping with Hellenistic practice. This gives these units a distinctly new nuance. <sup>707</sup>

Bultmann, one of the most influential scholars of the twentieth century, provided a wide range of literary designations to describe the variety of forms within the synoptic tradition. <sup>708</sup> He put particular emphasis on the apophthegm, a brief unit consisting of an edgy, more cynical aphorism. However, as Robbins points out, the ancient rhetoricians paid little attention to apophthegms. This meant Bultmann was free to refer to them without reference to classical rhetorical theory. <sup>709</sup> In fact, as Robbins points out he "created a detailed system of classification with no reference to standard rhetorical analysis." <sup>710</sup> Arguably Bultmann led scholars further away from a study of Greek rhetoric by requiring, in his classifications, that an interpreter determine whether a story was genuine or imported etc. In doing this he

assumed the shorter forms of a story were more likely to be earlier. Robbins points out such an assumption is speculative.<sup>711</sup>

According to Robbins Dibelius did in fact admit that a number of synoptic units contain close affinities with the rhetorical chreia, which was defined by the ancient rhetorician Aelius Theon as "A brief statement or action with pointedness attributed to a definite person or something analogous to a person."<sup>712</sup> If both action and a saying are present this is a mixed-chreia.<sup>713</sup> But Dibelius had a narrow view of chreiai. A closer study of Greek rhetorical rules, especially as set out in the more simplified manual of Hermogenes show that the chreia was not limited in all the ways that Dibelius assumed.<sup>714</sup> Some earlier scholars had realised this. For instance as far back as 1946, R.O.P. Taylor said in *The Groundwork of the Gospels* that "the definition (of the chreia) exactly fits the detachable little stories of which so much of Mark consists."<sup>715</sup>

As a form of summary from the discussion on awareness of chreiai Mack says "If early Jesus traditions took the form of chreiai, we may need to take the typical chreia scenes in the synoptic tradition more seriously than we have."<sup>716</sup>

Mack points out

A surprise is not that Hellenistic patterns of thought may have been at work in early Christianity. That we have known. It is rather that these thought patterns may have been essentially rhetorical, concerned more with cultural values and the logic of persuasion than with conceptual issues and the logic of philosophical investigation.<sup>717</sup>

Mack and Robbins say

The express aim (of their book *Patterns of Persuasion*) has been to demonstrate rhetorical composition (to be) in clusters of sayings not normally regarded as patterned, much less as patterned in forms of argumentation that were current in conventional discourse of the first century."<sup>718</sup>

The overall aim of such rhetoric was the creation of a Christian *paideia* (teaching or culture).<sup>719</sup> In their book Mack and Robbins therefore set out to test whether or not units in the gospels conform to the elaboration pattern of the literary form of the chreiai. Their closer studies of the works of Hermogenes and Theon showed that the chreiai was in fact of " central importance within education as a means of persuading and giving guidance for conduct." <sup>720</sup> They point out that Theon's *Progymnasmata* shows the ability of person to present a chreia in a long and short form was a fundamental skill learned prior to rhetorical training. <sup>721</sup>

Writers such as Aristotle are also considered. Aristotle believed analogy and example were primary modes of rhetorical induction. Hermogenes considered these could form a list for developing arguments in support of a main proposition. <sup>722</sup> Hermogenes also considered the full speech outline would begin with the statement of the proposition and end with a conclusion. The whole could be considered an elaboration. <sup>723</sup>

In a further description of the rhetorical exercises in Hermogenes, Mack points out that he assumes quite an advanced level of rhetorical training. Moreover "Moralizing is no longer merely a matter of caution and advice as with Theon. The elaboration builds it into the structure of the speech as its express intention." <sup>724</sup>

Mack shows the Greek understanding of the connection between the chreiai and moral development in his chapter "Elaboration of the Chreiai in the Hellenistic School" He refers to the writings of Seneca who believed a person achieves virtue by imitation models. "For Seneca, the model of virtue par excellence was Socrates, founder of ethical philosophy, speaker of precepts, who lived his life in keeping with his teaching." <sup>725</sup>

Mack points out that the teachers of rhetoric believed that "Imitation became not only a matter of learning style and impersonation, but of assuming "character" in some fundamental way as well." <sup>726</sup> He also points out "All the handbooks prefer chreiai containing ethical maxims, since for these later context rhetoric's function was primarily enculturating." The link between chreiai, ethical maxims and "speech in character" was shown when a maxim became a chreia when attributed to a specific person. <sup>727</sup>

Mack and Robbins found that, a study of Diogenes Laertius enables one to distinguish chreiai from things such as important events, typical behaviour, wise advice or a person's views. Laertius shows that, chreiai instead are characterised by the mention of the person, a statement-response, and there is always economy. Laertius shows "the wit and cleverness of the dissimulating response is clearly the point of the story." Theon gives a definition for chreia: "The chreia is a concise saying or action (with pointedness) attributed (with aptness) to some specific person. " <sup>728</sup>

Mack says

The value of the pattern in Theon and Hermogenes is just that it uses pattern to interpret chreiai. All three texts (*ad Herennium*, Theon and Hermogenes) present us with examples of small, fully worked-out elaborations that conform to the pattern. They are, of course, classroom exercises... And yet, alerted to the pattern in its form as a classroom exercise, it is possible to see it at work in an amazingly rich variety of literatures of the time. Studies in this area are only now beginning, so that reference to publications is limited. But work in progress has discovered the pattern in Plutarch's *Lives* and *Moralia*, Sextus Empiricus, Horace and Philo of Alexandria.

Mack goes on:

...But noting its own essential narrativity on the one hand and its own internal rhetoricity on the other, the possibilities for the expansion and elaboration of a chreia in a large narrative frame are multiple and complex. <sup>729</sup>

As stated above, Mack and Robbins observe that the canons of Judaism and Hellenism had suffered a critique in the violence of the birth of the new group who were writing the gospels.

<sup>730</sup> In Mack's chapter on "The Anointing of Jesus: Elaboration within a Chreia," he teases out some of the implications of this:

" the traditional values and canons of both its Jewish past and its Hellenistic environment are no longer adequate. By searching through its own emerging stock of convictions, memories and narrative lore, the new movement must craft its own proofs for its own new system of values." <sup>731</sup>

On the one hand they may, in the context of the time, have considered the scene, sayings and actions of Jesus fitting into the category of a chreia, especially the chreiai of the Cynics. Mack points out there is a striking resemblance between the chreiai and Jesus and the chreiai of the Cynics. <sup>732</sup> The chreiai of this Cynic type would be characterised by a devastating swerve in the place of expectations that would follow more conventional logic. <sup>733</sup> Opponents would be silenced. <sup>734</sup>

But as noted above if the new group wanted to distinguish themselves from others in their past and present what chreiai would they elaborate? Where could they go for examples? What kinds of analogies would be available to them? How could they obtain a common consent about the way things were and would go in normal human endeavour. Mack asks "Could elaboration work at all according to its prescribed rules." <sup>735</sup>

### ***Critique of Patterns of Persuasion***

In fact Mack and Robbins appear to be uncertain about the overall aim of the rhetoric of the chreiai to be found in the gospels. In their Conclusion chapter they say:

Taking the lead from the chreiai attributed to him, Jesus' wisdom would have included penetrating insight into the critical moments of life in a society held to be deserving of critique. Critique, however, appears to have been offered generally, not directed at

specific institutions, and in aphoristic mode, that is, rhetorically astute per occasion."<sup>736</sup>

Perhaps one of the reasons they come to the conclusion that "Critique.. appears to have been offered generally etc " is because the book *Patterns of Persuasion* has a focus on looking at particular units in order to demonstrate that they follow the elaboration pattern as set out in the classroom exercises of Theon and Hermogenes. The sections considered include the anointing of Jesus (Chapter Four ), Plucking Grain on the Sabbath (Chapter Five), and the Beelzebul controversy (Chapter Seven).

One of the problems with this approach has been that the existence of chreiai in the gospels presuppose that the chreiai stem from a person of authority. Most chreiai relate to Jesus.

Therefore the gospels need to establish that Jesus was a person of authority. But Mack states

The stories we have analysed, for instance, merely assumed the new convictions about Jesus, ethics, authority and so on. The argumentation was not concerned to demonstrate how one came to those convictions, or how one could ground or justify them philosophically.<sup>737</sup>

As Mack appears to admit, the book *Patterns of Persuasion* does not attempt to show how a number of elaborated chreiai are gathered together into a rhetorical section of a gospel in order to prove the authority of Jesus. If such a collection of chreiai were collected into a sequence of units to prove this in Mark, the first gospel, they would need to start with an introduction, argue with a number of analogies and examples and finish with a conclusion. If Mark's gospel is permeated with rhetorical units, one could assume that there would be other overall "elaboration patterns" based on the authority of Jesus that present an argued whole. One could assume that such a "whole" would include some sort of critique of the social systems from which the new group has emerged, that is Judaism and Hellenism.

In the course of creating a new *paideia* (cf. culture) the tradents of the Jesus traditions did not come to speech as authors of their own elaborations of chreiai about Jesus, commenting on his wisdom and adding their own reasons and exhortations for paying heed. Instead, they retold the stories and let the founder of their new movements speak for them. This enabled them to avoid any appeal to the claims and logics of the cultures at large." Mack and Robbins say "By subverting in this way the logic of Hellenistic culture, the Jesus movements created a teacher whose authority no one could question, a teacher whose statements were final." <sup>738</sup>

In other words, the words and actions of Jesus would provide the proof that he was a person of authority and he had the authority to critique both Judaism and Hellenism. It would seem Mack and Robbins were relying on the general assertions of the authority of Jesus to demonstrate his authority rather than showing how Mark set up a closely knit argument to prove this conclusively.

### **The First Section of Mark's Gospel**

As stated above, Mack and Robbins observed in their book *Patterns of Persuasion* that a critique of both Judaism and Hellenism had already taken place in the violence of the birth of the new Jesus movements. The tradents of the new movement wanted to differentiate themselves from both the established social and value systems. In trying to clarify their position and persuade others to join the movements the tradents were likely to rely on the rules of rhetoric already set out in the handbooks on rhetoric being used in the first century. A knowledge of such rules of rhetoric was considered a basic part of education. The pattern of rhetorical elaboration as set out in the simplified exercises of Theon, Hermogenes and others have enabled present day scholars such as Mack and Robbins to study the basic rules of first

century rhetoric and realise these were being followed in the gospels. The exercises in these ancient handbooks are comparatively simple, but they demonstrate the rich variety of units into which chreiai (small rhetorical sayings/actions) can be developed.

While Mack and Robbins appear to be unsure about what underlying logic is being followed by these "sustained" rhetorical points, an exploration of the first section of Mark's Gospel may be able to reveal more of the underlying logic. Consider the opening verse in the Gospel of Mark "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ." (Mark 1:1). This in fact is a proposition according to the rules of Aristotle. The claim is made that Jesus is the Christ. One could assume the writer, according to the rules of Hellenistic argumentation, would need to set out a series of demonstrations with a conclusion in order to prove this claim.

If Mark the writer were to set out a series of chreiai units in order to prove his opening proposition one could expect the scenes of each unit would play an integral part in the demonstration of Jesus' authority. The credibility of the rest of the gospel is based upon the reality of such authority. Also, in line with the rules of chreiai, Jesus would be making a response statement or action in terms of the scene in the chreia units set out in a sequence to support the claim. One of the ways in which Mark the writer could emphasise the universality of Jesus' authority (and authority as such), would be to set up the scenes so that analogies could be drawn between them and then between the units in which the scenes formed a backdrop.

When one considers the places where Jesus went in Mark 1:9 to 3:35 and "episodes" that took place in these settings they are as follows:

|                      |           |
|----------------------|-----------|
| From a Nazareth base | 1:9-12    |
| Into the desert      | 1:12-13   |
| Galilee/Sea          | 1:14-20   |
| Capernaum/Synagogue  | 1:21-28   |
| House of Simon       | 1:29-34   |
| Lonely place         | 1:35-37   |
| came out (of home)   | 1:38      |
| Galilee/seaside      | 1:39-45   |
| Capernaum/Home       | 2:1-12    |
| Beside the sea       | 2:13-14   |
| came (out)           | 2:15-22   |
| Grain fields         | 2:23-25   |
| cf. House of God     | 2:26-28   |
| Synagogue            | 3:1-6     |
| Sea                  | 3:7-12    |
| Into the mountains   | 3:13-19   |
| Home                 | 1:3:20-35 |

The analogies between the "episodes" or units are not apparent if one is using Narrative criticism when interpreting this gospel section. However, if the possibility of setting up the scenes into analogies or parallels in order to reinforce a line of rhetoric then there is less need to think of the story lines flowing into each other. In any case scholars have long since acknowledged that the "geography" in Mark's gospel has anomalies about it.<sup>739</sup> If the above scenes, and the units in which they are found, are arranged into a chiasmic, that is a circular pattern, then parallels are much more in evidence. Also, such an extended chiasmic pattern would have been familiar to people of the first century, given that the favourite author in Hellenistic literature was Homer who used extended chiasmus.<sup>740</sup> A rearrangement of the scenes is as follows:

|                     |         |                    |         |
|---------------------|---------|--------------------|---------|
| From Nazareth base  | 1:9-12  | Home               | 3:20-35 |
| Into the desert     | 1:12-13 | Into the mountains | 3:13-19 |
| Galilee/Sea         | 1:14-20 | Sea                | 3:7-12  |
| Capernaum/Synagogue | 1:21-28 | Synagogue          | 3:1-6   |
| House of Simon      | 1:29-34 | cf. House of God   | 2:26-28 |
| Lonely place        | 1:35-37 | Grain fields       | 2:23-25 |
| came out (of home)  | 1:38    | came (out)         | 2:15-22 |
| Galilee/seaside     | 1:39-45 | Beside the sea     | 2:13-14 |
| Capernaum/Home      |         | 2:1-12             |         |

A few of explanatory comments are in order here. It may be commented that the baptism of Jesus took place in the Jordan river. But the Gospel of John relates the Jesus had a home base in that area (as well) and he invited two of John's disciples to spend the day with him there (John 1:39). The third scene relates to the sea in Galilee. The fourth scene relates to the Synagogue in Capernaum. The ninth scene relates to Jesus at a home in Capernaum. A parallel scene of the House of God relates to David's visit there. (In Mark's gospel, Jesus is treated as a type of David cf. Psalm 2:6 and Luke 18:38). The other backdrop parallels are self evident. The above chiasmic structure would have the ninth scene, when Jesus is at his home base in Capernaum, In is in this unit the authority of Jesus is conclusively proved. In order to briefly consider the unit here, Jesus forgives the sins of the paralytic let down through the roof. People present protest. He then demonstrates that he has the authority to forgive sin by telling the paralytic to get up and walk. The critics are silenced and instead all "praise God, the author of such authority."

The rhetoric of elaborated chreiai in this section of the Gospel (1:9-3:35), would be reinforced by analogy, as Aristotle had said. A closer look at the units would show further parallels between the paired units and a continuity of intent between them. One could expect to see the major components of a chreia as described by Mack, that is, "scene, challenge, response."<sup>741</sup>

Consider a possible first unit of 1:9-11. Jesus came from Nazareth to be baptized in the Jordan. The Spirit of God responds, descending in the form of a dove and a voice came out of the heavens. "You are my Son, the beloved and in you I have been well pleased. The Father-Son relationship between Jesus and God is endorsed in the apparent parallel unit of 3:20-35. At the conclusion of this parallel unit, in the context of Jesus being accused of being possessed, the relatives of Jesus arrived to take control of him (3:21) His relatives, including

his mother, were standing outside calling for him. The Greek word *στηκοντες* translates "standing firm." But Jesus redefined his brother and sister and mother in terms of "Whoever does the will of God." This terse and cryptic sort of response points to a similarity with the *chreiai* of the Cynics. Perhaps an interesting comment on the tension within this scene is the omission of Mary, the mother of Jesus, from the people present at the crucifixion of Jesus (Mark 15:40).

The next pair of scenes relate to going into the desert 1:12-13 and going up into the mountain 3:13-19. Both backdrops relate to a retreat environment. In the desert, Jesus fasts for forty days and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild beasts and/but the angels ministered to him. Jesus is in a position of confrontation, one of the hallmarks of a *chreia* context. But angels minister to him which again endorses his connection with God who is the author of authority. The parallel unit of Jesus going into the mountain shows Jesus exercising authority in choosing twelve disciples "that he might send them to proclaim and to have authority to expel the demons." Here, his authority is such that he can authorise others to extend his mission. But again there is mention of opposition in "Judas Iscariot who indeed betrayed him.

The third parallel scenes are both at the seaside where Jesus is preaching in relation to the disciples. In 1:14-20, Jesus is proclaiming the Kingdom of God. He calls Simon and Andrew to follow him, and then James and John. In keeping with *chreiai* statements there is economy of statement here. But Jesus is acting with authority and purpose. The unit ends with James and John taking the dramatic action of leaving their father in the boat with the hired servants and following Jesus. In 3:7-12 Jesus is again at the seaside with disciples and a great multitude of people have arrived. Jesus orders the disciples to push out into the water to avoid the crush. The whole scene shows recognition of his authority, with the crowd following him,

the disciples doing as he bids, Jesus out in the water where he could address the crowd and his actions of curing the diseases. Even the unclean spirits recognise his authority "they fell before him and cried out saying "You are the Son of God." Jesus warns them to be silent.

The fourth set of parallel scenes and episodes take place in the Capernaum synagogue (1:21-28) and in an unnamed synagogue (3:1-6). The first scene shows Jesus teaching and people in the synagogue are astounded at his teaching because "he was teaching them as with authority.." Jesus orders an unclean spirit to come out of a man. The scene finishes with "This is a new teaching proclaimed with authority. And he commands the unclean spirits and they obey him." The second scene, also in a synagogue, shows a hostile audience watching to see if he would heal a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. Jesus responds "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. Again, the scene demonstrates a chreia form of comment, with the audience unable to make a comment. Then Jesus demonstrates his authority to do good on the Sabbath by curing the man. The scene ends with the converse action of the Pharisees plotting with the Herodians to destroy Jesus. The rhetorical line of logic in the unit is continued in this addition because it shows the realisation on the part of these people that their authority has been challenged.

The fifth pair of scenes shows the house of Simon and Andrew and the house of God, where David (a type of Jesus) entered (1:29-34 and 2:26-28). Jesus responds to the situation in the first scene where Simon's mother-in-law is fever-stricken. He cures her as well as the people being brought to the house. He also expels demons and compels them to silence (again). The second scene is about David who entered the house of God and fed the bread there to those who were with him. This was an action of authority on David's part. Jesus ends the scene with the cryptic saying that asserts his own authority and the authority of people's rights

in general, "the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" The inductive form of reasoning used by Jesus here could be described as being in its earliest form in which an example is used to refute the accusation of the Pharisees.<sup>742</sup>

The sixth pair of scenes is in a desert place and in cornfields (1:35-37 and 2:23-25). The demonstration of the chreiai in these scenes is not as obvious as elsewhere. But both scenes relate to a connection to authority. In the first scene Jesus goes into a desert place and prays there before dawn and this demonstrates his on-going linkage with the author of authority, that is, God. In the second scene while he and his disciples go through the cornfields the disciples began plucking the ears of corn to eat. The Pharisees use the incident to challenge the authority of Jesus, saying it is not lawful to do this manual labour. But Jesus turns the challenge back on the Pharisees (cf. a typical chreia statement). They rely on the Judaic tradition for their own position of authority. But King David, a figure considered to be at the epitome of Judaic heritage, did a similar thing when he and the ones with him were hungry.

The seventh pair of scenes both picture Jesus coming out of his home and previous lifestyle (1:38 and 2:15-22). Jesus says in the first scene that he "came out" in order to proclaim. In the second scene he says "I did not come (out) to call the righteous but sinners." It is in the follow on from this statement that he asserts he is inaugurating a new order (the Jesus movements) and he uses the image of new wine which needs to be put into fresh wine skins. Both scenes show Jesus pushing forward with intent in establishing a new *paideia*.

The eighth and last pair of scenes in this section of Mark's gospel shows Jesus proclaiming in synagogues in all of Galilee (1:39-45). This includes places along the seaside. The second setting shows him again by the sea 2:13-14. In the first scene we see Jesus curing a leper and

telling him not to tell people about this. In the second scene we see him calling Levi sitting by the custom house and he calls him to proclaim. In the combination of the two cases, Jesus is exercising authority in determining who will be validated for proclamation of the value system in the new Jesus movements, (even if the leper told about the cure anyway).

