

# *Jesus the Teacher*

A SOCIO-RHETORICAL INTERPRETATION  
OF MARK

VERNON K. ROBBINS

With a New Introduction

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1

## *Comparative Analysis of the Gospel of Mark*

Comparison, the existence of similarity, is the inescapable presupposition of historical research.<sup>1</sup>

The era of source, form, and redaction criticism of the gospels has revealed myriads of developments within Jewish tradition prior to and during the time in which Christianity came into being. These efforts have corrected many erroneous claims about earliest Christianity and have shown that Christianity began as one more group—a sect, voluntary association, or renewal movement<sup>2</sup>—within Palestinian Judaism.

These very methods, however, became so self-conscious about explicit historical developments within Christian circles that they failed to keep in touch with basic social and cultural phenomena in the Mediterranean world that created the environment in which Christianity lived and moved and had its being. Few NT documents have suffered more in this regard than the Gospel of Mark. The standard commentaries show little attempt to glean information from Greco-Roman literature as well as biblical and Jewish literature in order to explicate its contents.

Within recent years, interpreters have plumbed Greco-Roman literature as well as biblical and Jewish literature in order to establish a comparative base for explicating NT documents other than the Gospel of Mark. Certainly the Pauline letters have attracted this kind of investigation. Analysis of Greco-Roman letters has revealed various aspects of Paul's letters that reflect contemporary literary conventions.<sup>3</sup> Also, analysis of social data in the letters has opened new discussions concerning the engagement of Paul and Pauline Christianity with Greco-Roman society.<sup>4</sup> Next in line has been Luke-Acts. Investigations by Henry J. Cadbury have attracted renewed interest,<sup>5</sup> and new approaches have uncovered phenomena previously untapped for understanding this two-volume work.<sup>6</sup> In addition, various studies unrelated to the Pauline letters or Luke-Acts have analyzed Greco-Roman spheres of understanding and action for the purpose of broadening NT investigation.<sup>7</sup> Some studies of portions of

Mark have attempted to open a new era in the study of Mark,<sup>8</sup> but there has been little movement toward a systematic use of data from Greco-Roman, biblical, and Jewish literature in commentaries on its form and content.

A major challenge for an interpreter of a NT document is to discern the particular manner in which patterns of thought and action characteristic both of Jewish and of Greco-Roman social, religious, or literary traditions and conventions are exhibited in the document. In other words, an interpreter of a NT document must not only compare the text he or she is interpreting with biblical and Jewish data but also with Greek and Greco-Roman data. Biblical traditions and conventions had a major influence on earliest Christianity. Also, however, the social and cultural milieu of the first century C.E. had been influenced by traditions and conventions that had emerged from Hellenic society. Hellenistic culture had a widespread influence after the exploits of Alexander the Great (331–323 B.C.E.), and even in Judea the anti-Hellenistic reaction under the Maccabean priest-kings could not reverse the inertia of the progressive, universalistic cultural movement that was pervading the Mediterranean world.<sup>9</sup> Within this setting, two movements within Judaism survived the Jewish-Roman wars of 66–70 and 132–135 C.E.—Pharisaism and Christianity. While Pharisaism was a successful renewal movement within ethnic Jewish culture, Christianity adapted Jewish monotheism with its beliefs, values, ethics, traditions, and rituals to Greco-Roman culture.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, the authors of the NT gospels wrote documents that exhibit a fascinating intermingling of Jewish and Greco-Roman patterns of thought and action.

Despite the variations within Mediterranean culture, certain common patterns of interaction and communication existed throughout the cultural milieu in which Christianity was born. Rhetorical forms and the figure and concept of the sage intersected with established traditions to provide a common cultural base for Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Christian communities. Within this setting, small forms like the proverb, the apophthegma, and the chreia provided a bridge between oral and written culture. A great variety of larger literary forms—oration, diatribe, essay, symposium, epistle, and biography—represented the meeting ground for rhetorical forms and patterns of influence from the wise personages in the culture.<sup>11</sup>

From a cultural standpoint, it is no accident that the type of Christianity that lived on in the Greco-Roman world selected a NT comprised of five biographical documents (the gospels and Acts) and twenty-one epistles (or essays in the form of epistles). Even the one document that is neither a biography nor an epistle, the Apocalypse (Revelation), contains seven epistles in the first three chapters. Biography and epistle constitute

two of the most common literary forms in the culture and were ready-made for gathering smaller literary forms into a broader literary framework. The smaller oral and literary units were gathered together into larger generic structures that were heavily influenced by oratorical and biographical patterns of interaction and understanding.<sup>12</sup> The NT documents contain patterns, forms, and structures that exhibit the emergence of the Christian movement in the cultural sphere of late Mediterranean antiquity.