The last unit in the chiasmic structure is, as outlined above, about Jesus again being in a home base when a paralytic is lowered through the roof. Jesus does what Jews believed only God could do, he forgives the paralytic his sins. Jesus throws the questions people are asking back at them. "Which is it easier to say (to the paralytic). Your sins are forgiven or to say, Rise and take your mattress and walk?" Anyone would think that only God could say the latter with effect. But the paralytic immediately rises up, gathers up his mattress and walks. This leaves the crowd there dumbfounded, which again is the outcome of an effective chreia. The miracle summarises the underlying argument of the section that Jesus is a person of authority, authorised by God and his word and judgement cannot be questioned.

In terms of rules of reasoning as set out by Aristotle and described by Mack, the example and the enthymeme (rhetorical syllogism) are two primary forms of rhetorical logic and proof.<sup>743</sup> The syllogism is a form of deductive reasoning consisting of a major premise, a minor premise and a conclusion. In the case of the first section of Mark, the major premise was the claim that Jesus was the Christ. The minor premise(s), consists of examples from his life that demonstrate his authority. The conclusion is presented in the episode in which his forgiveness of the paralytic and then his cure of the paralytic provides the proof that he has the authority to forgive sins. This puts his authority on a par with God. The conclusive argument is set out in the text quite clearly.

Mack refers to Anaximenes and Aristotle in *Patterns of Persuasion* and makes the point that one of the hallmarks of a solid argument in Greek rhetoric is the ability to make universal generalisations from listed examples (or analogies). There is also a "general statement having to do with a class of objects, illustrating a principle or a relationship that has the potential for being universalized."<sup>744</sup> Mack and Robbins make a further point about an enthymeme. "In an enthymeme, part of the argument is missing because it is assumed."<sup>745</sup> When one compares these statements with the eight pairs of units and the final unit, there is a universal dimension of factors being outlined here that move beyond the demonstration that Jesus is an authorised person. This extends to a definition of what authority itself is based upon. The first pair of units or parallel paragraphs show this is based upon the will of God, The second pair demonstrates it extends to the good and the bad (cf. Satan and the angels and then the twelve disciples with Judas amongst them). The third pair of units shows the need for support in the exercise of authority. In both cases Jesus enlists the help of the disciples. In the first case it is Simon, Andrew, James and John and in the second case the disciples provide both general support and specific support, for example in helping Jesus to pull back from the crowd. The fourth pair of units show that authority challenges corruption. In a synagogue Jesus expels a bad spirit. In another synagogue he challenges the "bad spirit" amongst the people there by curing a man with a withered hand. They react by plotting to destroy him. The fifth pair of units highlights how authority gives priority to people, both in the cure of Simon's mother-in-law and many others and by the example of David feeding holy bread to his hungry companions. The sixth pair of units shows a respect for human needs. Jesus satisfies his need to pray, and the disciples satisfy their hunger with corn cobs. The seventh pair of units shows that authority can innovate a new order. Thus Jesus wants to proclaim his message further afield saying it was for that reason he had "come out" from his previous lifestyle. In the parallel unit he says he came (out) to call sinners and he compares his

ministry to that of new wine that needs to go into new skins (cf. new social structures) . The eighth pair of units show Jesus reaching out to crowds which is also a function of authority. The final unit and centre of the chiasmic structure shows the ability and readiness of Jesus to forgive. This demonstrates a key attribute of true authority.

### **Further Applications**

The pattern and approach of Mark in the first section of his gospel sets the likely style of writing that he will use in the further sections. A closer exploration of the text would be likely to show up another set of parallel units and paragraphs that follows the first set. If the first set of units relates to what authority is based upon, and it thereby sets out the basis for genuine law which is supposed to be the hallmark of Judaism, then one could ask if a second, similar set of units would be exploring the basis of Hellenism. The last section of Mark's gospel was discussed in previous pages in which it was strongly suggested that Mark has chiasmic structure here (as well). It was pointed out that this extended chiasm would be an unlikely find if either the historical critical exegesis method of interpretation were used or if the narrative critical approach to interpretation was taken. However, the proposed chiasmic structure here would have more credibility when considered in terms of a rhetorical line of logic. One of the interesting facets about this section of the gospel is that a proposed chiasmic structure appears to be organised around the response that people make to Jesus. One of the characteristics of the rhetorical chreiai is that it shows the action/saying response of a person of authority to a given situation. Yet in the final section of Mark's gospel the units appear to be organised around the responses that people make to Jesus. In terms of universal dimension to this section, the test of discipleship is, in the ultimate sense, the response made by people to Jesus in their day to day circumstances. A key theme for Mark is the test of discipleship.<sup>746</sup>

If Mark's gospel is characterised by the use of chreiai to further an inner logic to the text, it is likely other gospel writers would be relying on this form of writing as well. One of the types of argumentation, as described by Mack and Robbins and their study of Greek rhetoric, is the list of acceptable virtues in a *paideia*. In the case one could expect the gospel writers would show "the points at which this new kingdom does compare and contrast with conventional notions of culture, both Jewish and Hellenistic."<sup>747</sup> This approach compares with the deliberative speech which is to exhort or dissuade and the epideictic speech which is to praise or censure.<sup>748</sup> If Matthew's gospel is largely based upon a Judaic social system and Luke's gospel is largely based upon a Hellenistic society then one could expect that the lists of virtues and vices that emerge from an inner logic to these texts would connect with Judaism and Hellenism. Matthew would set out the best type of Judaic society and also set out its weaknesses. Luke would set out the best type of Hellenistic society and also set out its weaknesses. This would fit at least to some extent with the concluding comments of Mack and Robbins in *Patterns of Persuasion*

It now becomes understandable why the synoptic elaborations are heavy with rationales, contraries and analogies. Rationales were absolutely necessary for discourse of any kind to emerge. Contraries were required in the nature of the case if difference from others was the issue to be addressed.<sup>749</sup>

One assumes the "difference from others" here, refers to Judaic and Hellenistic societies.

**(iv) Early Liturgical Practice and a four-sided, transformative use of the Gospels**

The examination of rhetoric in a Gospel or one of its sections enables one to get a broad sweep of understanding as to the intentions of the writer. In this sense rhetorical interpretation is a “synchronic” method of interpretation. Consideration of the social setting behind a gospel also helps a reader to get the general sense of a writer’s intentions, especially in terms of responding to the crises of his own community. A recent publication by Alexander J Shaia called *Heart and Mind* uses both approaches in an examination as to why the early Church chose the present four canonical gospels rather than other texts.<sup>750</sup> This is a further development of his book, *The Hidden Power of the Gospels*.<sup>751</sup> Shaia shows how early liturgical practice set out the four gospels so a person or community could go through a transformative process in a three year cycle. He explains how the gospel of Matthew challenges people in a liturgical context to “climb the mountain” of taking on a new identity in Christ. The Gospel of Mark introduces people to the difficulties and crises of life with which they have to deal. The gospel of Luke enables them to take a step by step journey in the development of virtue. Shaia shows how the gospel of John is interspersed into the readings to inspire and encourage the community.

Shaia calls this four step process “*quadratos*” and he shows how it is repeated in many other formats in the development of spirituality, such as the spiritual exercises of St Ignatius.<sup>752</sup>

In his earlier book Shaia gives a brief description about how the early church community included practically all the gospels in its liturgical cycle. But in later centuries the liturgical readings were narrowed down and this situation continued until Vatican II.<sup>753</sup>

A point that emerges clearly from the writings of Shaia is the realisation that the early Church readily considered the gospels in their entirety and in terms of development of spirituality. Thus the gospels were read as a whole and the four gospels were seen as a whole in the task of transforming one's whole life.

Shaia does not use the terms of "socio-rhetoric" but there are parallels here because he considers the early society of the emerging church and its liturgy. He describes how certain types of rhetoric pervade the gospels to enable people to grow in the spiritual life.

His work is particularly useful in pointing out that the early church realised there were inter-connections between the four gospels and the four gospels should be approached and understood as a complementary whole.

### **Merits of the socio-rhetorical Approach to Interpretation**

While a socio-rhetorical approach to interpretation as shown in *Patterns of Persuasion* may show the likelihood that the gospel texts contain a critique of Hellenistic (and Judaic) society, the method does tend to consider one small section of text at a time rather than taking a general sweep or overview of the whole. Vernon Robbins has been the major proponent of socio-rhetorical method of interpretation and this was gradually developed from the basis of Historical Critical Exegesis, which has a diachronic approach to the texts. The Catholic Pontifical Commission has pointed out that a rhetorical interpretation can be described as a synchronic approach to biblical interpretation and thus it complements the historical critical method. But it appears that the socio-rhetorical method as used by Mack and Robbins in

*Patterns of Persuasion* needs to be based its explorations of smaller sections of text. The chreiai for instance, as described in *Patterns of Persuasion* are elaborated from the single sentence, or in the case of mixed chreiai, from the combination of the sentence and an action. The scene also plays a part here. Robbins sees that the line of rhetoric in Luke extends for the entire journey of Jesus to Jerusalem.<sup>754</sup> But in their book they show the elaboration pattern of chreiai work in relation to smaller sections of texts such as Plucking Grain on the Sabbath (ch 5) and the Beelzebub Controversy (ch 7). They themselves point out in the concluding pages of the book "But we needed something more to grasp the logic behind the phenomenon of clustered sayings."<sup>755</sup>

Use of the socio-rhetorical method of interpretation probably could, eventually, show that the gospels contain a critique of Hellenism. But one may ask if other methods could show up the critique and an inner logic to the gospels more easily and quickly.

### **Summary and Conclusions of Chapter Six**

Socio-Rhetorical interpretation developed from Historical Critical Exegesis. However as the name implies it includes sociological and rhetorical interpretation. Unlike Historical Critical Exegesis, these are described by the Catholic Pontifical Commission as "synchronic" methods of interpretation. Socio-rhetorical interpretation as shown above, demonstrates how Paul used the formats of current Hellenistic letter-writing, and also its rhetoric, to encourage his new Gentile converts to practice the spirit of the key social commandments. It also shows how Mark's gospel relied on the literature and popularity of the Greek Socrates tradition to describe the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. It shows how the Greek rhetorical

form of chreia sayings, as taught in Hellenistic educational handbooks, was a form used to retell the stories of Jesus. On the one hand socio-rhetorical interpretation shows how the gospel writers used Hellenistic cultural forms in writing up the gospels. It also assumes a critique of Judaistic and Hellenistic societies had been made and was being made in the gospels. However it does not appear to show how this critique was being made in the underlying logic of the texts.

**STEP C****THE SOLUTION****Chapter Seven****Semiotic Analysis****-Word Patterns Come First****a. Semiotic Analysis and the Catholic Pontifical Commission**

It appears the method of biblical interpretation called “semiotic analysis” is not used or discussed as often as other methods of interpretation. For instance a Google search may bring up about a hundred thousand sites with the expression “logico-semantic” (a form of semiotics). But a search of the expression “historical-critical” will bring up about fifteen million sites.

Despite its apparent lack of popularity, the Catholic Pontifical Commission has given a definition and clarification of semiotic analysis which, it says, was formerly called “structuralism.”<sup>756</sup> The Commission describes this method as “synchronic”, that is, it entails a concentration on the text “as it comes before the reader in its final state.”<sup>757</sup> The method is based upon three main principles.

First it considers “the entire text but only the text; it does not look to any date “external” to the text such as the author, the audience, any events it describes or what might have been its process of composition.” Secondly there is no meaning given except in and through relationships in the text, in particular the relationship of “difference.” It is out of a network of relationships that the meaning of the text is constructed. Thirdly each text follows a

“grammar,” “that is to say, a certain number of rules or structures in the collection of sentences. There are various levels, each of which has its own distinct grammar.”

The Commission gives further clarification of the principles of looking at only the text, looking at structures of meaning formed through relationship and also the distinct grammar(s) used in the collection of sentences. Besides giving the three principles of this type of interpretation, the Commission says “the overall content of a text can be analysed at three different levels.”

First there is the narrative level. Here, the analysis seeks to retrace the different phases, logically bound to each other, that mark out the transformation (of the text) from one level of meaning to another. In each of these phases the analysis establishes the relationships between those “roles” that are being played by the ‘actants’ that are transforming the level of meaning. Secondly there is the level of discourse. This in itself consists of a further three operations. It entails a fixing and classification of the elements of meaning in a text (such as actors, times, places) It entails tracking each such figure to determine how the text is using it. Then there is an inquiry into the value that such a figure may hold. The third level, at which “the overall content of a text can be analysed,” is that of logico-semantics. This will be considered further on.

At the same time, use of the method may not appear to be so “very complicated” when one teases out the Commission’s definition in terms of the text itself and its discussion of the second level of discourse. It can thereby be shown how semiotic analysis can contribute to one’s understanding of the Bible. For instance, when one reads the gospels there is the obvious level of meaning which is found on the narrative level. But as the Commission says,

there can be deeper levels again that are logically bound to each other by the “roles” played by the “actants” in the text. There can be a fixing of the elements of meaning there (cf. actors, times, and/or places). There can be a tracking of such figures to determine just how the text may be using these.

In an application of the Commission’s description of the second level of discourse (the first level being the narrative), one can take one of the above elements of meaning, for example places. One can consider how the text may be using a list of places to transform its level of discourse so that it can contain a deeper level of meaning. How so? The text can be using the list of places as “paragraph hooks.” In this way there would only be the one “hook” or place per collection of sentences. Each sentence collection would be able to stand on its own in the same way that a modern paragraph can stand alone. These places and their paragraphs could be set out in a pattern such as an extended, inverted circle (chiasm) or in a pattern of parallel lines. By setting out the places in this way, the text would be pulling whole paragraphs into a series of pairs which could then be compared or contrasted with each other. If each of these pairs of paragraphs has a distinct concept in common then the whole section of paragraphs can form a particular level of meaning. Such a level of meaning may not be explicitly stated in the text. However this could still exist and the level would be based on the mutual concepts focussed upon by the paragraph pairs.

In further sections or in other gospels other elements of meaning such as actors or times (as well as place) could be used by the text to form “hooks” that can pull together “stand alone” collections of sentences. These “figures” may not necessarily be structured into patterns. But they would still be used to pull together a number of sentence collections which would thereby become a whole section of a gospel. If for instance statements about time were being

used in this way it would be more difficult for a gospel writer to form a paragraph pattern from these

On the other hand if a list of places has already been used to form a pattern then a reader could suspect that other “elements of meaning” could be used in the same way. For example, in previous pages there has already been a discussion of a chiasmic pattern formed by the responses made towards Jesus in the last section of Mark’s gospel.

The Commission says,

The semiotic approach must be open to history: first of all to the history of those who play a part in the texts; then to that of the authors and readers. The great risk run by those who employ semiotic analysis is that of remaining at the level of a formal study of the content of texts, failing to draw out the message.<sup>758</sup>

Given the historical situation of Hellenistic domination that surrounded the gospel writers and given the efforts made by both Jewish and Christian writers in the first century CE to discern and use Hellenistic methods and ideas, one could expect that the gospel writers would be going through a similar process of discernment. One could expect they would be trying to work out what parts of Hellenism could be incorporated into Christianity and what parts should people be warned against. If semiotic analysis could uncover this sort of critique, then it should indeed help in “one’s understanding of the Bible as the Word of God.”

There has already been discussion of the first narrative level of meaning and the second level of discourse. The third level of meaning outlined by the Commission is the “logico-semantic level.” The Commission says:

This is the so-called deep level. It is also the most abstract. It proceeds from the assumption that certain forms of logic and meaning underlie the narrative and discursive organisation of all discourse. The analysis at this level consists in

identifying the logic which governs the basic articulations of the narrative and figurative flow of a text.

One of the operative words here is “all” (discourse). That is, a particular level of meaning includes **all** the text. The Commission reminds us that semiotic analysis directs “greater attention to the fact that each biblical text is a coherent whole, obedient to a precise linguistic mechanic of operation..”<sup>759</sup> It also remarks that present semiotic research (in the 1990’s) “centers most particularly upon enunciation and intertextuality.” This observation suggests that if a certain level of meaning (for instance a critique of Hellenism) is developed to include the whole of one gospel, then there could also be connections between this level in the one gospel with the same level in other gospels as well.

### **What a Logico-semantic Level in Mark’s Gospel may look like**

If a level of meaning does exist across the gospels, and underlying the text then one could ask what does it actually say? What for instance would the Gospel writers be saying if there were in a critique of Hellenism at this level?

Logically, a critique of Hellenism would be likely to involve a critique of Judaism as well. After all Judaism was the basic world view of the writers. As Jews they would have considered the Law of God to be primary. So in any comparison between the two social systems they would be more than likely to deal with Judaism first. One could expect that this priority could be threaded through every type of comparison to be made at this level of meaning. The prioritisation could be one of the “rules of grammar” being used by the text.

A first question to be dealt with in relation to Judaism especially if a rationalistic Hellenistic approach were being taken would relate to its definition, that is, what is it based upon. The distinguishing feature of Judaism is their observance of God's law. But what is law based upon or, putting it another way what is the key to true law? The answer here is authority which leads to further questioning. What is real authority based upon? One could expect Mark the first gospel to deal with such question first of all.

A discussion in previous pages shows that Mark does in fact deal with the question of authority in the first section of his gospel, especially in relation to Jesus. A question to follow this question about the basis of true law (and Judaism) would relate to what Hellenism is based upon. Greco-Roman society prided itself on its order and rationality. The straightness of Roman roads, its architecture and the systems of its governance all reflect this. The opposite of order is chaos. So, how does a society based on order avoid collapse into chaos? An answer to such a question is that this sort of society needs a sense of direction. To digress here. The same sort of theme was developed in Shakespeare's play of "King Lear." Lear gave up his kingship but he kept a contingent of soldiers. Without a kingdom the soldiers had nothing to do and the result was implosion. To return to Mark's second section. One could expect that if Mark were to develop a critique of Hellenism, he would explore what a sense of direction needs to be based upon.

A third section for Mark could be more directly related to Christians. What sort of person could operate effectively between two different types of societies, one based on law and the other based on order? Mark could show that Jesus challenges his followers to "raise the bar" of three key social commandments that is, "thou shalt not kill," "thou shalt not commit adultery," "thou shalt not steal" (Mark 10:19). In doing this the idealism of Hellenistic

society would thereby be “built into” conformity to the key social commandments in Judaism. This challenge of “raising the bar” as presented by Mark would not be only conceptual or abstract. Rather it would have a direct focus on the person of Jesus. It would be based on the relationship between the Christian and the on-going presence of Jesus Christ. Jesus sums this up with “Go sell what you have and give to the poor ..... and come follow me” (Mark 10:21). A fourth and final section to be dealt with by Mark could relate to an on-going response to this Jesus who lives on in present situations and the difficulties of every-day life.

### **A Quick Look at Other Gospels**

The gospel of Matthew was written from the basis of a Jewish society, as Alexander J. Shaia has pointed out.<sup>760</sup> If a level of meaning providing a critique of Judaic and Hellenistic societies is created in Mark’s gospel and continued on into Matthew’s gospel, then one could suspect there would be a focus in Matthew’s gospel on internalising the law. An outline of this might be a presentation of Jesus as a child of Judaism followed by an outline of the qualities needed to function in a law-based societies and then the attributes of the best type of law-based society. There could also be a section that warns Christians against the limitations of this social system. One could also suspect there would be an emphasis throughout on a personal following of Jesus in discipleship.

The gospel of Luke, as Shaia has pointed out, was probably written for a multiple number of communities around the Roman Empire.<sup>761</sup> One could expect it would present Jesus as a child of the world. Like Matthew’s gospel it might provide a description of values needed, but in this case, the values needed to function in an order-based type of society. It would also list the the best type of values to be found in this sort of society. One could also expect here would be warnings against the excesses to be found in a society based upon order. Just as

Matthew's gospel presented a 'type' of person functioning in a law-based society (a disciple), so there may be a "type" of person that fits with a Hellenistic society. One would not be surprised about the theme of a "handing over" of the mission of Jesus to his followers who would go out into the world with this new 'hybrid' society. This outward movement would be dealt with in particular in the book of Acts.

At the same level of meaning, the gospel of John would be dealing with the inevitable tension to be found in a hybrid society based on both law and order. In particular one could expect reprimands for those with a predominantly "law-based" view of the world who prefer to trust in ritualistic observances rather than the on-going presence of Jesus. One could expect John's gospel to focus on the on-going presence of Jesus as "living authority" and as the "living word."