Yet the interest in the broader cultural environment faces a persistent deterrent in NT studies. Interpreters study the OT and expand the analysis to intertestamental and rabbinic Jewish literature without consulting Greco-Roman literature. Since no Greco-Roman literature is contained in the Bible, the literature does not have the religious sanctions that Jewish literature shares with Christian literature. To accept Greco-Roman data in the analysis requires a broader orientation toward the cultural involvement of earliest Christianity than many NT interpreters have been willing to entertain.

#### INTERPRETATION OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Only with the rise of modern scholarship has there been an attempt to discover the social and cultural environment of the Gospel of Mark. The earliest traditions suggested that this gospel was written by a close associate of Peter. This associate, John Mark, simply translated and wrote down, as accurately as he could, the things that Peter preached about Jesus.<sup>13</sup> Such an interest in reliable transmission of tradition ignores dimensions of cultural influence in the document. For many interpreters, a fundamental shift in interpretation began in 1901 with William Wrede's analysis of the statement of secrecy in Mark.<sup>14</sup> His analysis proposed that the secrecy motif had been placed within the narrative by its author to explain why people did not know, during Jesus' ministry, that he was the Messiah. Such an interpretation broke the focus of attention on Mark as reliable history. Since Wrede's work, interpreters have faced the challenge of explicating this gospel in the religiohistorical environment in which the document was written, namely, earliest Christianity.

In the ensuing years, investigations of Mark have focused on Jewish dimensions within early Christian traditions about Jesus so intently that too little attention has been given to Mediterranean culture of late antiquity, which represents the overall context in which this gospel emerged. Recently, analysis of techniques of composition and of plot development in Mark has suggested that the author wrote a document that represents a creative literary achievement.<sup>15</sup> Still, this insight has not allowed most

interpreters to understand Mark within the cultural setting of late Mediterranean antiquity. Either the relation of Mark to Jewish traditions or the internal literary characteristics of Mark dominates analysis so completely that perceptions about broader cultural influences are virtually absent from commentary on Mark.

When interpreters have analyzed Mark in relation to Jewish literature, they have been struck by the absence of such a literary form in the antecedent tradition. For this reason, a description internal to Christian traditions themselves has attracted the greatest approval. Rudolf Bultmann's proposal that Mark presents the end product of the proclamation of the kerygma<sup>16</sup> still reigns supreme, with modifications, among interpreters. In fact, however, Mark's gospel does not look especially strange among all the different kinds of biographical compositions during the Hellenistic era. A few interpreters have been aware all along that the gospels contain significant parallels to contemporary Greco-Roman biographies,<sup>17</sup> but their insights have gone unheeded.

During the era of form and redaction criticism, most interpreters were—and many still are—impressed with the uniqueness of the Gospel of Mark rather than the similarities it shares with biographical literature within Jewish and Greco-Roman circles during the first and second centuries C.E.<sup>18</sup> Observations of uniqueness, however, should not turn an interpreter away from analysis of similarities that a document shares with other literature in its cultural setting. Any document containing significant literary dimensions is unique to itself. This uniqueness reflects the creativity of a writer who formulates a literary account somehow different from the literature available to him.

The claims about uniqueness in Mark are linked with two strongholds of opinion: (1) that Mark is the first gospel written within earliest Christianity, and (2) that the gospels are unparalleled in Jewish literature. Whether written first, second, or third, a document that was composed in the *lingua franca* of the culture and that functioned as a mediary between ethnic Jewish traditions and general Greco-Roman traditions should be expected to contain influences from general streams of tradition. The lack of an exact parallel in Jewish or Greco-Roman literature is a pertinent item for the investigation of Mark, but this lack should encourage analysis of broader cultural influences rather than exaggerated claims about uniqueness. On the one hand, much of Greco-Roman literature was "unique" in the sense that many different constituent forms and styles were united into "new" wholes. On the other hand, the uniqueness of any document is an achievement within a sociocultural environment that furnishes pat-

terns of understanding and action through which the document communicates.<sup>19</sup> For this reason, items that appear to be unique often reflect, on closer analysis, manifold dimensions in common with cultural phenomena contemporary with it.