### **The Influence of Centralised Leadership in the Writing of the Gospels**

In the book *The Hidden Power of the Gospels: Four Questions, Four paths and One journey* Shaia and Gaugy point out that about fifty gospels were produced in the first century and out of them the Church selected those four gospels that could be used in its lectionary to re-create the transformative process of "quadratos."<sup>762</sup> However, if semiotic analysis shows there is a distinct level of meaning that provides a critique of Judaism and Hellenism in the gospels and this level goes across all the gospels, and includes all of the text, then one has to ask whether or not the four gospels were simply "picked out" of about fifty potential canonical gospels. Rather, it would seem there was some sort of deliberation on the part of the Church's central leadership that involved a plan to provide a critique of Hellenism. The gospels that had a plan to do this would also be more likely to include the transformative process of "quadratos."

Obviously the gospels were not written from the same place or at about the same time. However this would not have prevented the church from providing some sort of on-going leadership in the production of the four gospels finally chosen for its lectionary and its canon. The Church had already exercised leadership in its early years as shown in the Jerusalem Council described in Chapter Fifteen of Acts. The overall context of the above pages have demonstrated that providing a critique of Hellenism would have been an on-going preoccupation of the Christians in the first century. Given the preoccupation, it would have been natural for the church leadership to “sketch out” some ways in which this sort of critique could have been developed. Mark’s gospel provided much of the material used by Matthew and Luke. It could have provided a “blueprint of grammar” for these gospels and John to follow as well.

The letters of Paul show there was enough communication (and debate) between the leadership and membership of the Church to show that a “steering” process in the writing of the canonical gospels could have taken place. By the end of Paul’s ministry and before the gospels were written, much of the controversy about conversion to Judaism via circumcision had already been debated and clarified. This would have made the devising of an overall “sketch-plan” for the gospels much easier. There may have been about fifty gospels written during these decades. But there was only the one Paul, the one leader called James and the one Peter. It also appears there were some leadership figures that “towered over” the rest of the membership which could have been writing the non-canonical gospels.

### Comments about Semiotic Analysis by Joseph Fitzmyer

As stated above, the Commission says the logico-semantic level of semiotic analysis “proceeds from the assumption that certain forms of logic and meaning underlie the narrative and discursive organisation of all discourse.”<sup>763</sup> An obvious question here is how can a reader detect these “certain forms of logic and meaning,” especially as they underlie the organisation of “all discourse”?

It would appear the difficulty of detecting such levels of meaning is a factor that influences the views of critics such as Joseph A. Fitzmyer. In his book *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, he says:

This mode of analysis (semiotic analysis) of the biblical text is very complicated, as the description of it given by the Commission makes clear.

He adds:

Significantly, the Commission does not say what the advantages of this mode of analysis really are. That semiotics discovers something about the underlying structure of language or certain dimensions of discourse in a biblical text may be conceded. That it contributes to one’s understanding of the Bible as the Word of God expressed in human language is another matter.

One could take issue with Fitzmyer’s observation that the Commission does not say what the advantages of semiotic analysis really are. In fact it considers its definition of semiotic analysis clarifies the advantages of it, cf.

The description of semiotics that has been given and above all the formulation of its presuppositions should have already served to make clear the advantages and the limitations of this method.

Also, in its closing paragraph about this form of analysis the Commission says:

When it does not become lost in remote and complex language and where its principal elements are taught in simple terms, semiotic analysis can give Christians a taste for studying the biblical text and discovering certain of its dimensions, without their first

having to acquire a great deal of instruction in historical matters, relating to the production of the text and its socio-cultural world.<sup>764</sup>

Fitzmyer also says:

The Commission finally admits that the method entails a certain structuralist philosophy that may not be universally acceptable.”<sup>765</sup>

As a contradiction to this the actual text of the Commission says:

Semiotics can be usefully employed in the study of the Bible only insofar as the method is separated from certain assumptions developed in structuralist philosophy.

Fitzmyer’s comment infers that a certain structuralist philosophy is being used in semiotic analysis. But the Commission is saying that the method has to be separated out from assumptions developed in structuralist philosophy.

Fitzmyer repeats a Commission criticism of this method of analysis:

“that of remaining at the level of a formal study of the content of texts, failing to draw out the message... When it does not become lost in remote and complex language..... “

One could react to his observation with the comment that a scenario of a message being lost would be all the more likely if influential biblical scholars such as himself were disinterested in the method. The “message” would be lost whether this was expressed in “remote and complex language” or not. Fitzmyer provides a reminder of the continuing domination and his own preference the Historical Critical method of Exegesis amongst biblical scholars and as compared with semiotic analysis. He says the findings of the latter are “often far more abstruse than any instruction in the historical aspects of a biblical text.”<sup>766</sup>

In a further note about the Commission’s observation about the risk of the semiotic method’s failure “to draw out the message,” Fitzmyer goes further. He says:

“the message” is not something that exists in the text prior to a reading (like a rabbit that a magician pulls out of a hat); the sense emerges in the process of reading and is not really separate from the reader.

One wonders if Fitzmyer means here that a “message” in the gospel can only be picked up in the present process of someone reading it? Does he deny that the creator of any sort of project “builds in” levels of meaning? He continues,

Every text would really be a dialogue between an implied author and an implied reader, and the rules of meaning in that dialogue are governed by an intention.

The expressions of “implied author” and “implied reader” are actually used in descriptions of narrative criticism. They are listed by Mark Alan Powell as being basic principles for this method.<sup>767</sup> The Commission does not use these expressions in relation to semiotic analysis and mention of them only complicates what Fitzmyer is saying here. He concludes the note: “this is not a creation of the reader, but a meeting of two minds.”

It appears here an inference is made that the findings of semiotic analysis are really a creation of the reader. In this sense then, Fitzmyer would be saying semiotic analysis is not really a form of biblical interpretation at all.

Fitzmyer’s book claims to be a commentary on the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s description of “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church.” . But in this note he appears to contradict the status given by the Commission to the semiotic method of biblical interpretation. The Commission lists and describes semiotic analysis as a form of synchronic interpretation and it appears to put it on a par with narrative criticism and rhetorical analysis. But Fitzmyer does not appear to even accept it as a valid form of biblical interpretation.

A problem for “semioticians” as Fitzmyer calls them, is not just the judgment of the Commission that they too often remain at the level of a formal study of the content of texts,

failing to draw out the message “itself.” This is a valid type of criticism. However one could argue that the “semioticians” also face the scepticism and bias of biblical scholars such as himself. The opinions of a scholar like Fitzmyer would carry a lot of weight in the academic world. For instance in the Dalton and McCaughy library in Melbourne there are fifty books by Joseph Fitzmyer listed in the catalogue. Fitzmyer was also an editor of the Jerome Biblical Commentary. If he describes the findings of semiotic analysis as being “like a rabbit that a magician pulls out of a hat,” then the credibility of the semiotic method of biblical interpretation is not likely to be universally recognised by the academic world in general. Much the same would hold for its findings.

### **The Clues of a Water Circle in the Gospel of John**

A semiotician, as Fitzmyer calls someone using semiotic analysis, needs to demonstrate that contrary to his judgment, a “message” does in fact exist in the gospel text, prior to one’s reading of it. This leads one back to the question here as to how one would be able to uncover a level of meaning in the text that is beyond that of the narrative level.

### **Use of the Grammar of a text to find another Level of Meaning.**

The Commission says in following semiotic analysis, there is an awareness that the text consists of a network of relationships. It is out of this network that a meaning of the text is constructed. It states

Each text follows a ‘grammar,’ that is to say, a certain number of rules or structures; in the collection of sentences... various levels, each of which has its own distinct grammar.”<sup>768</sup>

One could surmise from this that if the gospel texts have a level of meaning that deal with a critique of Hellenism then this level of meaning would be following a “grammar” and this could extend from one gospel into another one. Where could one start in the detection of such a “grammar?” A reason why this question is important is that, as the Commission states finding the logico-semantic level of the gospel, is “the so-called deep level. It is also the most abstract.” It appears that Historical-Critical exegetes such as Fitzmyer would think that finding such a deep level is so difficult it is impossible. He infers this level “is not something that sits in the text prior to a reading” and the result is “not really separate from the reader.”

However the “grammar” as the Commission describes it that is being followed in developing a particular level of meaning in the gospel, can lead one to that particular level of meaning itself. Moreover the existence of the grammar is evidence that a certain level of meaning does in fact exist in the text prior to a reading of it. The grammar also exists independently of the reader because it is based on the ‘technical’ evidence of the text itself.

Historical critical exegetes pride themselves on a method that is deemed “scientific.”

However the existence of the level of meaning, as uncovered by the grammar that defines it, could be described as being more scientific and objective than the findings of historical critical exegesis. How so? Findings of the historical critical method rely on ‘scientific evidence’ which is constantly disputed by other scholars and is constantly contradicted by new evidence such as archaeology and/or language research. On the other hand the technical evidence of a particular grammar found in the texts remains there despite conflicts in differing perspectives.

Could one find evidence of a grammar that deals with a critique of Hellenism in the gospels and if so where?

### **Uncovering the “grammar” of a Water Circle in John’s Gospel**

In a section above it was noted that one of the difficulties in semiotic analysis is that, as the Commission says, a level of meaning in a gospel text would include **all** the discourse. This means that if an analyser picks up a certain level of meaning in part of a gospel text they could as it were become “stuck” there, unable to decipher the same level of meaning in the whole of the discourse. The likely result would be as the Commission and Fitzmyer criticise,

“

The great risk run by those who employ semiotic analysis is that of remaining at the level of a formal study of the content of texts, failing to draw out the message.<sup>769</sup>

Fitzmyer is arguably right when he says

For it can get lost in remote and complex language, often far more abstruse than any instruction in the historical aspects of a biblical text.<sup>770</sup>

In previous discussions about the construction of a water circle in John’s gospel it was noted that finding this circle did not depend on working out a “meaning” for the text, as compared with other chiasmic structures that were noted in writings such as those of Brendan Byrne.<sup>771</sup>

Rather uncovering the circle depended on the “technical” aspects of the text. In the language used to describe semiotic analysis by the Commission, it relied on finding out how the text was using a “figure” and in this case it was an image connected with water. The process of finding the circle also considered how the text was using this figure in “all” of the discourse, that is, cutting right across the gospel of John. Thus the “level of meaning” stretched from the immersion in water at the baptism of Jesus in the first chapter of the gospel to the immersion

in water of Peter when he jumped out of a boat to swim or wade towards Jesus in chapter twenty-one.

Some writers such as Shaia see chapter twenty-one as being added later on to this gospel.<sup>772</sup> But “uncovering the level of meaning” of the water circle does not entail a discussion about how a reference to water got there. Rather only the use by the text of a particular figure or element of meaning is being considered.

Uncovering the chiastic structure of a water circle in John does not mean this is **the** level on which there is a critique of Hellenism in the gospels. However, if it does interconnect into such a level one can wonder if the grammar used here is also used elsewhere to transform the level of discourse into the level of such a critique. Also, if the circle demonstrates the existence of such a grammar, then one can expect, as the Commission says, that it will extend right across the discourse.

A closer look at the circle itself shows up a number of aspects of an apparent grammar. Also, given that the gospel of John was written after the other gospels, if the grammar of this level had been further developed with each successive gospel, then these developed aspects may also be evident in the circle. A re-cap on the water circle is as follows:

- 1:26 Immersion in water (Initiation to mission)
- Ch 2 Jesus serves meal using water (to make wine)
- Ch 3 Nicodemus taught renew birth through water
- Ch 4 "Give me a drink" request to Samaritan woman
  - 4:11 "Pail" mentioned for collecting water
  - 5:2 Pool of Bethesda sign
  - 6:1 Sea of Tiberias (cf. Emperor & divinity)
  - 6:21 Walks on water - destination gained
  - 7:38 Rivers of living water (cf. claim divinity)
  - 9:8 Pool of Siloam sign
  - 13:5 Basin of water for washing feet
  - 19:28 "I thirst" plea on cross
  - 19:34 Water from side of Christ symbolises birth of Church
- 21:1 Jesus serves meal using water (to obtain fish)
- 21:7 Immersion in water (initiation to mission)

It should be noted again the Commission says that in semiotic analysis it is found a certain level of a text obtains its meaning from its interrelationship with other text arranged in a certain way in order to connect with the same level of meaning. For instance in an essay on the above circle a critic could ask (as Fitzmyer has done) even if this type of pattern was deliberately set up by the writer, what is the purpose of it? To repeat Fitzmyer. Does it actually "contribute to one's understanding of the Bible as the Word of God expressed in human language?"<sup>773</sup> If the water circle is on the same level as a possible critique of Hellenism it only obtains its significance in terms of other textual arrangements that bring out a meaning which is on the same level. In this case the circle would be connecting with other textual arrangements about a critique of Hellenism that had already been made in the three preceding gospels.

If one wants to find some hints as to how the circle might find its meaning in terms of other textual arrangements one can look at the centre, which, in terms of extended chiasm is likely to sum up the key meaning. Here, the text says in a literal translation of John 6:21, "They

wished therefore to take him into the boat, and immediately was the boat at the land to which they were going.”<sup>774</sup>

One can already see some interconnections with the scenario of a critique of Hellenism. This was briefly and logically proposed above. In this sentence there is a readiness to take the person of Jesus “on board.” The boat in a figurative way could represent the Church. There is a play on the element of meaning which is time, in terms of the word “immediately.” Then there is play on the element of meaning which is place/destination. The sentence says “the land to which they were going.” In the proposed scenario of a critique of Hellenism as sketched out above there is a consideration of Judaism followed by a consideration of Hellenism. It has already been noted that Judaism is likely to have been considered in terms of its focus on law. In terms of law, especially natural law and the design of human made laws, law as such is either observed or set up in terms of cause and effect. This in turn happens within time. The above sentence which is the centre of a water circle in John also calls to mind those ancient temples or monuments like Stonehenge in England. The design of these places of worship capture the rays of the sun as it rises at a specific time and shines towards a specific place.

Judaism is largely based on cause and effect (cf. natural and human law). Hellenism relies on a sense of direction.

In terms of relevance to the meaning of the gospel (and God’s Word), the sentence shows that for the church the success of immediately arriving at a destination hinges on whether or not the disciples there want to take Jesus on board. Added to this summing up, the scene has a miraculous dimension. The story in earlier verses has said the disciples rowed three or four

miles before they saw Jesus walking on the lake (v. 19). They were therefore this distance from where they had started out. The Sea of Galilee is about eight miles wide and this estimate would put them in the middle of it. The miraculous dimension of the story, telling that somebody had walked for three or four miles into the middle of the sea is extended into the sudden arrival of the boat at the other side. There appears to be a time/place warp taking place here.

It seems the disciples, the writer and the reader are not sure what exactly happened here. But the “cryptic” part of the story is one of the established criteria for Scriptural revelation.<sup>775</sup> At the same time there is a simplicity about the water circle. It does not require some sort of exclusive insight to match the references to water here. It might be commented that the “I thirst” statement of Jesus on the cross is not, strictly speaking, a match with Jesus asking the Samaritan woman for a drink. But in both cases he is telling someone he is thirsty as readers in general would realise.

In John’s water circle a further number of “grammar” elements for a level of meaning about a critique of Hellenism can be identified. Firstly there is a reliance on images relating to water, with the exception of a sea or river. . The images can be briefly stated, even in the one word. The inter-relationship structure at this level is not to be found in the meaning of the text but rather in the technical way the text uses “figures” which in this case are images connected with water. It is when the grammar is followed that relationships in meaning can then be considered. There is also a reliance on the text as it is, rather than an exploration about its historical background or the stages of its formation or its part in the overall narrative. The Commission states this kind of textual exploration is characteristic of semiotic analysis.

Another point here, as already noted, is that a veiled reference to Judaism in the centre of John's water circle comes before a veiled reference to Hellenism. Hence there is a continued play on the general sequence in wording of law and order as also time and place. The two words in both cases remain both connected but distinct from each other. Already it is suggested that if there is to be a critique of Hellenism in the gospels then integral to this critique will be both a contrast and comparison drawn up between Judaic society as such and Hellenistic society as such. Indeed the two differing societies are likely to be placed side by side. One of the ways this could be done is for the gospel of Matthew to focus on a critique of Judaism and the gospel of Luke to focus on a critique of Luke. Also, again, just as Judaism and Hellenism have been compared with law and order (in Mark as discussed above) so one could expect the two to be connected with time and place. In a critique of Judaism in Matthew, a primary element of meaning used by the text is likely to be time. In a critique of Hellenism in Luke, a primary element of meaning used by the text is likely to be place. A biblical student for instance would already be aware that scholarship recognises how the gospel of Luke is based on a journey.<sup>776</sup>

Already, by an examination of grammar apparently being used in the water circle of John, one is equipped to search out a critique of Hellenism in the same level of meaning in the gospels themselves.

## **b. Semiotic Analysis and the Gospels**

### **(i) The Gospel of Mark and “Recognise Law and Order”**

#### **Section A**

A likely structure for a critique of Hellenism in the Gospel of Mark has already been set out in the above pages. Also, an extended chiasmic structure for places listed in the first section of the gospel has already been set out. Further it has been noted how the text has apparently used this list of places to function as paragraph headings. As Jesus moves from place to place in this section of the gospel, one is reminded of the heroes of Homer, as depicted on the funerary urns of the eight century BC.<sup>777</sup> One can also recognise how each paragraph, especially as endorsed by its pair, establishes the authority of Jesus and this culminates in a central paragraph in which he forgives the sins of a paralytic. This is in response to his critics who have said, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mark 2:7).

At the same time, it is also claimed above this section of the gospel sets forward a definition of authority as such because it shows what authority itself is based upon. Space here does not permit a full demonstration of all the paragraphs and the interconnections that prove this point and only a brief summary can be provided. However to follow is a reference to a particular paragraph pair and a summary of their key points. Below each pair is a point about authority that both paragraphs have in common.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| 1:9-12 Home (at Nazareth then Bethany)<br>My beloved one.. with thee I am well pleased | 3:20-35 Home... whoever does the will of my<br>father is my brother/sister/mother |
| <i>Authority is based on God's will</i>  |   |
| 1:12-13 Into the desert – bad and good spirits   | 3:13-19 Into the mountains – good and bad<br>disciples                            |
| <i>Authority extends to good and bad</i>   |   |
| 1:14-20 Gallilee/Sea preaching cf. disciples   | 3:7-12 Sea preaching cf. disciples  |
| <i>Authority requires support</i>  |   |
| 1:21-28 Capernaum/Synagogue Versus unclean<br>spirits (silenced)                       | 3:1-6 Synagogue Versus Pharisees (silenced)                                       |
| <i>Authority challenges corruptions</i>  |   |
| 1:29-34 House of Simon – priority to people  | 2:26-28 (House of God – priority to people)                                       |
| <i>Authority gives priority to people</i>  |   |
| 1:35-37 Lonely place – need to pray  | 2:23-25 Grain fields – need to eat  |
| <i>Authority respects human needs</i>  |   |
| 1:38 came out (or home) new order  | 2:15-22 came (out) – new order, cf. Wine skins                                    |
| <i>Authority can innovate new order</i>  |   |
| 1:39-45 Galilee/seaside “people to him from every<br>quarter”                          | 2:13-14 Beside sea “all the crowds gathered about<br>him”                         |
| <i>Authority reaches to crowds</i>   |   |
| 2:1-12 Capernaum/Home “authority to forgive sin.”                                      |   |
| <i>Authority is ready to forgive</i>   |   |

A couple more points about the grammar being used by the text can be made and/or repeated here. All of the discourse in this part of the text is included in these paragraphs. Further, as the Commission has intimated, a semiotic analysis of the text here can teach principal elements of the text in simple terms. The Commission has said:

Semiotic analysis can give Christians a taste for studying the biblical text and discovering certain of its dimensions, without their first having to acquire a great deal of instruction in historical matters, relating to the production of the text and its socio-cultural world.<sup>778</sup>

In fact there is a universality in the concepts set out above that provide a definition of authority. The level of meaning therefore can be understood by people who do not have a grounding in Biblical studies. Moreover there is a flexibility in the concepts so these can be re-worded in terms of the situation of the people being taught.

Fitzmyer has said

That semiotics discovers something about the underlying structure of language or certain dimensions of discourse... may be conceded. That it contributes to one's understanding of the Bible as the Word of God... is another matter.<sup>779</sup>

But the Commission states “obedient to a precise linguistic mechanic of operation, semiotics contributes to our understanding of the Bible as the word of God.”

## **The Gospel of Mark and What is Needed for a Sense of Direction**

### **Section B**

Again there are limits here as to the extent that a level of meaning that deals with Hellenism in a Section B of Mark can be repeated. It is dealt with in full in the book by Michelle Nailon in *Five Pivotal Texts: Reality Search*.<sup>780</sup> This Section B is also set out in full on the web site [www.realityworkshops.org](http://www.realityworkshops.org). However a closer look at this is required to show the continuity of grammar being used by the text here. Such continuity underlines the purpose of the writer in setting out a comparison between Judaism and Hellenism. Thus, not only is there a relationship of “comparison” being set out as with Section A. There is also a relationship of “difference.” Thus there is comparison and contrast between the two systems of society that are to be found in Judaism and Hellenism. Again, as with Section A, the

paragraphs include the whole of the discourse. Also again, the section is based upon a list of places that pull together a collection of sentences and each of these can stand alone as paragraphs. The paragraphs are also arranged in a chiasmic pattern. Points of commonality can be found both between each paragraph pair and with other paragraphs in the section.

Consider Section B as follows:

Paragraph “hooks” are the location/destination of Jesus

|                     |  |   |   |
|---------------------|--|---|---|
| 4:1-9               | <b>Beside sea</b><br>He who has ears let him hear                    | 8:27-91:1                                 | <b>Caesaria (at seaside)</b><br>Some here will see Kingdom of God       |
| (To have direction) |  | <i>Be receptive</i>                       |   |
| 4:10-4:34           | <b>Alone</b><br>Those who see and not perceive                       | 8:22-26                                   | <b>Outside</b> Bethsaida - retreat<br>See men as trees walking          |
| (To have direction) |  | <i>Perceive as well as see</i>            |   |
| 4:35-41             | <b>Other side</b><br>Calms sea – who is this?                        | 8:13-21                                   | <b>Other side</b><br>Bread – not yet realise                            |
| (To have direction) |  | <i>Note the dignity of the person</i>     |   |
| 5:1-20              | <b>Other side of sea</b><br>Gerasines swine drowned, who saw it told | 8:10-13                                   | <b>Dalmanutha (near sea)</b><br>Pharisees seeking sign                  |
| (To have direction) |  | <i>Realise the big picture is complex</i> |   |
| 5:21-34             | <b>Other side of sea</b><br>If I touch even his garments             | 7:31-8:9                                  | <b>Sea of Galilee Decapolis</b><br>Spitting he touched the tongue       |
| (To have direction) |  | <i>Value personal contact</i>             |   |
| 5:35-45             | <b>House of ruler</b><br>Jairus' daughter rises                      | 7:24-30                                   | <b>District of Tyre, in a house</b><br>Syriophoenician's daughter cured |
| (To have direction) |  | <i>Believe in own power</i>               |   |
| 6:1-30              | <b>Own country</b><br>Herod kills Baptist                            | 7:17-23                                   | <b>House, away from crowd</b><br>What come out defiles                  |
| (To have direction) |  | <i>Avoid bad actions</i>                  |   |
| 6:31-45             | <b>Desert place</b><br>Multiplies loaves                             | 6:54-7:16                                 | <b>Out of Ship</b><br>Eating with unclean hands                         |
| (To have direction) |  | <i>Don't overstress formality</i>         |   |
| 6:46                | <b>Mountain to pray</b>  | 6:53                                      | <b>Gennasaret and anchored</b>  |
| (To have direction) |  | <i>Stay anchored</i>                      |   |
| 6:47-52             | <b>Midst of sea –</b><br>hard hearts, not understand                 |   |   |
| (To have direction) |  | <i>Avoid Hard heartedness</i>             |   |

As with the water circle in John, there are “common sense” points of comparison between the paired paragraphs. Another point about the possibility of the writer designing an extended chiasmic structure here is that missionaries, would find paired paragraphs easier to memorise as they moved from place to place. In the writings of Homer, this sort of structure was constantly used and committed to memory in this way. Homer’s association with this sort of structure was echoed by Cicero who wrote, “I’ll be like Homer and put the cart before the horse.”<sup>781</sup>

As with the mid point of Section A in Mark, the mid point in the chiasmic structure of Section B performs a “summing up” function in terms of describing what is needed for society that is based on Order. There is a special significance in the mid point here as well because it matches the mid point of John’s water circle which describes the walking of Jesus over the sea. A different sort of point (about hard-heartedness) is drawn out here by the writer. But, as the Commission says in its description of semiotic analysis,

the analysis of the text consists then in establishing the network of relationships (of opposition, confirmation, etc.), between the various elements; out of this the meaning of the text is constructed.<sup>782</sup>

If Mark’s text used the walking on water incident as being crucial to his description of a basis for Hellenism, then it is likely that John was using the same incident in relation to a critique of Hellenism as well.

## **Mark and the “Adult Child”**

### **Section C**

Sections A and B (as analysed here) take a reader up to Chapter Nine of Mark’s gospel and the story of the transfiguration. When working out the chiasmic structure for Section B, one could assume that at the transfiguration there may be a shift in the gospel’s structure. A

closer look at the text between Mark 9:2-10:31 which is up to the beginning of the passion narrative, shows that there does not appear to be an “inner” structure to this section at all. Rather it appears to be a straightforward account of Jesus being transfigured as. Jesus and the three disciples then come down from the mountain and find a father distraught because his son is possessed by a devil. After the son is cured the group go to Capernaum where Jesus takes a child and says “Whoever receives such children in my name, receives me”...Jesus warns against giving scandal to “little ones”, he warns against marriage break up and again praises the child “For of such is the kingdom of God.” (Mark 10:14). It is in this context he challenges a man who had observed the commandments from his youth and he says “Go sell what things you have and give them to the poor. ...and come follow me.” (Mark 10:21).

There is the recurring theme here about ‘the child.’ One can ask whether this gospel section fits in a level of meaning that presents a critique of Hellenism. In previous paragraphs here it was suggested that logically, if Mark has worked out a basis for Judaic society (that is, what authority is based on) and a basis for Hellenistic society (that is, what a sense of direction is based on) then a question would arise as to what sort of person could operate effectively in both societies. Here, in 9”2-10:31 it is the child.. Is there a connection between this theme and the man challenged to follow Jesus? If the man sells what he has and gives to the poor he is no longer in a position to set up his own household. If he commits his life to a following of Jesus, then he also in a sense gives up his own self-determination. Arguably he is in a similar situation of dependence as that of a child and in that sense he becomes an “adult-child.” An adult child is of course is a contradiction in terms. This leads to a question as to whether or not anyone at all, apart from Jesus, can completely fit the description.

In terms of the text developing a level of meaning that provides a critique of Hellenism, it appears here that yet another “rule of grammar” is being developed. That is, when the text is dealing with the subject of “the child,” it is not presenting a case (or critique) for either Judaism or Hellenism. Therefore the text does not appear to be setting up structures that provides a “critique” of either society.

## **Mark – The Power of One is Based Upon Coping**

### **Section D**

Reference has already been made to a chiasmic structure in the last part of Mark’s gospel that is based upon the text’s use of elements of meaning such as response to Jesus. The

Commission says semiotic analysis involves:

- (a) the fixing and classification of ... elements of meaning ....
- (b) the tracking of each figure to determine how the text uses it....
- (c) inquiry into the thematic value of the figures....<sup>783</sup>

In view of this sort of analysis Mark 10:31-16:8 can be set out as follows:

## What the Power of One Deals With

|                                      |                                  |                                   |                                    |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 10:32-34                             | Ones following – afraid          | 16:8                              | Women flee – afraid                |
| <i>(The Power of One deals with)</i> |                                  | <i>Fear</i>                       |                                    |
| 10:35-45                             | James and John re place on right | 16:1-7                            | Angel sitting place on right       |
| <i>(The Power of One deals with)</i> |                                  | <i>Place Getting</i>              |                                    |
| 10:46-47                             | Bartimaeus asks to see           | 15:42-47                          | Joseph asks for body               |
| <i>(The Power of One deals with)</i> |                                  | <i>Asking</i>                     |                                    |
| 10:48-52                             | Crowd deny “Son of David” title  | 15:22-41                          | Crowd deny “King of Jews” title    |
| <i>(The Power of One deals with)</i> |                                  | <i>Crowd Pressure</i>             |                                    |
| 11:1-8                               | Disciples - colt to carry        | 15:21                             | Simon Cyrene – carries cross       |
| <i>(The Power of One deals with)</i> |                                  | <i>Accepting help</i>             |                                    |
| 11:9-26                              | “Hosanna- Kingdom – David”       | 15:16-20                          | “Hail King of Jews”                |
| <i>(The Power of One deals with)</i> |                                  | <i>Praise and mockery</i>         |                                    |
| 11:27-12:12                          | Chief priest.. whose authority?  | 15:1-15                           | Pilate.. Are you King of the Jews? |
| <i>(The Power of One deals with)</i> |                                  | <i>Belief in self</i>             |                                    |
| 12:13-17                             | Pharisees etc role of Caesar     | 14:53-72                          | Chief priests assume Caesar’s role |
| <i>(The Power of One deals with)</i> |                                  | <i>Civic authority</i>            |                                    |
| 12:18-27                             | Sadducees cf. Dying              | 14:51-52                          | Young man cf. Shroud               |
| <i>(The Power of One deals with)</i> |                                  | <i>Regeneration</i>               |                                    |
| 12:28-34                             | Scribe re. love and              | 14:44-46                          | One betrays and                    |
| 12:35-44                             | Crowd heard gladly               | 14:47-50                          | All fled                           |
| <i>(The Power of One deals with)</i> |                                  | <i>Individual/Corporate guilt</i> |                                    |
| 13:1-2                               | Crowd favours                    | 14:42-43                          | Crowd condemns                     |
| <i>(The Power of One deals with)</i> |                                  | <i>Crowd fickleness</i>           |                                    |
| 13:3-37                              | Peter James John ask             | 14:12-41                          | Peter James John grieve            |
| <i>(The Power of One deals with)</i> |                                  | <i>Finding support</i>            |                                    |
| 14:1-2                               | Priests plotting                 | 14:10-11                          | Judas sought to betray             |
| <i>(The Power of One deals with)</i> |                                  | <i>Plots and criticism</i>        |                                    |
|                                      | 14:3-9                           | Woman anoints – to be remembered  |                                    |
| <i>(The Power of One deals with)</i> |                                  | <i>Taking initiative</i>          |                                    |

It should be noted here that this overview does not show how many more parallels can be found between the paragraph pairs. For instance in the twelfth pair the word “watch” occurs five times in the first paragraph and three times in the second one. But the word does not occur before or after these.

The Commission talks of:

The principle of the structure of meaning: There is no meaning given except in and through relationship.... the analysis of the text consists then in establishing the network of relationships... between the various elements; out of this the meaning of the text is constructed.<sup>784</sup>

A critic of the above extended chiasm might say that some of the links are “weak”, for example between the colt carrying Jesus and Simon of Cyrene carrying the cross of Jesus. However, when links are extended over thirteen paragraph pairs as is the case here an apparent “weakness” in one link is reinforced by the more obvious links to be found elsewhere, for example the “Hosanna to the son of David” and the “Hail King of the Jews” in the fifth paragraph pair. Size of the paragraphs can also match, for instance the two paragraphs in the twelfth pair are quite long while the two in the thirteenth pair are quite short. The interconnections are also reinforced what appears to be an exception to the grammar rule. The tenth pair appears to be broken into two sub-divisions which puts these into a parallel formation rather than a chiasmic one. But a close reading shows how a scribe who repeats the commandment of “Love your neighbour as yourself.” (Mark 12:28-34) is juxtaposed with the kiss of Judas (Mark 14:44-46). Then to follow this the crowd who hears Jesus gladly (12:35-44) is juxtaposed with the followers who all fled (14:47-50). In this case the behaviour of both the individual and the crowd are tied together. There is even a crossing over of the background imagery here.. In the first combined paragraph we are reminded of

Jesus sitting in the Temple watching the crowd for instance the widow with the mite. In the second combined paragraph Jesus says to the crowd coming to arrest him “I was with you daily in the temple teaching...” He recognised the now hostile faces.

In previous pages it was pointed out that neither the method of historical critical exegesis nor narrative criticism could provide an explanation for the chiasm that is described above. At the same time both methods of interpretation, as also socio-rhetorical criticism, have underlined the importance of response to the on-going presence of Jesus. If semiotic analysis is used here however one can see more clearly how the writer is trying to persuade a reader that the success of any type of society involves the way the individual responds to each situation (whether major or minor) as it arises. In each of the above situations someone is responding to the presence of Jesus.

It might be argued that at this stage an analyst could be move into the realm of sociology of religion. The universality of social definitions that have been given would apply to all types of society and not just those of the first century CE.

## **(ii) Matthew and “Internalise the Law”**

When one moves into the gospel of Matthew, there are already a range of things one can anticipate about it. If a level of meaning that has been developed in the water circle in John and the gospel of Mark is further developed in Matthew, one can expect that Judaism could be described within this level as being distinct from Hellenism. Matthew is generally recognised as being based on Judaism, for instance William Richard Stegner says it was written by Jewish Christians.<sup>785</sup> If Matthew were to focus in particular on a critique of Judaism there

would be a heavy emphasis on authority and Jewish law as well as the pre-eminence of Jesus in relation to law. There would be a theme of discipleship given the connection between the Jewish people and their law covenant with God as in the Old Testament. With emphasis on Jewish law there would also be a heavy reliance on quotations and traditions and the “mind-set” of the Old Testament.

At the same time one could expect that the general structure of Matthew (in terms of this level of meaning) would have parallels with Luke (if there is a similar level of meaning in Luke’s gospel.) Such a parallel structure would not only demonstrate similarities between Judaism and Hellenism, for instance an interest in the cultivation of social values. It would also present both social systems side by side so that differences between the two world views could be seen more clearly. If semiotic analysis is used it should be possible to see a network of relationships between them.

Already in Mark there has been a presentation of “law” and “order” as being both different but (arguably) complementary. If one reconsiders the central verse of the water circle there is also a time/place interrelationship cf. “immediately they reached the place where they were going.” (John 6:19)

If one were to consider how Matthew may have broken up his gospel into sections like Mark, an obvious first section would be the infant narrative in 1:1-4:25. A swift look at the text shows that here and in the gospel as a whole there is not the same type of emphasis on place as in much of Mark. However, one could reason that just as Mark has a section break before the start of the passion narrative, so it is likely that Matthew may have a put some kind of break here as well. In fact just before Matthew’s passion narrative which starts in Matthew

26:1, there is the statement in 26:1a “And it came to pass when ended the Jesus all the words these,” (a literal translation)<sup>786</sup> If there are a number of sections at the level of meaning of a critique of Judaism, an investigator can ask whether or not Matthew winds off each such section with this same sort of statement? In fact, going backwards in the gospel at about five pages of an A4 copy of the gospel at a time, one finds this statement being repeated in a similar way. There is an added significance here in that this statement contains a statement about time. The repetition of the statement suggests that the writer is making a deliberate break in the text here. This observation about Matthew’s text is not new to scholarship. In fact some people see a chiasmic structure when they recognise as central to this statement the statement of “When Jesus finished these parables” (Mtt 13:53). Also there appears to be an oscillation between discourse and missionary activity. However this established way of viewing the gospel structure is not being teased out here. Rather the statement of “When Jesus finished these parables” is considered as outside the structure being considered. This relies only on the statement “When Jesus had finished these words.”

Another indication of a break being made in the text is is that just before the repeated statement, there appears to be a “growth” statement about the disciples themselves and their relationship with Jesus. This sort of statement is included in the statements listed below. So far, as with other elements of “grammar” that dealing with this “critique” level of meaning, the text divisions are technical. That is they can be found without actually studying the meaning of the text itself. As, the Commission has said of semiotics:

Each text forms a unit of meaning complete in itself, the analysis considers the entire text but only the text; it does not look to any date “external” to the text such as the author, the audience, any events it describes or what might have been its process of composition.<sup>787</sup>

Apparent sections in Matthew’s text and “growth” statements are as follows:

|           |            |                   |   |
|-----------|------------|-------------------|---|
| Section A | 1:1-4:25   | Infancy narrative | “disciples of him” (5:1)<br>“Opening his mouth he taught them saying” (Mtt 5:2)                       |
| Section B | 5:1-7:28   |                   | “like a prudent man”.. (7:24)<br>“And it came to pass when finished Jesus words these” (Mtt 7:28)     |
| Section C | 8:1-10:42  |                   | “little ones” (10:42)<br>“And it came to pass when ended the Jesus giving charge,” (Mtt 11:1)         |
| Section D | 11:2-18:35 |                   | “brother of him” (18:35)<br>“And it came to pass when ended the Jesus words these.” (Mtt 19:1)        |
| Section E | 19:3-25:46 |                   | “the least ones” (25:45)<br>“And it came to pass when ended the Jesus all the words these,”(Mtt 26:1) |
| Section F | 26:1-28:20 |                   | “makers of disciples” (28:19) <sup>788</sup>  |

While the Commission says semiotics “considers the entire text but only the text” it also adds the following statement:

The semiotic approach must be open to history: first of all to the history of those who play a part in the texts; then to that of the authors and readers.<sup>789</sup>

One should be able therefore to expect that the findings of semiotics fit with the general opinions of Biblical scholars, despite the differences in interpretation methods. In fact they should help to explain the level of meaning that semiotic analysis uncovers.

### **Section A in Matthew**

To provide some details about this: The infancy narrative in Matthew reflects the background of Jewish Christians as twentieth century biblical scholars such as Bultmann have pointed out. Joseph, the legal father of Jesus, traces his ancestry back to King David. In accord with Jewish tradition this means Jesus could trace his ancestry back in the same way.<sup>790</sup> In Matthew’s narrative there is also a heavy reliance on Isaiah 7:14 in which it is promised a virgin who will conceive.”<sup>791</sup> Other methods of interpretation draw out the significance of

this. Or again, William Stegner discusses the general opinion that the three temptations of Jesus in the wilderness fits with the wilderness theme in writings of the Qumran Community and also the early history of Israel.<sup>792</sup> Stegner asks the questions, “Why were Israel’s numerous failures in the wilderness summarized by three temptations? And why these three?” He recalls two Targums that list three wilderness sins as the cause of God’s anger. He recalls a Midrash in which Moses compares Israel to a wife who continually provokes her husband (which could relate to one of the wilderness temptations of Israel) He says in the “rebuke tradition” two of the three temptations are cited, that is idolatry and the grumbling about manna.

In previous pages here, there has been several discussions about the three key social commandments of “thou shalt not kill,” “thou shalt not commit adultery,” and “thou shalt not steal.” There has also been discussion of the common but varied descriptions of these commandments such as “power, sex and money.” It seems in the repetition of the three “pitfalls” of the human condition, there is some parallel with Israel’s temptations in the wilderness and the three temptations of Jesus. Worship of the devil could be a shortcut to power, satisfaction of material needs compares with money, presumption about family social supports has an association with sex.

Studies along these lines should be able to show other methods of interpretation endorse the findings of semiotic analysis. For instance, they help to show echoes of commonality in the three temptations in Matthew (4:1-11) and the challenge of Jesus in Mark “Go sell what you own and give to the poor and come follow me.” (Mark 10:17-22). Another point of commonality here, as shown by the semiotic analysis, is that an “adult child” section in the gospel does **not** have the underlying level of a critique about either Judaism or Hellenism.

Perhaps an “unspoken” theme of this level of meaning, reflected in the “grammar” is that really, there is no such thing as an “adult child” and there is nobody (apart from Jesus) who can smoothly move from one type of society into the other. People are all ranged on one side or the other. This fits with another theme being highlighted by the grammar which is an emphasis on forgiveness. Such a quality is be crucial if people with two world views could ever co-exist in the one hybrid society.

### **Section B in Matthew**

Section B of Matthew, in terms of a semiotic analysis, reflects Shaia’s findings of Matthew’s gospel. He describes the gospel as “Climbing the Mountain.” Apart from the initial image of the mountain (cf. the sermon on the mount) , it appears there are subdivisions within the section that are based on verbs (cf. time). These are in the form of exhortations. Consider:

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| “Blessed are”   | (5:1-12),  |
| “You are the salt of the earth .. ”                     | (5:13-16), |
| “You heard.. but I say”                                 | (5:17-48), |
| “Heed righteousness but not with a view to be seen ...” | (6:1-18),  |
| “Do not lay up treasure ...”                            | (6:19-34), |
| “Judge not”..   | (7:1-12),  |
| “Enter ye.. the narrow gate”                            | (7:13-23). |

A summary statement about each of these paragraphs could be that a reader or listener is challenged to go beyond the avoidance of sin, or being average, being literal, or a tendency towards show, treasure, judging and/or the easy.” A person is in fact being challenged to go beyond a legalistic interpretation of the law. In doing they are like a prudent person (who built his house upon rock).

### **Section C in Matthew**

In the third section of the gospel, **Section C**, it appears that each paragraph begins with a present participle such as “coming,” “entering,” “seeing,” “approaching,” “embarking,” “passing,” “going,” “calling,” etc. These all relate to a following of Jesus. There is one exception here, but it appears to prove the rule. The exception is that there is no present participle in the paragraph that tells of someone who wants to delay involvement with Jesus and wait to bury his father (8:21-22).. Inevitably in this collection of present participles there are repetitions of words such as “coming” and “approaching” etc. But they all still add up to twenty-one sentence collections or paragraphs that describe attributes needed to internalise law. A paraphrase of these include: “ask for help”, “recognise authority,” “be independent of the crowd,” “be ready to move,” “trust” “prioritise” etc. Of special significance here is the middle attribute which is to forgive. One can recall here the incident in the middle of Mark’s first extended chiasmic structure when a paralysed man is let down through a roof. This story (9:1-8) is also about the paralytic and about forgiveness. Such a connection links the same level of meaning being developed Matthew with the level already developed in the gospel of Mark. Added to the significance is the suggestion that Matthew was aware of Mark’s extended chiasm and wanted to repeat the emphasis, even though his reliance on a time element (present participles) did not allow for the patterning of his points. Matthew also appears to place emphasis on his final point which is quite long. This involves the sending out of the twelve disciples as missionaries (10:1-42) It also puts a highlight on a possible weakness in the social system of Judaism, that is, narrowness. If this is the case one could expect the same sort of theme to be repeated by Matthew.

By this stage in the gospel a couple of more points of “grammar” appear to be added to the level of meaning that offers a critique of Hellenism. It is evident that Judaism is to be “critiqued” as a different system from Hellenism. It is also evident that echoes of the points

of emphasis to be found at this level in Mark from which Matthew took much of his text, are likely to be repeated and developed further.

### **Section D in Matthew**

Section D in the gospel of Matthew appears to be organised so as to follow a statement of time. Not all these statements appear in the text. But it appears they are implied. For instance, in the first paragraph starting with 11:2 there is the statement which says literally “But John hearing in the prison the works of Christ sending through the disciples of him.” This comfortably translates into “When John heard about the works of Christ.” At the end of this first paragraph of a Section D, in 11:19 the statement of Jesus is made “And wisdom is justified by her works.” A reader could wonder why the statement is placed here. In terms of semiotic analysis of a particular level of meaning, it fits neatly. Section D in Matthew (at this level) extends from 11:2 to 18:35. It includes 31 points making it a long section. But all the points fit in with “the works of wisdom.” Consider some of the points made with Wisdom leading them. Wisdom proves, excuses, relieves, prophesies, justifies, judges, predicts, relates according to God’s will, bears fruit etc. In compiling the sentence collections there is one sentence, at 13:53 that appears to contradict the collection. It says “It came to pass when Jesus ended these parables he went from there.” This sentence does not fit with the one that divides off each gospel section, that is, “When Jesus ended these words,” But it may indeed fit with the “grammar” being used to develop a critique of Judaism. It has already been noted that in considering the ‘grammar’ of semiotic analysis here, one works out the technicalities with which the text uses elements of meaning and then one tries to work out the significance of these. In this case it appears there is a “technicality” evident with this statement but with no evident explanation.

The expression could fit with the thirteenth statement in the section so this reads “it came to pass when Jesus ended these parables he went from there. And coming into his native town “(13:53-57) This paragraph is about the lack of faith in the home town of Jesus.

In such case one move on and consider the middle paragraph in Section D of Matthew. This is number sixteen (14:25-46). This in fact records the same event of Jesus walking on the sea as the middle story in Section B of Mark, that is, Jesus walking on the sea (Mark 6:47-52). It also coincides with the middle of John’s water circle which is also about walking on the sea. One might think it a coincidence that the incident about the paralytic in Matthew’s Section C matches the mid point of Mark’s Section A. But the re-occurrence here of the walking on the sea incident, in Matthew (14:23-36), out of thirty-one “paragraphs” does look deliberate. It is also interesting to note that the last point made in this Section D is also about forgiveness, which by now should make one realise this is a key theme, taken from Mark and repeated in Matthew. Again, one wonders if the writer is telling us that in the Judaic system, forgiveness is a point of weakness and so he wants to stress it.

Overall it appears Matthew’s Section D is dominated by the figure of Wisdom and one could interpret this as being part of the challenge to a reader to develop an environment of internalised law. While reading this section one is constantly reminded here of the household environment of the “perfect wife’ in Proverbs 31:10-31.

### **Section E in Matthew**

Section E in Matthew can again be sub-divided into paragraphs that start with a statement of time. However rather than developing a list of virtues here, it appears Matthew is setting out

a list of failings, failings to be found in Judaism in particular. In this section there is also a re-occurrence of “Jesus says,” as though it is himself that is providing the warnings. One could suspect Matthew is “hiding behind” the criticisms as if to say it is not himself or his community saying this but it was Jesus who said it. Matthew (aka Jesus) warns against things like, selfish use of the law, the belittling of children, many possessions, making demands, condemnation, ambition, controls, vestiges of greatness, money from religion, false appearances etc. Again the last point here appears to be of special significance for a Judaic, law-based system of society. This final paragraph warns against “lack of accountability” (cf. “I was hungry and you did not give me to eat.” 25:42). As regards the present day Church and civil society one is reminded here of the lack of accountability in the matter of child abuse. One also gets the sense that Matthew is not just warning about the deficiencies of Judaism but also the Church itself as it has inherited characteristics of a Jewish social system.

### **Section F in Matthew**

Section F in Matthew can again be subdivided in terms of time statements. Yet there is also a heavy emphasis here on the word “disciple(s).” This word occurs about once in each paragraph as well as compared with the “Jesus said” phrase in the Section that precedes it. Each paragraph appears to trace some aspect of discipleship and the momentum of the text here appears to build to a crescendo when “they all fled” (26:56). Then the story of the passion forms the one long paragraph. Obviously there needs to be time statements in this paragraph as well. But they do not appear to form sub-divisions. On the other hand at the end of passion narrative, paragraphs formed by time statements and around the disciples re-emerge. But there now appears to be a theme of about the re-emergence of the disciples themselves and the assumption of responsibility on their part, starting with the “disciple” from Arimathaea who asks for the body of Jesus. It is interesting to note that this person who

appears to come from outside the circle of those who followed Jesus is given the status of “disciple.” In the paragraphs to follow the passion one also has the sense of the readiness on the part of Jesus to forgive them. There is no mention of their failings but rather soon given responsibility. They are told of the resurrection, told to go to Galilee, are maligned by the guards and then told to go out and make disciples of others (28:16-20).

Matthew has many other structures in his gospel besides those pointed out above, for instance some paragraphs such as 13:36-52 appear to have a subdivision in which the second part clarifies what was said before it, in this case the story about the weeds deliberately planted in a field. Such sub-divisions usually come back to a growth in understanding on the part of the disciples.

Semiotic analysis of Matthew shows how he builds a sense of time and development into his gospel. Commentators using other methods of interpretation might point out how only Matthew has Jesus saying in the Eucharist account “for the forgiveness of sins.” (26:28). But semiotic interpretation provides a three dimensional drama that shows how “forgiveness” pervades the whole gospel.

### (iii) **Luke and “Give a Sense of Direction”**

Even before one comes to the Gospel of Luke-Acts, one can expect that if the same level of meaning is to be developed across this text, as has been uncovered by semiotic analysis in Mark and Matthew, there will be parallels with the critique of Judaism as set out in Matthew. The parallels will be set up so as to illustrate points of difference as well as similarity.

In Matthew there is an emphasis on time as well as law. One can expect in Luke there would be an emphasis on place as well as order. At the same time one could expect that points about a society based on order by Mark would be picked up and developed here. Whereas it appears that Mark saw Judaism as being based on law and therefore authority (cf. Mark's Section A 1:9-3:35), he saw the need for a society that is based on Order to have a sense of direction (cf. Mark's Section B 4:1-9:1).

It is generally accepted that Luke's gospel is based on a journey.<sup>793</sup> Thus already one can see in this gospel an emphasis on a sense of direction, that is, Jerusalem and from there (in Acts) towards Rome. Rome was the centre of the known world, yet was also a base for moving ever outward.

As a follow-on from Mark and Matthew one could expect that if the gospel of Luke were to present a critique of Hellenism there would be parallels in his structure (at a certain level of meaning) with the gospel of Matthew. In fact, like Matthew's gospel, Luke begins with an infancy narrative that forms a Section A. There are differences here that reflect differences between the two social systems. In Matthew Jesus is presented as a child of Judaism and a

fulfilment of its prophecies (cf. “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son” Isaiah 7:14). In Matthew the genealogy of Jesus begins with Abraham the father of Judaism. In Luke however Jesus is presented as a child of the world with a genealogy that goes back to Adam and God (3:38). As with Matthew’s Section A, the text in the infancy narrative in Luke does not appear to be using elements of meaning to provide a critique of either Judaism or Hellenism. Rather in accord with grammar that treats “child” sections as being “different” the text flows in a straight forward way.

### **Section A in Luke**

Section A in Luke, like its counterpart in Matthew, does have a section on the Temptations of Jesus. Again Jesus shows his focus goes beyond the satisfactions of material things (bread), power (cf. worship of the devil) and over-reliance on social bonding (cf God’s angels). The third point is emphasised when Jesus goes to his home town of Nazareth and challenges them to look beyond their boundaries. He is thrown out of the town and he moves on (Luke 4;16-30).

### **Section B in Luke**

In a possible Section B in Luke, one could wonder if, at a level of a critique of Hellenism, Luke’s text would be using the “figure” of place to set out a structure for this. Starting with a reference to Capernaum where people are astounded at the authority of Jesus (4:31-32), there are thirteen groups of sentences that can stand alone as paragraphs. The sentence collections can be formed around the locations of Jesus and his disciples. In accord with the grammar previously noted, there is one place reference per group of sentences. In this collection of sentence groups one could ask if Luke is forming a chiasmic structure out of the places as did Mark in in Sections A and B. However Luke is setting up a critique of Hellenism, which, according to Mark is in need of a sense of direction, a chiasmic structure

here would not fit at all. It would appear that this sort of society is “going around in circles.” Instead of an extended inverted circle (chiasm) Luke sets out the first thirteen sentence collections. Then he begins again with the town of Capernaum and lists the next thirteen places so that they run parallel to the first thirteen. This sort of “grammar” thus endorses a sense of direction that traverses the gospel. In setting out the text in this way, the grammar also endorses a positive view of this type of society and its potential. Thus while Mark was giving definitions of the bases of Law and Order, Luke is teasing out the qualities and probably the weaknesses of a society based on Order, that is, Hellenism.

Luke’s parallel lines of places stretch from Luke 4:31-9:51, and this includes s about a third of his gospel. The places and their paragraphs can be set out (some with a brief reference to content), as follows,

|         |   |         |   |
|---------|---|---------|---|
| 4:31-32 | <b>Capernaum</b> (with authority)                   | 7:1-10  | <b>Capernaum</b> (Centurion authority)      |
| 4:33-37 | Synagogue/city                                      | 7:11-35 | <b>City</b> Nain                            |
| 4:38-41 | <b>House of Simon</b> Peter                         | 7:36-50 | <b>House Simon</b> the Pharisee             |
| 4:42-44 | Deserts/ <b>cities</b> /synagogues<br>(proclaiming) | 8:1-21  | <b>Cities</b> and villages<br>(proclaiming) |
| 5:1-11  | One of the <b>boats</b>                             | 8:22-25 | <b>Boat</b>                                 |
| 5:12-15 | Outside <b>city</b> (re leper)                      | 8:26-39 | Gerasenes/city (re demonised man)           |
| 5:16    | Withdrawing into the <b>deserts</b>                 | 8:40-48 | <b>Journey</b>                              |
| 5:17-26 | <b>House</b>  | 8:49-56 | <b>House</b>                                |
| 5:27-39 | <b>House</b> of Levi (disciple)                     | 9:1-10  | Villages/ <b>houses</b> (disciples)         |
| 6:1-5   | Through <b>cornfield</b> (eating)                   | 9:10-17 | <b>Outside</b> Bethsaida (feeds 5,000)      |
| 6:6-11  | <b>Synagogue</b> (what they might do)               | 9:18-27 | <b>Alone</b> (things to suffer)             |
| 6:12-16 | <b>Into mountains</b> to pray, picks out 12         | 9:28-36 | <b>Mountain</b> to pray – picks out 3       |
| 6:17-49 | <b>Down mountain</b> – foundations                  | 9:37-51 | <b>Down mountain</b> – heed sayings         |

The paragraphs have far more in common, in fact, than can be set out above. To illustrate such parallels the first three paragraph pairs and some of their points in common are reproduced here.

|                |   |                |  |
|----------------|---|----------------|--|
| <b>4:31-32</b> | <b>Capernaum</b>  | <b>7:1-10</b>  | <b>Capernaum</b>   |
|                | Teaching<br>astounded<br>authority in his word  |                | authority in his word<br>marvelled<br>authority in his word  |
| <b>4:33-37</b> | <b>Synagogue/city</b>   | <b>7:11-35</b> | <b>City Nain</b>   |
|                | possessed man<br>come out<br>man made whole again<br>astonishment came on all<br>authority and power<br>rumour into neighbourhood |                | dead man<br>get up<br>man made whole again<br>fear took over all<br>a great prophet<br>word into neighbourhood               |
| <b>4:38-41</b> | <b>House of Simon Peter</b>   | <b>7:36-50</b> | <b>House of Simon the Pharisee</b>   |
|                | woman with fever<br>standing over her<br>rebuked fever<br>woman serves<br>cures diseases<br>claim about identity                  |                | woman with remorse<br>standing behind him<br>rebuked Pharisee<br>woman serves<br>cures sinfulness<br>question about identity |

It should also be noted the above points of comparison do not come from paragraphs as a whole but rather in the sequence of the sentences.

Each paragraph pair to be found in Luke's Section B appears to clarify the sorts of attributes or qualities that are needed within an ordered community. It is interesting to note that the first of these is about authority. Given that authority is the basic quality to be found in Judaism it appears the list is also pointing out the need for a recognition of authority in an ordered community as well. One could go further here and speculate on whether or not the point is being made that a Hellenistic society is ultimately based on the moral law. One can also speculate on how a time-place dialectic and law-order dialectic is being set up in the gospels as a whole, in order to put two distinct distinct facets of reality into a dialectic tension with

each other. Further qualities for an Ordered Community and as described in Luke's Section B are listed in a re-presentation of the above table:

|  |  |         |  |
|--|--|---------|--|
| 4:31-32                                | <b>Capernaum</b> (with authority)                  | 7:1-10  | <b>Capernaum</b> (Centurion authority)                     |
| <i>Authority</i>                       |  |         |  |
| 4:33-37                                | Synagogue/ <b>city</b> expelling demons            | 7:11-35 | <b>City</b> Nain widow & son                               |
| <i>Compassionate Power</i>             |  |         |  |
| 4:38-41                                | <b>House of Simon</b> Peter<br>Cures mother-in-law | 7:36-50 | <b>House Simon</b> the Pharisee<br>Forgives ointment woman |
| <i>Bodily Care</i>                     |  |         |  |
| 4:42-44                                | Deserts/ <b>cities</b> /synagogues<br>proclaiming  | 8:1-21  | <b>Cities</b> and villages<br>proclaiming                  |
| <i>Proclamation</i>                    |  |         |  |
| 5:1-11                                 | One of the <b>boats</b> big catch                  | 8:22-25 | <b>Boat</b> stills storm                                   |
| <i>Power in Nature</i>                 |  |         |  |
| 5:12-15                                | Outside <b>city</b> (re leper)                     | 8:26-39 | Gerasenes/ <b>city</b> (re demonised man)                  |
| <i>Opposes disease and bad spirits</i> |  |         |  |
| 5:16                                   | Withdrawing into the <b>deserts</b><br>Prayer      | 8:40-48 | <b>Journey</b><br>Reflecting woman                         |
| <i>Prayer</i>                          |  |         |  |
| 5:17-26                                | <b>House</b> Forgives Paralytic                    | 8:49-56 | <b>House</b> raises Jairus' daughter                       |
| <i>Forgiveness</i>                     |  |         |  |
| 5:27-39                                | <b>House</b> of Levi (disciple)                    | 9:1-10  | Villages/ <b>houses</b> (disciples)                        |
| <i>Proclamation with Others</i>        |  |         |  |
| 6:1-5                                  | Through <b>cornfield</b> (eating)                  | 9:10-17 | <b>Outside</b> Bethsaida (feeds 5,000)                     |
| <i>Nurturing</i>                       |  |         |  |
| 6:6-11                                 | <b>Synagogue</b> (what they might do)              | 9:18-27 | <b>Alone</b> (things to suffer)                            |
| <i>Union with God</i>                  |  |         |  |
| 6:12-16                                | <b>Into mountains</b> to pray, picks out 12        | 9:28-36 | <b>Mountain</b> to pray – picks out 3                      |
| <i>Invitation</i>                      |  |         |  |
| 6:17-49                                | <b>Down mountain</b> – foundations                 | 9:37-51 | <b>Down mountain</b> – heed sayings                        |
| <i>Solid foundation</i>                |  |         |  |

This list as described, is an interpretation of the paragraphs, and, as with all interpretation, especially in terms of abstract concepts, one could expect some differentiation over time, between cultures, individual interpreters etc. The material is being presented at the level of concepts and there is a flexibility of interpretation allowed, as with the concept-culture of Hellenism as such.

In the gospel of Matthew it was found that the text appears to use the sentence of “when Jesus had finished these words” as a “divider” between his different sections at the level of meaning of a critique of Judaism and Hellenism. One can ask if this “grammatical rule” is also being used in the gospel of Luke. That is, does Luke also divide off his statements with a specific sentence. Given that the overall emphasis is about a journey to Jerusalem, one could not be surprised that Luke divides off his major sections with a statement about going to Jerusalem?

We find at the end of Section A in 4:30 Jesus leaves his home town of Nazareth. Then at the end of a proposed Section B there is the statement “he set his face to go to Jerusalem” (9:51). At the end of further possible sections we also find similar statements. In 13:22 there is the statement “as he made his way to Jerusalem. In 17:11 there is the statement “as he continued to go up to Jerusalem.” In 18:31 there is the statement “Behold we are going up to Jerusalem.” In 21:37 he is in Jerusalem. Then, at the end of the gospel, in 24:52 the disciples returned to Jerusalem.” The re-occurrence of this statement through the gospels suggests the statement is being used by the text to break up its divisions. But there remains questions about what elements of meaning the text may use to divide up these Sections into collections of sentences.

In fact after Luke's long Section B, there appears to be a shift from the use of places by the text to a use of actors. The Pontifical Biblical Commission mentions actors as a possible element of meaning used in this way. It says:

The level of discourse. The analysis here consists of three operations: (a) the fixing and classification of figures, that is to say, the elements of meaning in a text (actors, times, places), (b) the tracking of the course of each figure in the text in order to determine just how the text uses each one (c) inquiry into the thematic value of the figures. This last operation consists in discerning "in the name of what" (=what value) the figures follow such a path in the text determined in this way.<sup>794</sup>

As with the use of times to determine sentence collections (or paragraphs), paragraphs based upon a person being addressed by Jesus, do not readily sort into a pattern. However if we take the paragraphs that are so formed up to the "to Jerusalem" reference in 13:22, then we find the summary points of each paragraph appear to support a list of ways in which a society can improve on democracy. Surely such a list would fit under the category of a "critique of Hellenism." People addressed in these paragraphs include "James and John," "one," "to another," "seventy-two," a certain lawyer," "Martha," "a certain disciple," "the crowds," "woman in crowd," etc. At the same time, summary points include the following: "stay peaceful," "be detached," "look to the future," "keep moving," "reach out," "make love basic," "priorities reflection," "ask," "use spiritual power," "listen," "seek wisdom," "prioritise integrity," etc. In fact, if there is a process of differentiation between Judaism and Hellenism taking place in the development of these concepts, and Judaism is being distinguished from Hellenism by its sense of time, then one can assume that, in contrast, Hellenism has a tendency to dwell on the "now." Thus Judaism may be characterised by its reliance on time and law. Hellenism is characterised by its sense of place and order. One can therefore expect that suggestions for improvement in the latter type of society would be about building into this type of society a better sense of time. There would also be an attempt to build in a

sense of moral values that are stronger than those worked out by rationalism. There would be a challenge to materialism and aggression. Thus further points are as follows “accept outsiders,” “prioritise truthful speech,” “direction not treasure,” “focus on direction,” “internalise honesty,” “discern,” “nurture nature,” “dignify woman,” “loosen bonds,” “start from the small.”

It may be asked whether or not Luke would be bothered in building up a list of concepts that might be applied to a Hellenistic community. However, historically speaking, the gospel of Luke was written after letters such as Paul’s letters to the Corinthians. In this Paul elaborated on a list of qualities to be found in love, “Love is patient and kind: it is never jealous; lover is never boastful etc. (1 Cor. 13:4-8) There are also negative attributes that are listed as in 2 Timothy 3:1-5, cf.

“People will be self-centred and grasping; boastful, arrogant and rude; disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, irreligious; heartless and unappeasable; they will be slanderers, profligates, savages and enemies of everything that is good; etc.”

Scholars such as Carl R. Holladay suggest 2 Timothy was written between 70 and 90 CE, after the death of Paul.<sup>795</sup> However the list demonstrates how writers at the time of Luke were categorising virtues and vices, or, to put it another way, strengths and weaknesses. The writer of Luke’s gospel would therefore be familiar with such lists which were already common in Hellenistic literature such as Plato and Aristotle who were the founders of “virtue ethics.”<sup>796</sup> In the case of Luke’s gospel, rather than reeling off a list of virtues, he builds the concepts of them into the text. Paul has apparently tried to do this in his letters already. For example rather than insisting on “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” in his letter to the Corinthians, he tries to inculcate a respect for one’s body, “Your body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit.” (1 Cor. 6:19). In presenting virtues in terms of concepts the virtues are given the flexibility of being interpreted changing historical and cultural circumstances.

### Section D in Luke

In Luke's next section which one could describe as Section D, the text continues to use actors as the "hooks" for each collection of sentences. However a more negative approach is being taken here which appear to reflect the negative aspects of a Hellenistic society. People such as "someone," "Pharisees," "Lawyers and Pharisees," etc. are addressed. At the same time there is an opposition expressed towards a so-called "saved" leader, rejection, hierarchy, a payment base, elitism, ideological foundation, exclusion of difference, over-absorption in a system, material obsession, inflexibility etc. The list just given accounts for the first ten paragraphs out of a total of twenty. After paragraph ten (half way through) there is a reminder to forgive and a reminder that they are going to Jerusalem (17:11). It is interesting to note now the echo of "forgive" continues to be repeated at this level of meaning.

The list of negatives, arguably about Hellenism, continues and lists such as "ingratitude," "alienation of dignity," "predictability," "over-formalised justice," "self-grandisement" "exclusion of children," "over-focus on material security," "total self-reliance," "this life only," and finally "closure to the new." As a sweeping generalisation it could be suggested that the whole section warns against an over-stress on idealism.

One of the ways in which the excesses being listed here actually line up against a society that has been notorious for its over-stress on idealism would be to consider the list in relation to Nazi Germany. We could start with the opposition expressed here against a "saved leader," namely Hitler himself. Then there are the practices of rejection, hierarchy, elitism, exclusion of difference, over-absorption into the system, material obsession, inflexibility, alienation of dignity, self-grandisement, total self-reliance, this life only etc. All these fit with a

description of Nazi Germany in the 1940's. Another interesting point to wonder about here is why should Nazi Germany with its apparent over-stress on idealism, be so opposed to Judaism? One idea is that Jews controlled the banking system and Germans thought they were stealing their money. There is likely to be some truth in that. But at the same time one wonders. Did a government that over-stressed idealism recognise Judaism in itself as presenting a radical difference and threat to its own position.

According to the above analysis of Luke, his Section C with his positive list of attributes and the first and second halves of his Section D with his more negative ones are structured in terms of parties being addressed. Because the text is using the same element of meaning to further develop a level of meaning there is a commonality between both sections. This creates a type of continuum line that stretches from the beginning of Section C to the end of Section D. One is reminded by this that even positive aspects of this type of society have within them the seeds of causing problems when over-stressed. One is also reminded that a democracy that appears to be operating well can be pulled into a state of totalitarianism, sometimes quite quickly. There is also a reminder here that capitalism (cf. democracy) and totalitarianism (cf. communism) are in many ways like two sides of the same coin.

Below, two pages are reproduced from Nailon's *Five Pivotal Texts*, to demonstrate the shift from improving on Democracy (Section C) into the avoidance of Over-stress on Idealism (Section D).

## Section C

## IMPROVE ON DEMOCRACY

9:52-13:22

Paragraph "hooks" are Parties Addressed

| Summary Point                    | Ref      | Parties           | Key Quote                                 | V4 Page    | V5 <sup>797</sup> Page |
|----------------------------------|----------|-------------------|---|------------|------------------------|
| 1. . Stay peaceful               | 9:52-55  | James & John      | "He rebuked them (re fire to destroy)     | <u>142</u> | <u>123</u>             |
| 2. . Be detached                 | 9:56-58  | said one          | "Foxes have holes"                        | <u>142</u> | <u>123</u>             |
| 3. . Look to future              | 9:59-60  | to another        | Leave the dead to bury the dead           | <u>142</u> | <u>123</u>             |
| 4. . Keep moving                 | 9:61-62  | another           | "looking behind not fit for kingdom"      | <u>143</u> | <u>124</u>             |
| 5. . Reach out                   | 10:1-24  | seventy-two       | "Two by two . . . sandals"                | <u>143</u> | <u>124</u>             |
| 6. . Make love basic             | 10:25-37 | certain lawyer    | "Love Lord the God of Thee"               | <u>144</u> | <u>125</u>             |
| 7. . Prioritise reflection       | 10:38-42 | Martha            | "(Mary has) better place                  | <u>144</u> | <u>125</u>             |
| 8. . Ask                         | 11:1-13  | certain disciple  | "Our Father"                              | <u>145</u> | <u>126</u>             |
| 9. . Use spiritual power         | 11:14-26 | the crowds        | "The one not being with me against me is" | <u>145</u> | <u>126</u>             |
| 10. . Listen                     | 11:27-28 | woman in crowd    | "Blessed the womb"                        | <u>146</u> | <u>127</u>             |
| 11. . Seek wisdom                | 11:29-36 | this generation   | "Queen of the South"                      | <u>146</u> | <u>127</u>             |
| 12. . Prioritise integrity       | 11:37-44 | Pharisee          | "Outside clean, inside robbery"           | <u>147</u> | <u>127</u>             |
| 13. . Accept outsiders           | 11:45-54 | Lawyer            | "build tombs of prophets"                 | <u>147</u> | <u>128</u>             |
| 14. . Prioritise truthful speech | 12:1-12  | Disciples         | "what said in private proclaimed"         | <u>148</u> | <u>128</u>             |
| 15. . Direction not treasure     | 12:13-31 | someone           | "re inheritance"                          | <u>149</u> | <u>129</u>             |
| 16. . Focus on direction         | 12:32-40 | Little flock      | "seek kingdom & things added"             | <u>149</u> | <u>129</u>             |
| 17. . Internalise honesty        | 12:41-53 | Peter             | "blessed slave . . faithful steward"      | <u>150</u> | <u>130</u>             |
| 18. . Discern                    | 12:54-59 | Crowds            | "face of earth you discern, this no"      | <u>150</u> | <u>130</u>             |
| 19. . Nurture nature             | 13:1-9   | some              | "Leave fig tree until I dig around it"    | <u>151</u> | <u>131</u>             |
| 20. . Dignify woman              | 13:10-13 | bent woman        | "woman was bending double"                | <u>151</u> | <u>131</u>             |
| 21. . Loosen bonds               | 13:14-17 | Synagogue ruler   | "Loosen bonds"                            | <u>151</u> | <u>131</u>             |
| 22. . Start from small           | 13:18-22 | throughout cities | "mustard seed"                            | <u>152</u> | <u>132</u>             |

"to Jerusalem" 13:22

## Section D

## AVOID OVER-STRESS ON IDEALISM

**Luke 13:24 - 18:31**  
**Paragraph "hooks" are Parties Addressed**

| Opposition to Totalitarianism    | Ref      | Parties addressed   | Key Quote                               | V4 Page    | V5 Page    |
|----------------------------------|----------|---------------------|---|------------|------------|
| 1. . V . "Saved" Leader          | 13:23-30 | Someone             | "there are first ones who will be last" | <u>154</u> | <u>134</u> |
| 2. . V . Rejection               | 13:31-35 | Pharisees           | "c/f mother hen re Jerusalem"           | <u>154</u> | <u>134</u> |
| 3. . V . Hierarchy               | 14:1-11  | Lawyers & Pharisees | "chief places at table"                 | <u>155</u> | <u>135</u> |
| 4. . V . Payment base            | 14:12-14 | one inviting        | "invite poor persons"                   | <u>155</u> | <u>135</u> |
| 5. . V . Elitism                 | 14:15-24 | one reclining       | "certain man a great supper"            | <u>156</u> | <u>136</u> |
| 6. . V . Ideological foundations | 14:25-35 | Crowds, many        | "lay foundation of house"               | <u>156</u> | <u>136</u> |
| 7. . V . exclusion of difference | 15:1-32  | Pharisees & scribes | "hundred sheep . . prodigal son"        | <u>157</u> | <u>137</u> |
| 8. . V . over-absorbing system   | 16:1-13  | Disciples           | "render account, shrewd steward"        | <u>158</u> | <u>138</u> |
| 9. . V . material obsession      | 16:14-31 | Pharisees           | "rich man and Lazarus"                  | <u>159</u> | <u>138</u> |
| 10. . V . inflexibility          | 17:1-10  | Disciples           | "you should forgive"                    | <u>160</u> | <u>139</u> |

**Forgive****To Jerusalem (17:11)**

|   |          |               |   |            |            |
|---|----------|---------------|---|------------|------------|
| 11. . V . ingratitude                             | 17:11-19 | Ten lepers    | "but where the nine?"                     | <u>160</u> | <u>139</u> |
| 12. . V . alienation of dignity                   | 17:20-21 | Pharisees     | "Kingdom of God within you"               | <u>161</u> | <u>139</u> |
| 13. . V . predictability                          | 17:22-37 | Disciples     | "2 men on a couch, one taken"             | <u>161</u> | <u>140</u> |
| 14. . V . over-formalised justice                 | 18:1-8   | them          | "pray . . widow & judge"                  | <u>162</u> | <u>140</u> |
| 15. . V . self-grandisement                       | 18:9-14  | Some          | "2 men went up to temple to pray"         | <u>162</u> | <u>141</u> |
| 16. . V . exclusion of children                   | 18:15-17 | Disciples     | "allow the children to me"                | <u>162</u> | <u>141</u> |
| 17. . V . over-focus<br>. . . . material security | 18:18-25 | Certain ruler | "all things sell & follow me"             | <u>163</u> | <u>141</u> |
| 18. . V . total self-reliance                     | 18:26-27 | ones hearing  | "things impossible . . possible with God" | <u>163</u> | <u>142</u> |
| 19. . V . this life only                          | 18:28-30 | Peter         | 22 "left house etc - receives life....."  | <u>164</u> | <u>142</u> |
| 20. . V . closure to the new                      | 18:31-33 | Twelve        | "Jerusalem, Son of men rise again"        | <u>164</u> | <u>142</u> |

**"Behold we are going up to Jerusalem" 18:31**

A fuller note of explanation about the V.4 and V. 5 abbreviations being used in these pages is probably in order. Version Five of the "Reality Search" analysis is based on the literal translation by Marshall in the *Revised Standard Version* (1985). Originally this was the major analysis and it was considered that the literal translation here was more credible

because the words were closer to the original Greek.<sup>798</sup> It was more likely to demonstrate the text's use of particular words such as place and persons addressed etc. so these could function as "paragraph hooks". Moreover permission had been obtained from the British Treasury to publish this literal translation on the internet. However, those who did look at this text complained they "could not make head or tail of it." Some thought the text was written in old English. A paraphrase of the literal text was therefore undertaken. This paraphrase appears in *Five Pivotal Texts, Reality Search Version Five*. A reason why the literal translation pages were also made available on the internet was to enable those looking at the analysis to immediately check with the literal translation for proof that the paraphrase was not being "twisted" to fit the analysis.

### **Section E in Luke**

A possible **Section E** in Luke is interesting in its own right. It is not reliant on a party being addressed by Jesus. Rather each paragraph features a "kingdom figure" who appears to stand up for their rights. The paragraphs also include story figures. There is the blind man of Jericho, Zacharias the tax collector, a "certain man" who was an investor, the owner of a vineyard, They also include Jesus himself as a figure of action, as a king (entering Jerusalem), a teacher, a house master (expelling the temple sellers) etc. We could recall here that in the gospel of Matthew the "type" of person whose fortunes are being followed by the writer here is the disciple. By contrast, in Luke it appears he deliberately puts forward and lauds the Kingdom figure who stands up for themselves and their rights. Even the widow donating a mite in this Section E, is asserting her rights – her right to be part of the community. Asserting some sort of a voice is also part of the action here. By the end of this Section E in Luke 21:37 Jesus was, during the day, in the Jerusalem temple.

### **Section F in Luke**

A last section in Luke, Section F, appears to be more loosely organised. It appears to be dominated by the place where Jesus is located. By this stage in the gospel one could expect that Luke would be gradually pulling together threads of the two social systems, of Judaism and Hellenism. This is because in the final part of the gospel there is to be a process of Jesus handing on his mission to his disciples. The disciples in turn, in the book of Acts, would be carrying a new “hybrid” social system into the world. In the tension portrayed in this section of the gospels two key failings of the two social systems appear to come into evidence. In Judaism there is the narrowness of its leadership who refuse to accept Jesus. Then there is the “loud voice,” that pushes Pilate, a Hellenistic ruler, into giving way and allowing Jesus to be put to death.

Perhaps if an interpretation were to be put on this it could be observed that the faults of both social systems, especially narrowness and the “loud voice” can be found in the same people when they are bad enough! In any case the two failure points about narrowness and the “loud voice,” are to be carried, via the grammar of the text, into the book of Acts.

### **Summary of Findings So Far**

The major aim of these pages has been to seek out and/or demonstrate whether or not the Gospels contain a critique of Hellenism. First there was an effort made to uncover such a critique using the dominant methods of historical critical exegesis and the more recently popular method of narrative criticism. Although these methods showed up an interest in the gospels in an outreach to Gentiles, it was not evident that an actual critique of the gentile approach, that is, Hellenism in the Greco-Roman world, was being assessed. Then socio-rhetorical interpretation was considered and it showed that Hellenistic models and indeed

universalistic models were being used by the gospels. This could be seen in Mark's use of the tradition of Socrates and Mark's use of the Greek's *chreia* form of rhetoric. There was also a universalistic approach called "quadratos" operating in the use of the gospels in the early liturgical practice. However while these investigations showed an appreciation of Hellenistic traditions and its models of communication, they did not actually show up a critique of Hellenism.

There was then a discussion of semiotic analysis as explained by the Pontifical Biblical Commission (1993).<sup>799</sup> The Commission's definition was then used to demonstrate that there is in fact a level of meaning that runs in a logical fashion through the gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke. This level of meaning does indeed appear to offer a critique of Hellenism. A major way in which this critique is presented is to compare and contrast it with Judaism. Therefore a critique of Judaism is also provided.

Possibly one could say the aim of this thesis has been achieved by the demonstration that a critique of Hellenism does exist in the synoptic gospels. However it was also noted in above pages that one of the key, operative words used by the Commission's definition is that "all" of the discourse is covered by a specific level of meaning. One could interpret this as meaning it would only apply to the one gospel, or to the synoptic gospels. . However given that it appears to run in a logical order through Mark, Matthew and Luke, one can only wonder if the line of logic here continues to run through the Acts of the Apostles and finally through the gospel of John.

There is another consideration here. It is one thing to demonstrate a certain level of meaning exists in the gospels. But it is another thing to clarify why the writers went to the trouble of

putting it there in the first place. One of the problems with demonstrating the credibility of structural analysis is the need to show its purpose. Unless a critic can see the function for example of an extended chiasm, they are more likely to pick up on what they see as a weakness in the proposed structure. For instance if the incident of Simon of Cyrene carrying the cross of Jesus (15:21) is matched up with a colt carrying Jesus (11:1-8) the match up loses some of its credibility when considered in isolation from its context in a whole group of pairs. In semiotic analysis a level of meaning stretches across the whole of the discourse. Meaning is found through relationships which in turn are to be found in the whole, especially the whole of a text section (cf. Section D Mark 10:31-16:8). Any one part of the level of meaning needs to be considered in terms of the whole.

This means if the critique is extended into the book of Acts and the Gospel of John, the significance of the level of meaning in the Synoptic gospels is only understood when considered in relation to the same level of meaning extended into Acts and John.

Moreover even when one demonstrates a line of logic that runs through the texts in providing a critique of two social systems the above question remains as to why the writers put it there in the first place. A fairly obvious answer would be to strengthen the Christian community as a whole as it moves into the future. The double critique would be a means of defining the identity of the emerging church. Further to this it would be to continue on what Paul had already done to some extent. There was an intention to both critique and incorporate Hellenistic ideas, culture and indeed its whole world view into Christianity itself. Moreover a reason for the critique would be to bring the two types of societies of Judaism and Hellenism, into some sort of dialectic relationship with each other. Perhaps it is in Acts and John that a solution to “co-existence” is put forward.

While the following points may have already been raised in the general context of scepticism about the merits of semiotic analysis they are being repeated here. When the Commission talks of the logico-semantic level of semiotic analysis it says “This is the so-called deep level. It is also the most abstract.”<sup>800</sup> One of the ways in which the investigation in these pages has attempted to simplify the ‘abstract’ and ‘deep level’ talked about here has been to observe the “grammar” that the Commission explains is being used in or rather by the text. The observation of such grammar has been used as a “stepping-stone” to the logico-semantic level that the Commission talks about. This observation works as follows. When a “grammar” appears to show the outlining of paragraphs with something in common, in either a pair of paragraphs and/or with other paragraphs in a whole section, then the resulting point(s) in common is described in terms of an abstract concept, such as forgiveness or authority etc. Thus the concepts were arrived at via the grammar rather than some sort of deep-seated discernment. Thus the process of naming the concepts has been based on a generalised use of common sense. For instance in one of Luke’s paragraph pairs Jesus is in a house and he forgives the sins of a paralytic. He then tells him to get up (cf. Lk 5:17-26). The paragraph pair in Luke also shows Jesus in a house and he tells the daughter of Jairus to get up (cf. Lk 8:49-56). A generalised point in common with both paragraphs, suggests these are about forgiveness bringing new life. Forgiveness bringing new life, would (hopefully) be a quality to be found in an Ordered Community (cf. Luke’s Section B 4:31-9:51). This appears to arise from a comparison between the two texts. It is not, as Fitzmyer may suggest, a creation of the reader. His image about pulling a rabbit out of a hat certainly implies this.<sup>801</sup>

#### (iv) Acts and “Launch the New Society”

It is commonly noted among readers of Luke that there is a “passing on” of the mission of Jesus in the Gospel to his disciples in the Acts of the Apostles. In the Acts of the Apostles, after the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 the apostles themselves largely drop out of view. From here the text focuses on the mission of Paul and his journey to Rome. Shaia notes that the first couple of chapters in Luke’s gospel have strong parallels to the opening chapters in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>802</sup> It could be noted here that the first chapters of Luke, that is, the infancy narratives, follow a similar structure to the opening chapters of Matthew. In fact neither the opening chapters of Matthew or Luke appear to have the level of meaning developed elsewhere that provides a critique of Judaism and Hellenism. It has already been suggested in a discussion of Matthew that a reason for this lack of an “extra” level is that his infancy narrative is a “child” section of the Gospel. The same holds with the infancy narrative of Luke which is also a “child” section. This is the case even if the first presents Jesus as a child of Judaism and the second presents him as a child of the world (including the Greco-Roman Empire). It appears that according to the grammar the text is using the “child” does not come under a category of either Judaism or Hellenism but rather “the child” can pass between the two.

#### Section A in Acts

At the start of Acts there is an upsurge of activity by the Holy Spirit. The new Church is in its first fervour and the text appears to treat it as being in a “child” situation. Shaia for instance says there are close parallels here with the opening chapters of Luke. On the other hand it has been noted in previous pages that points in the opening chapters of the Acts are found

sequentially mentioned, going backwards into the end of Luke's gospel. This chiasmic structure has the effect of knitting the two books together. Whereas an investigation using Historical Critical Exegesis or Narrative criticism may not regard this chiasmic sort of structure as being significant, it does take on extra meaning when considered in terms of the new church continuing the mission of Jesus and taking it into the wider world. The chiasmic structure also takes on extra meaning when one thinks in terms of a 'hybrid' society (consisting of Judaism and Hellenism) that appears to be pulled together at the end of Luke now being taken into the Greco-Roman Empire.

If one were to consider how the outreach of this movement might be put into a logical structure by the writer one could expect that the first flowering of the new movement (Section A) might be followed by the recognition by Church leaders of authority beyond the boundaries of Judaism (Section B). One could expect to see opposition to such outreach (Section C). Sections B and C as analysed in Nailon's *Five Pivotal Texts* is reproduced below:

**Section B****RECOGNISE AUTHENTICITY OF OUTSIDERS**

Acts 6:8 - 11:29

**Paragraph "hooks" are places where New Converts are Located**

| <b>Beyond religious law system</b>            | <b>Ref</b> | <b>Location</b>   | <b>disciple and 'outsider'</b> | <b>V4<br/>Page</b> | <b>V5<br/>Page</b> |
|---|------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1. . Power is in Person (not a system)        | 6:8-8:3    | Outside Jerusalem | Stephen & Saul                 | <u>196</u>         | <u>169</u>         |
| 2. . Separation of spiritual favour and money | 8:4-25     | Samaria           | Philip & Samaritans            | <u>199</u>         | <u>172</u>         |
| 3. . Inter-racial                             | 8:26-40    | Ethiopia          | Philip & Ethiopian             | <u>199</u>         | <u>172</u>         |
| 4. . Power outside of priests                 | 9:1-31     | Damascus          | Ananias & Saul                 | <u>201</u>         | <u>174</u>         |
| 5. . Movement promoted                        | 9:32-34    | Lyydda            | Peter & Aeneas                 | <u>202</u>         | <u>175</u>         |
| 6. . Oriented towards re-birth                | 9:35-43    | Joppa             | Peter and Dorcas               | <u>202</u>         | <u>175</u>         |
| 7. . Inter-cultural                           | 10:1-48    | Caesarea          | Peter & Cornelius              | <u>203</u>         | <u>176</u>         |
| 8. . Readiness to adjust                      | 11:1-1-18  | Jerusalem         | Peter & ones of circumcision   | <u>204</u>         | <u>177</u>         |
| 9. . Mutual financial support                 | 11:19-29   | Antioch           | Barnabas, Paul & 'Christians'  | <u>205</u>         | <u>178</u>         |

**Christians at Antioch sending alms to elders in Judea . .c/f 11:25****Section C****COPE WITH OPPOSITION TO OUT REACH**

Acts 12:1 - 15:29

**Paragraph "hooks" are those who Oppose New Conversions**

| <b>Coping Response</b>       | <b>Reference</b> | <b>Opposer</b>        | <b>Likely Motive</b>      | <b>V.4<br/>Page</b> | <b>V.5<br/>Page</b> |
|------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1. . Power through Prayer    | 12:1-23          | Herod                 | Politics                  | <u>207</u>          | <u>180</u>          |
| 2. . Power through truth     | 12:24-13:12      | Sorcerer              | Monetary                  | <u>208</u>          | <u>181</u>          |
| 3. . Material Independence   | 13:13-52         | The Jews              | Influence amongst wealthy | <u>209</u>          | <u>182</u>          |
| 4. . Perception to escape    | 14:1-6           | The disobeying Jews   | Crowd influence           | <u>210</u>          | <u>183</u>          |
| 5. . Stress on humanness     | 14:7-18          | Crowds                | Adulation                 | <u>211</u>          | <u>183</u>          |
| 6. . Brotherly Support       | 14:19-28         | Iconium Jews          | Desire for leadership     | <u>211</u>          | <u>184</u>          |
| 7. . Salvation through grace | 15:1-29          | Some of Pharisee sect | Sect control              | <u>213</u>          | <u>184</u>          |

**Apostles and elder brothers sending reduced rules throughout Antioch, Syria and Cilicia 15:29**

Possibly one would realise the Church would heed multiple voices and develop an understanding of the “living” word (Section D). They would recognise authority in the range of figures (Section E). Finally the challenge of the new Church would be taken to the social centre of the known world (Section F). Whereas one might figure out this would be a likely structure for the Acts, it is “easier” to simply follow the story and see how it connects with a logical progression.

If Section A goes from Acts 1:1 to 6:7, we then find nine paragraphs (Section B) that show a disciple and an “outsider”, for example Stephen and Soul, Philip and Samaritans, Philip and an Ethiopian, Ananias and Saul, Peter and Aeneas, Peter and Dorcas etc. In each case there is an insight provided into the nature of this new movement. For instance Stephen shows power is in the person (and not a system). We are told spiritual favour is separate from money, We see the new movement is inter-racial and power resides outside of priestly permits, We see movement as such is being promoted. It is oriented towards re-birth (cf. Dorcas) and the inter-cultural. There is a also readiness to adjust (cf. no circumcision) and there is mutual financial support. One may possibly work out that all these qualities would be hallmarks of the new movement. However, here the text simply says so.

One could expect there would inevitably be opposition to the new movement and this is what the text describes between 12:1-15:29 (forming a Section C). We see such opposition coming in terms of politics (cf. Herod), money (cf. a sorcerer), influence amongst the wealthy (cf. the Jews), influence with crowds cf. the disobeying Jews. We also see crises caused by crowd adulation, desire for leadership and desire for sect control. It is at the end of this section that the findings of the Jerusalem Council, about abstaining from blood (cruelty as

such?), fornication (and not just adultery) and strangling (unjust business practices?) are announced.

### **Section D in Acts**

Perhaps one of the interesting sections that the text throw up and which one may not expect is its emphasis on Heeding Multiple Voices and the Living Word (Acts 15:30-20:31). In these chapters there is a huge range of words being used to describe multiple voices. There is also a development of the sense of a “living word” In fact as the Section develops the “Word” takes on a life of its own. It appears in this Section D that “the Word” is being used by the text as an element of meaning with its own “thematic value”. It thus becomes the focus of its own paragraph which then provides a step in defining what “the Word” actually is. However there is one paragraph here (19:21-41), where the “word” is not being used as a paragraph hook. Rather it appears the paragraph centres around the words of “the way,” instead. One could ask why this paragraph should deviate from the others. Does it mean that a “grammar rule” about the one word being used as a paragraph hook throughout a section is not the case here? Perhaps the grammar is not using the phrase ‘the word’ as a focal point for each at all. On the other hand a closer look at the subject matter of the paragraph here shows that the exception is proving the rule. The paragraph describes a riot in which a crowd was shouting out “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians” The writer says there was the one voice from all over a period of about two hours crying out like this. It was only when someone warned the crowd that the Romans could charge them with insurrection that they quietened down. In the context of the narrative here about “a loud voice” and in the context of an explanation of “the word,” one could expect the writer would deliberately avoid using the phrase.

For a clarification of the extent to which Luke appears to be developing a theology of the “Living Word” the page setting out a semiotic analysis of it it Acts (as recorded in Nailon’s *Five Pivotal Texts*) is set out below

## Section D

## HEED MULTIPLE VOICES AND THE LIVING WORD

Acts 15:30 - 20:32

Paragraph "hooks" are references to the 'Word of God'

| <i>Steps towards the Living Word</i>   | V4          | V4         | Page | Page       |
|--|-------------|------------|------|------------|
| 1. The "word" is taught and preached by many   | 15:30-35    |            |      |            |
| . . Paul and Barnabas . .teaching and preaching . . others many the word of the Lord         | 15:35       | <u>215</u> |      | <u>187</u> |
| 2. The "word" continues to live on with those who 'have' it                                  | 15:36-41    |            |      |            |
| . .let us visit . .(where) . we announced the word . (and see) how they have (it)            | 16:33       | <u>215</u> |      | <u>187</u> |
| 3. Speaking the "word" is permitted by the Ultimate Spirit                                   | 16:1-16:10  |            |      |            |
| . . prevented by - Holy Spirit to speak - word in Asia . .not allowed them - Spirit of Jesus | 16:6        | <u>216</u> |      | <u>188</u> |
| 4. The "word" is spoken to those ready to believe  | 16:11-40    |            |      |            |
| . Believe . . and they spoke to him the word of God with all . . in the house of him         | 16:32       | <u>217</u> |      | <u>189</u> |
| 5. The "word" is received by people who include the wealthy                                  | 17:1-34     |            |      |            |
| . . and these were more noble . . who received the word with all eagerness                   | 17:11       | <u>218</u> |      | <u>190</u> |
| 6. The "word" has opponents  | 17:13-34    |            |      |            |
| . . announced by Paul the word of God, they (Jews) came there also . .troubling              | 17:13       | <u>219</u> |      | <u>190</u> |
| 7. The "word" urges proclamation   | 18:1-6      |            |      |            |
| . . .Paul was urged by the word to solemnly witness to ... Jesus being the Christ            | 18:5        | <u>220</u> |      | <u>191</u> |
| 8. Teaching the "word" is commanded by the Final "I AM"                                      | 18:7-23     |            |      |            |
| . . said . Lord . speak and not keep silence . I am with thee . .teaching . . word of God    | 18:11       | <u>220</u> |      | <u>192</u> |
| 9. The "word" expects attention  | 18:24-19:10 |            |      |            |
| . . some hardened and disobeyed, (others) came to hear word                                  | 19:9        | <u>221</u> |      | <u>193</u> |
| 10. The "word" is increased and strengthened by the "I AM"                                   | 19:11-20    |            |      |            |
| . . by might of the Lord the word increased and was strong                                   | 19:20       | <u>221</u> |      | <u>194</u> |
| 11. The "word" is linked in with "the way"   | 19:21-41    |            |      |            |
| . no small amount of trouble concerning 'the way'  | 19:23       | <u>222</u> |      | <u>194</u> |
| 12. The "word" continues the work of "I AM"  | 20:1-38     |            |      |            |
| . . I commend you to the Lord and to the word of the grace of him being able to build        | 20:32       | <u>223</u> |      | <u>195</u> |

The "flock" accompany Paul to the ship to Jerusalem - 20:28

### **Section E in Acts**

It is generally conceded by scholars that Acts was written by the same person that wrote Luke. For example there are biblical courses on “The Narrative of Luke-Acts.” However the Greek text appears to be “looser” than the gospel of Luke. That is, there are sections of it in which words appear to be omitted. At times the literal wording of the RSV translation appears to make more sense than the paraphrase of it for example in references to “the word” or “the way.” However as the book moves on and Paul emerges as the lead actor, one sees the involvement of people from an ever wider background who assist him in some way. All of them support him from their own realm of authority. This part of the text – Acts 21:1-26:32, forms a Section E and it is about Recognising Authority in the Range of Figures. There are the disciples who accompany Paul (including women and children) (21:1-6). There are the prophets who warn (21:7-14), church leadership that requires purification (21:15-26), law enforcers who protect him (21:27-39), a crowd that challenges Paul (21:39-22:23), State law that respects his citizenship (22:24-29), Jewish leadership that provide a forum (22:30-23:10), kith and kin who give secret help (23:11-24), the Governor who gave on-going protection (23:25-24:27), the Successor who weighed up his case (25:1-7), the Emperor who provided a base for world outreach (25:8-12) and finally someone from a Monarchy who gave him a hearing (25:13-26:43). Some scholars argue God is the main actor of Luke-Acts.<sup>803</sup> By this stage in Acts God (via Paul) is using every type of authority in an ever-widening outreach in the establishing of a new Kingdom.

## **Section F in Acts**

In a last part of Acts, a Section F, Paul reaches Rome, but only because of the mutual assistance given between himself and a centurion, that is, a legal representative of the Roman Empire. Paul, as representative of the new church is not just “in” the Hellenistic Roman Empire, but a functioning part of it.

## **(v) John and “Pass on the Power of One”**

The gospel of John was the last of the five major texts about the life of Jesus and the beginnings of the Church and shows there was a long period of reflection before or while it was being written, Shaia like many other writers, says this was around the end of the first century.<sup>804</sup> He also suggests the gospel largely consists of meditations.<sup>805</sup>

The writer of the gospel and his community would have been aware of the “teething” problems of setting up a society that was equally reliant on Judaic and Hellenistic backgrounds. Early in Acts we are given a glimpse of the tensions that existed in such a community. The “Hellenists” are complaining that the “Hebrews” are excluding them from a community meal (Acts 6:1). This sort of practice of course reaches back into the history of Jews who kept apart from Gentiles. But in the new context it was no longer acceptable.

Some scholars such as Francis Moloney suggest that this sort of tension continued on into the Church at the end of the century.<sup>806</sup> Certainly we have Paul who challenges the Galatian Jews for eating apart from Gentile Christians. He sees the community meal of the Eucharist as being at the essence of Christianity.

If there is a level of meaning about a critique of Hellenism and its incorporation into the Christian church, one could ask how the writer would deal with the on-going problem of “Hebrews versus Hellenists.” History relates how the mainstream Jews had excluded Christians from their synagogues towards the end of the first century CE.<sup>807</sup> However, as the Acts of the Apostles and the Letter to the Galatians shows, some Jewish Christians wanted to continue on with their ritualistic practices. The debate argued about in Acts appeared to focus on circumcision. But there were a whole host of other ritualistic rules that went with this.

In the gospel of Mark, an effort was made to show how Christianity revolves around the on-going presence of Jesus. But it would seem by the end of the century a Jewish Christian group within the church wanted to base their reliance on ritualistic practices rather than a faith in the on-going presence of Jesus. It would seem that the writer of John’s gospel would have to challenge them about this once and for all. It would seem in this context that the constant confrontation with “the Jews” was likely to include those people who were in the Christian community but who, even then, continued to identify themselves as Jews. Again, how could the witer deal with this? Once again if the “grammar” of a semiotic analysis that explores a level of meaning that provides a critique of Hellenism, is used here, then some similar methods of setting up the structure writing may be here as well.

### **Section A in John**

In the opening of John’s Gospel there is an immediate elaboration on “the Word of God.” Here, the section Acts 15:30 – 20:31 in the Acts of the Apostles has been a preparation for the understanding of “the Word” now being presented by John. We have already been told, through a the paragraphs about the Word in Acts that aspects of the “Word” include such

things as: - The “word” is taught and preached by many, it continues to live on, speaking the “word” is permitted by the ultimate Spirit,” the “word” is spoken to those ready to believe, the “word” is received by those who include the wealthy, “the “word” has opponents, the “word” urges proclamation, the “word” is commanded by the final “I am” etc.

It appears that like the introductions to Matthew, Luke’s gospel and the Acts, the opening prologue of John’s gospel (1:1-18) is similar to a “child” section and the logic built into the structure of the texts about a critique of Judaism and Hellenism is omitted here.

If we look beyond this Section A, stories begin which like sections of Mark and Luke, appear to be structured around places, in this case where Jesus is located. He is presented first of all in Bethany beyond Jordan, then into Galilee, then Cana/Galilee. Further on there appears to be a repetition of such places. If the places and the paragraphs formed around them are put into parallel lines they appear as follows:

### **Section B in John**

|         |                       |         |                   |
|---------|-----------------------|---------|-------------------|
| 1:19-28 | Bethany beyond Jordan | 3:22-36 | Judea at Jordan   |
| 1:29-51 | Into Galilee          | 4:1-42  | Into Galilee      |
| 2:1-10  | Cana/Galilee          | 4:43-50 | Cana/Galilee      |
| 2:11-12 | Capernaum/Galilee     | 4:51-54 | Capernaum/Galilee |
| 2:13-25 | Jerusalem/Temple      | 5:1-24  | Jerusalem/Temple  |
| 3:1-21  | Night                 | 5:25-47 | An hour           |

The suggestion of this structure for a Section B in John’s gospel (1:19-5:47) does not contradict other more established structures suggested by biblical commentators, for example the Cana to Cana chiastic structure which is well-known. The gospel writers appear to have

been capable of putting multiple structures into the text for the range of their theological insights and what they wanted to convince their readers about. The above is just one suggested structure amongst many. One could ask why there is a paragraph set out above about “night” and another about “an hour.” The answer here is “Not sure.” It appears the grammar is deviating here from its own rule about a focus on locations. Perhaps the writer wants to put a focus here on an inter-change between time and place.

Again, as with other paragraph pairing, it is not just the “hook” that is in common between the two collections of sentences. Re-consider the last two pairs above and parallels to be found within their sentence structure.

|         |   |         |   |
|---------|---|---------|---|
| 2:13-25 | Jerusalem/Temple<br>Jesus went up to Jerusalem<br>Cleansing<br>Reaction<br>46 years and re-building<br>Knew people                  | 5:1-24  | Jerusalem/Temple<br>Jesus went up to Jerusalem<br>Cure<br>Reaction<br>38 years and re-direction<br>Knew the Father                          |
| 3:1-21  | Night<br>Teacher from God<br>Spirit blows where it will<br>Witness<br>Witness from heaven<br>Eternal life through faith<br>Judgment | 5:25-47 | An hour<br>Authority from God<br>I do nothing from myself<br>Witness<br>Witness greater than John<br>Eternal life through faith<br>Judgment |

One could ask what the above structure and subject arrangement has to do with the level of meaning that promotes an understanding of Christianity being a hybrid of Judaism and Hellenism. If we go back and look at a summary point that is in common to each pair of paragraphs, we find that together these in fact provide a list of characteristics about Living Authority. Re-consider the key points in the paragraphs as set out in the table above.

|                             |   |         |   |
|-----------------------------|---|---------|---|
| 1:19-28                     | Bethany beyond Jordan<br>Baptising            | 3:22-36 | Judea at Jordan<br>Baptising            |
| <i>Represents God</i>       |   |         |   |
| 1:29-51                     | Into Galilee<br>Come and See...               | 4:1-42  | Into Galilee<br>Come and See            |
| <i>Invites</i>              |   |         |   |
| 2:1-10                      | Cana/Galilee<br>First sign                    | 4:43-50 | Cana/Galilee<br>Unless you see signs    |
| <i>Uses Power</i>           |   |         |   |
| 2:11-12                     | Capernaum/Galilee<br>Not stay there many days | 4:51-54 | Capernaum/Galilee<br>Household believed |
| <i>Relies on Household</i>  |   |         |   |
| 2:13-25                     | Jerusalem/Temple<br>My father's house         | 5:1-24  | Jerusalem/Temple<br>Cures on Sabbath    |
| <i>Works for the Father</i> |   |         |   |
| 3:1-21                      | Night<br>Re Nicodemus                         | 5:25-47 | An hour<br>Scriptures give witness      |
| <i>Gives Witness</i>        |   |         |   |

Already in Acts, the level of meaning has demonstrated that authority exists across the board in terms of people – whether they belong to the Christian community or not. In particular, in Acts there is a recognition of the authority to be found in secular government and there is a demonstration as to how such authority was constantly in use in order to protect Paul and facilitate his journey to Rome. It appears that in the above collection of paragraphs there is a re-focus on the living authority that is to be found in the person of Jesus. It has such attributes as representing God, inviting, using its power, relying on household support, working for the Father and giving witness.

In terms of the rhetorical intention of the writer here, one could interpret this as exhorting readers to “Heed the characteristics of live authority.” This fits with the opening location of

both lines of places which refer to the Jordan – water. The crossing of water symbolises a new beginning. John is presenting a new interpretation of authority.

If this is a valid interpretation (using semiotic analysis) of this section of text, one could almost anticipate that John would develop a similar section, using the same grammatical techniques, that would deal with a key, underlying principle of Hellenism. Already in Acts, much attention has been given by Luke to an understanding of “the Word.” A key characteristic of Hellenism is its reliance on logic and speech. Indeed, just as narrowness appears to be a pitfall for Judaism (and a law-based society), so a major pitfall for Hellenism and an order-based society is “the loud voice.” (Nowadays one can hear a similar criticism labelled ‘political correctness’).

### **Section C in John**

Once again in John’s text, as noted across John 6: 1 – 13:1, a range of locations for Jesus are in evidence. Once again the places appear to be repeated. In this case however there appears to be an interpretation being made about the increasing alienation and isolation of Jesus.

Consider this in terms of a Section C for John. Paragraph “hooks” relate to the location/direction of Jesus.

|           |   |          |  |
|-----------|---|----------|--|
| 6:1-14    | Across water (sea) –<br>(new beginning) | 10:40-42 | Across water (Jordan) –<br>(new beginning) |
| 6:15      | Mountain alone                          | 11:1-6   | Remained alone                             |
| 6:16-21   | Sea journey                             | 11:7-31  | On journey                                 |
| 6:22-71   | Synagogue in Capernaum                  | 11:38-52 | Tomb                                       |
| 7:1-13    | In Galilee – not Judea                  | 11:53-57 | Not openly                                 |
| 7:14-53   | Temple/home                             | 12:1-11  | Bethany/home?                              |
| 8:1-19    | Into Jerusalem                          | 12:12-19 | Into Jerusalem                             |
| 8:20-59   | Temple                                  | 12:20-36 | (in temple)                                |
| 8:59-9:41 | Jesus was hidden                        | 12:36-43 | Jesus ... was hidden                       |
| 10:1-21   | I am the door                           | 12:44-50 | I have come as a light                     |
| 10:22-39  | Solomon's Porch then away               | 13:1     | Hour when Jesus to move out of this world  |

The grammar being used by the text has again, determined the above divisions. For instance, when the two parallel lines of paragraphs above were first detected, it appeared there was no “match” for 10:22-39 which is located in Solomon’s Porch and which finishes with Jesus escaping from the grasp of his enemies. However a re-look at the verse to follow the second paragraph (12:44-50) in the parallel pair above “Solomon’s Porch,” we find that the verse to follow it, that is, 13:1, explains that Jesus is to move out of this world. Hence there is a match with the Solomon’s porch paragraph in terms of location. In both cases Jesus is moving beyond the grasp of those who oppose him. In its context the paragraph pair also presents a warning to those people (especially Jewish Christians), who may tend to ignore Jesus because of their preference for Jewish rituals and context.

An interpretation of the above paragraph structure shows up points in common both to each parallel pair and also to a subject as a whole which appears to deal with the :”Characteristics of the Living Word.” How would this fit with Hellenism as such? As already noted above Greek philosophy on which Hellenism is based is characterised by its emphasis on rationalism and abstract argument which can be engaged upon by all levels of its society. It is its belief in a “living word” that cuts across its society that enables Hellenism to underpin democracy as its system of government. Also, as noted while it is “the voice of the people,” that enables this society to function, it can also be prey to ‘the loud voice,’ in which section or other tends to dominate and distort the communication that is essential to its survival. A further aside to this observation is the reliance of a society which over-stresses idealism, on the spread of propaganda

Arguably in John’s Section C he outlines the characteristics of the Living Word that also fits with Jesus himself as being the “Living Word.” Consider some of the characteristics that emerge in this section by a re-consideration of the paragraph table set out above.

|           |                                       |                                   |  |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| 6:1-14    | Across water (sea) –<br>5,000 fed`    | 10:40-42                          | Across water (Jordan) –<br>(many believed)   |
|           |                                       | <i>Appeals to Crowd</i>           |  |
| 6:15      | Mountain alone<br>To make king        | 11:1-6                            | Remained alone<br>To stone                   |
|           |                                       | <i>Is sought after</i>            |  |
| 6:16-21   | Sea journey<br>They arrive            | 11:7-31                           | On journey<br>Brother to rise                |
|           |                                       | <i>Achieves goals</i>             |  |
| 6:22-71   | Synagogue<br>Words of Life            | 11:38-52                          | Tomb<br>Lazarus out                          |
|           |                                       | <i>Brings Life</i>                |  |
| 7:1-13    | In Galilee – not Judea<br>Not believe | 11:53-57                          | Not openly<br>To arrest                      |
|           |                                       | <i>Is doubted and Outlawed</i>    |  |
| 7:14-53   | Temple/home<br>Seek to Kill           | 12:1-11                           | Bethany/home?<br>Day of Burial               |
|           |                                       | <i>Is Aware of Death Threats</i>  |  |
| 8:1-19    | Into Jerusalem<br>True to witness     | 12:12-19                          | Into Jerusalem<br>Hosanna                    |
|           |                                       | <i>As public witness</i>          |  |
| 8:20-59   | Temple<br>Hour not come               | 12:20-36                          | (in temple)<br>Hour has come                 |
|           |                                       | <i>Is conscious of timing</i>     |  |
| 8:59-9:41 | Jesus was hidden<br>Blind man         | 12:36-43                          | Jesus ... was hidden<br>Blinded of them      |
|           |                                       | <i>Light of the World</i>         |  |
| 10:1-21   | I am the door<br>Division             | 12:44-50                          | I have come as a light<br>Judging            |
|           |                                       | <i>Is Commanded by the Father</i> |  |
| 10:22-39  | Solomon's Porch then away             | 13:1                              | Hour when Jesus to move out of this<br>world |
|           |                                       | <i>Speaks Like a Shepherd</i>     |  |

Again there are close parallels between the sentences of the paragraph pairs listed above that lead to a general conclusion about “characteristics of the living word.” Consider the last three paragraph pair parallels.

|           |   |          |   |
|-----------|---|----------|---|
| 8:59-9:41 | <p>Jesus was hidden</p> <p>Able to see</p> <p>Not keep the Sabbath claim</p> <p>Be put out of the synagogue</p> <p>Glory of God</p>                                       | 12:36-43 | <p>Jesus ... was hidden</p> <p>Blinded their eyes</p> <p>Hardened their hearts</p> <p>Be put out of the synagogue</p> <p>Glory of man (before Glory of God)</p>                               |
| 10:1-21   | <p>I am the door</p> <p>Will find pasture</p> <p>May have life in abundance</p> <p>Father knows me</p> <p>I received the commandment</p> <p>Has a demon and is raving</p> | 12:44-50 | <p>I have come as a light</p> <p>Will not remain in darkness\</p> <p>Might save the world</p> <p>Father who has sent me</p> <p>He has commanded me</p> <p>His commandment is eternal life</p> |
| 10:22-39  | <p>Solomon’s Porch then away</p> <p>Speaks like a shepherd</p>  | 13:1     | <p>Hour when Jesus to move out of this world</p> <p>Loving his own .. to the end</p>  |

### Hebrews and Hellenists

While it may be thought that with all the other structures and themes going on in this complex gospel of John, the level of a critique and incorporation of a “living authority” and a “living word” into the understanding of Christianity here would be enough. However John continues to deal, in a rhetorical way, with the divisions between Hebrews and Hellenists that continue on in his community. In his section B that deals with Live Authority there is a dimension of warning to the Hellenistic members of the community. This section includes actors that come from outside Judaism, for example the Samaritan woman. At the end of each paragraph pair

there is also a veiled warning to Gentile converts that they need to have faith. The following table shows the text verses for the second paragraphs in the pairs with the closing verses showing the need for belief.

|         |           |   |
|---------|-----------|---|
| 3:26-36 | Verse 36, | “The one believing in the Son has eternal life.”  |
| 4:1-42  | Verse 42, | “It is no longer because of your words that we believe.”                                |
| 4:43-50 | Verse 50, | “The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him.”                                    |
| 4:51-54 | Verse 53, | “And he himself believed and all his household.”  |
| 5:1-24  | Verse 24, | “he who hears my word and believes him who sent me.”                                    |
| 5:25-47 | Verse 47, | “But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words.” <sup>808</sup> |

On the other hand in Section C of the analysis there appears to be a much more obvious criticism of Jewish Christians who would prefer to stick with their Jewish customs and identity. In each paragraph (delineated by a location/ direction taken by Jesus) there is a reminder that Jesus and Christianity has out-paced the benefits of Judaism. Consider a key point being made in the first paragraphs of the eleven pairs. The next eleven reflect a similar theme.

|           |   |   |
|-----------|---|---|
| 6:1-14    | “This is truly the prophet...”                                      | Hebrew Christians needed to rely on Jesus rather than the law   |
| 6:15      | “so they could make him king”                                       | After the Temple destruction Hebrew Christians had to clarify if Christianity was a political or spiritual force.       |
| 6:16-21   | “they were afraid,”   | Fear about reliance on Jesus  |
| 6:22-71   | “teaching in the synagogue”   | Many disciples said.... This is a hard saying   |
| 7:1-13    | “his brothers said this because they did not believe in him.”       | The word “brothers” implies. those of the same Jewish ethnic group  |
| 7:14-53   | “Is he about to go to the dispersion of the Greeks?”                | .. re. Teaching Greeks as distinct from those of Jewish descent.  |
| 8:1-19    | “scribes and Pharisees led a woman who had been caught in adultery” | If Hebrew Christians were loath to eat with Gentiles they would be less likely to approve of (or allow) inter-marriage. |
| 8:20-59   | “we are the seed of Abraham”  | Trust in descent from Abraham rather than the word of Jesus   |
| 8:59-9:41 | “they would be put out of the synagogue”                            | - A pain still held by Hebrew Christians  |
| 10:1-21   | “I have other sheep that are not of this fold”                      | “this fold” implies Hebrew Christians   |
| 10:22-39  | “Has it not been written in your law”                               | cf.. those who keep details of the Mosaic law   |

In this context it is interesting to note that the first paragraph pair, that is, 6:1-14 and 10:40-42 show Jesus crossing water. The first paragraph pair in Section B shows Jesus “beyond the Jordan” (1:28) and (3:26) The crossing of water at the start of both sections symbolises a new beginning. In the context of criticisms made of Jewish Christians in Section C it recalls Moses crossing the Red Sea. Jesus is taking the Hebrew Christians to a new place.

When considering the veiled criticisms of Hellenists and then Jewish Christians in Sections B and C one could wonder if the “grammar of the text” here (in terms of semiotic analysis) is being contradicted. There is a constant ordering elsewhere of putting “law” (and Judaism)

first and then “order” (Hellenism) second. Yet here Hellenists are criticised first. On the contrary the major theme in Section B is Living Authority (cf. Law) and the major theme in Section C is the Living Word (cf. Order). Hellenists are weak in the first area while Jewish Christians are weak in relying on the Living Word of Jesus.

### **Section D in John**

Continuing on in the gospel of John into a possible Section D it appears this section deals with the “handing over” of the power of Jesus to his disciples. In the semiotic analysis of Nailon’s *Five Pivotal Texts* this covers John 13:4 – 17:26. This could be described as a “child” section and compares with similar “child” sections in other gospels, that is, Mark 9:2-10:31, Matthew 1:1-4:25, Luke 1:1-4:30 and Acts 1:1-6:8. One of the ‘clues’ to show why this section could be described as a “child” section is that as soon as Judas goes away, Jesus addresses the people present as children. Because the whole section appears to belong to a “child” section, one can expect and so discern that the grammar that the text is using, does not carry a level of meaning that puts forward a line of logic about either Judaism or Hellenism. In terms of an “ordinary” analysis, rather than semiotic analysis, the section consists of four steps in which people includes:

|  |              |
|--|--------------|
| A Challenge to identify with the authorised, Living Word | (13:1-14:31) |
| Reasons for an Identification with the Word              | (15:1-27)    |
| Promise of the on-going guidance of truth                | (16:1-32)    |
| The Prayer of the Word                                   | (17:1-26)    |

### **Section E in John**

A possible Section E for John's gospel stretches over the passion narrative from 18:1 – 20:30. If the text here were analysed in terms of someone being told to do something (once within each each collection of sentences) there could be a broad interpretation for the type of community one could expect to develop from the hybrid community already set out in the preceding gospels and chapters. The Section E could be titled "Allow the Authorised, Living Word to Set Direction." Characteristics of such a society would be as follows:

|          |                                   |  |
|----------|-----------------------------------|--|
| 18:1-9   | Legal rights                      | "allow them to go"                     |
| 18:10-12 | Non-violence                      | "put your sword into its sheath"       |
| 18:13-27 | Respect for witnesses             | "Question those who have heard"        |
| 18:28-40 | A philosophical base              | "What is truth?"                       |
| 19:1-16  | Respect for the humanity of Jesus | "Behold the man"                       |
| 19:16-24 | Scriptures fulfilled              | "Soldiers - to fulfil scripture"       |
| 19:25-26 | Seeing maternal nature of Church  | "Behold your son"                      |
| 19:27-30 | Adoption of way of the Child      | "Behold your mother"                   |
| 19:31-42 | Care for the Body of Christ       | "that he might take the body of Jesus" |
| 20:1-18  | Support of leadership             | "Go to the brothers and tell..."       |
| 20:19-23 | Sacrament of forgiveness          | "Peace, go receive the Holy spirit"    |
| 20:24-30 | Priority of faith                 | "Be faithful"                          |

It might be argued that the above description of the section of text 18:1-20:30 sounds somewhat like a "wish list." But consider the context of a community at least somewhat familiar with the "wish list" set out by Plato in the *Republic*. One could assume that the final section of the final gospel chosen for the Church's canon would contain a sketch outline of its own "wish list" for the best type of civic society.

A casual reader could claim that it appears the gospel analysis here omits all the rich content of the Passion narrative and is therefore defective. But semiotic analysis does not claim to pick up on all levels of meaning in a text. On the contrary it deals with only one level of the text's grammar at a time. In the analysis being discussed here the level being explored is whether or not there is a critique of Hellenism in the gospels. This level is dealing with a follow through of a line of logic developed across the gospels. It would be up to other semiotic analyses and other methods of interpretation to explore the significance of the passion and so much of the rest of the gospel.

### **Section F in John**

A final Section F for John's Gospel would consist of the last Chapter, chapter thirteen. Some writers, for example Shaia, say this final chapter of the gospel is an addition.<sup>809</sup> However, it does include Peter jumping into the water which is a parallel to the baptism of Jesus, in John's apparent water circle that stretches across the gospel. Also, if we reconsider this water circle as a summing up of John's gospel and the line of logic to be found in the preceding gospels as well, then we can re-consider the central verse about taking Jesus into the boat and immediately they reached where they were going (6:19). All parts of the water circle thus have special significance.

The significance of verse 6:19 is also a reminder that taken out of the context of the whole level of meaning, any one chiastic circle indicated above, or any one line of parallel paragraphs does not appear to have much relevance on its own. Thus if an extended chiastic circle (as pointed out in previous discussions) is shown in the context of other methods of interpretation, such as historical critical exegesis or narrative criticism then it is likely to be

dismissed. For example, in a presentation of the water circle in an essay context it was remarked that the “I thirst” statement of Jesus on the cross was a weak match for occasion when Jesus was asking the Samaritan woman for a drink.

Indeed some commentaries have said the “I am” statement of Jesus when walking on the water in John 6:20 does not fit into the same type of category as the “I am” statement to be found elsewhere in the Gospel. At least a difference between this and other “I am” statements here has been picked up. Thus one Google find for the “I am” statements in John says there are eight of these statements in the gospel. The following Google find says there are seven such statements. It omits 6:20 altogether.<sup>810</sup>

However, as already stated it is when the texts and their structures are considered in terms of the one level of meaning about Judaism and Hellenism forming a hybrid society, that any one part of this level gains importance because it has the context of the whole.

Perhaps there is a whole realm of discussion that has hardly been explored but which could follow in the discipline of sociology. If Judaism and Hellenism form a hybrid society which is Christianity, then this raises the question. Does Christianity, like other hybrids, consist of consist of two distinctly separate streams of society (like an organism that consists of two distinct sets of chromosomes?). Like time and place and law and order, one could ask. Do the two streams of society co-exist but they do not form a third and fused entity? If this is the case then the whole concept of the “one church” may need review.

## **Summary of the Solution**

The solution of the question as to whether or not the gospels contain a critique of Hellenism relies on a semiotic analysis of the text. Fitzmyer appears to compare semiotic analysis with “pulling a rabbit out of a hat.” However it has been demonstrated that the existence of an overall critique of Hellenism is based on the text’s use of key words such as place or persons addressed (which were less likely to be changed or omitted by early copyists). The key words provide “hooks” for paragraphs which have been placed in relation to each other in gospel sections. The sections in turn present a line of logic that define, compare and contrast Judaism with Hellenism. The critique of Hellenism therefore is primarily based on its differentiation from Judaism.



- **Did the gospel writers collaborate with Church leadership?**

The gospel analysis set out above implies there was some sort of collusion between church leadership and gospel writers about the basic structures that were to be used, even before the gospels were to be written. For instance, Mark would set out definitions. Then Matthew would deal with Judaism and Luke would deal with Hellenism. John would later deal with on-going tensions within a hybrid group. Scholarship describes the gospels in terms of such headings. For instance it demonstrates how Matthew and Luke both copied from Mark with their own perspectives. But there does not appear to be much discussion about how Matthew relies upon the elements of time or organise his material and Luke relies on the names of places, nor the interconnections between time and place or law and order that sets these two gospels into a relationship with each other. It is very hard to believe the Church canonists selected these gospels out of a possible fifty and such interconnections just happened to be there.

- **Why did Luke use patriarchal models?**

In recent years feminist scholars have provided proof of patriarchal influences in the gospel texts, especially those of Luke. These scholars raise the question (whether they state it or not) as to why a divinely inspired text should embed inequalities and injustices into the cultures that claim to be based upon them. Perhaps in some defence of the writers, one could say that they could only deal with the 'givens' of the social milieus in which they found themselves. The solution demonstrated above, at least shows how the gospels presented the two social

systems of Judaism and Hellenism in juxtaposition to each other. Hopefully this would provide a tension towards on-going improvement.

- **The relevance of Gospel attempts to build law and order societies**

The semiotic analysis set out in the solution above shows how the gospel structures can be understood in a fluid type language that deals with concepts rather than specific terminology. Thus many of the words used in the above solution would not have existed in the time of the gospel writers. They may not be used in a couple of hundred years either. But the text sets out concepts that are on-going. The solution above provides a framework for their understanding. This framework in turn could help people from a whole range of environments (including industry) to access the concepts of the gospel more readily than most methods of gospel interpretation.

- **Education and a simplified access to gospel structure**

The solution set out above could provide students with an immediate access to the “underbelly” of the gospels. For instance they could go through paragraph pairs to find out for themselves the way in which the writers have melded such paragraphs. Other approaches would consider such “paragraphs” as coming from unrelated parts of the gospel text.

- **Poverty, chastity and obedience - the nucleus of Christianity**

The “child” sections of the gospels as shown in the semiotic analysis set out above, provide extra proof of the pivotal importance of the three social commandments “thou shalt not kill, commit adultery or steal.” They show that the essence of Christianity (and modern industry) is help others live, socialise and be materially secure. The “child” sections show that the “giving” interpretation in the obedience, chastity and poverty vows of religious life continue to be relevant whether there is a specific “nun” task at hand or not. They also show the intimate connection between Jesus, the ultimate (and only real) “adult child,” and those who would align themselves with him.

- **The importance of ancient secular literature in Gospel interpretation**

The solution above shows how gospel writers were well aware of the benefits and limitations of Hellenistic culture and the society it influenced. Their efforts to tease out the “goods” and “bads” of Hellenistic culture has relevance today in a society that tends to overlook the differences.

- **Allegorical interpretation revisited**

Historical critical exegesis and narrative criticism both uncover much of the story behind the writing of the gospels. However the solution above gives a general sweep of the whole. Some analyses of the gospel may categorise different sections as being about “dialogue” etc. But the analysis above shows what the “dialogue” is about and how it is relevant to the whole.

The solution above also shows that the whole gospel is in a sense an allegory which allows a line of logic about society as such, to be explored and presented.

- **Nazism and the danger of salvation history**

The emergence of Nazism, it would seem, was closely related to the uninhibited adulation given to idealism. The solution given above shows how Christianity has attempted to “harness” the impetus of idealism to the benefit of all. The solution shows that Christianity did not necessarily “override” Judaism. Rather, the two systems of law and order continue to exist in their own right. What Christianity has attempted to do is bring both social systems into a dialectical tension with each other.

- **Tensions Within Islam**

Arguably Islam could be described as a “law-based” society. For instance it places special emphasis on time. Perhaps with the advent of modern technology such as the internet Muslims are suddenly faced with the power and persuasiveness of the West – a society largely based upon Hellenism. Little wonder many feel threatened. Like many others over the centuries they feel engulfed by the inroads of this culture. One point of comfort for them would be the realisation that the basis of their own society remains authentic in its own right-like time itself.

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<sup>797</sup> Note the “V4” and “V5” in these tables stands for Version Four of the Analysis which is a paraphrase of Version Five which is the literal translation of Marshall in the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament.

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