The thesis of this investigation is that the fusion of religious traditions, folklore, and ethical pronouncements in the Gospel of Mark contains parallels both in Jewish and in Greco-Roman circles during the first century. Examination of Greco-Roman literature featuring religio-ethical teachers suggests that fundamental sociocultural influences in Mediterranean culture intermingled with Jewish influences to provide the overall integration of Jesus traditions in Mark. The analysis presupposes the distinctiveness of Mark in the setting of Jewish and Greco-Roman literature. Distinctiveness, however, in contrast to uniqueness, does not presuppose isolation from popular sociocultural influences. Undoubtedly the study requires modification of statements about the uniqueness of Mark, but the major goal is to explore the literary and social environment in which this gospel was written.

#### TOOLS FOR ANALYSIS

While various studies have given us a beginning point for a new era of investigation of the gospels,<sup>20</sup> the type of research that will reveal the intersection, fusion, and transmutation of cultural streams of tradition within the early Christian movement only recently has gained momentum. The "quests" and new "methods" that liberated the text of the Gospel of Mark during a previous era of scholarship need to be revised and adapted to allow a new reading that positions the text amidst sociocultural patterns of understanding and action as they were perpetuated by biblical, Jewish, Greek, and Greco-Roman traditions and are available to us in extant literature.

My approach is supported most explicitly by the method of interpretation of literature and culture formulated by Kenneth Burke and Clifford Geertz.<sup>21</sup> The concept of culture espoused by the approach is semiotic. In other words, the stories, sayings, and editorial comment that we read are the signifiers—signs, symbols, or expressions (i.e., *semeia*)—of cultural understanding. Underlying the semiotic approach is a belief that "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun."<sup>22</sup> Culture is constituted by "those webs, and the analysis of it [is] . . . an interpretive one in search of meaning."<sup>23</sup> Our analysis presupposes, therefore, that our data consists of "our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to."<sup>24</sup> The data with which we are primarily concerned are in the Gospel of Mark. The

text of Mark presents a construction by another person, that is, the author of the text and the concerns of the author. This "other person's construction" recites a "flow of behavior" which is symbolic action, that is, the recital of action is social discourse that exhibits cultural forms of understanding. The recital of the flow of behavior in Mark exhibits webs of significance that accompanied some early Christians as they engaged in the thinking and doing that perpetuated the patterns of belief and action that came to be called Christianity.

The time is ripe, therefore, to construct a reading of the Gospel of Mark in a setting of significant engagement with a range of data from ancient Mediterranean culture. A sense of the distinctiveness of Mark must not turn one away from analysis of social and cultural influences in the document. The interpreter needs to use disciplines that reach beyond the confines of the traditional forms of NT criticism to explicate the intermingling of social, religious, and literary traditions and conventions in the Gospel of Mark. This study goes beyond previous analysis by employing a socio-rhetorical method of interpretation. Rhetoric refers to the art of persuasion.<sup>25</sup> Rhetorical interpretation, therefore, is concerned with strategies that change attitudes and induce action. While much rhetorical analysis concentrates on overt techniques of persuasion, socio-rhetorical analysis emphasizes the wide range of strategies, both overt and covert, that constitute persuasive communication.

It is natural for rhetorical strategies to occur in settings characterized by "strife, enmity and faction,"<sup>26</sup> and the Gospel of Mark is filled with such combativeness. But sole concentration on overt rhetorical strategies may fail to reveal that "opponents can join battle only through a mediatory ground that makes their communication possible."<sup>27</sup> The mediatory ground is constituted by "a general body of identifications that owe their convincingness much more to trivial repetition and dull daily reënforcement than to exceptional skill."<sup>28</sup> In other words, changing attitudes and inducing actions are matters of identifying oneself with particular images, people, actions, or perceptions. Following the lead of Kenneth Burke, our rhetorical approach emphasizes that an author persuades his readers not only by the use of overt techniques of ordering and emphasizing but also "by the use of stylistic identifications; his act of persuasion may be for the purpose of causing the audience to identify itself with the speaker's interests; and the speaker draws on identification of interests to establish rapport between himself and his audience."<sup>29</sup> A socio-rhetorical approach, therefore, analyzes the text as a strategic statement in a situation characterized by "webs of significance" containing an intermingling of social, cultural, religious, and literary traditions and conventions in the Mediterranean world.

## SOCIO-RHETORICAL FORMS IN MARK

Within the setting of socio-rhetorical analysis, four kinds of form play a role: (a) progressive form; (b) repetitive form; (c) conventional form; and (d) minor form. The term "form" in our usage shares some common ground with the meaning of the term in form criticism. Yet most form criticism became interested in specific categories of form, that is, *Gattungen*, rather than with the rhetorical dimensions of form that change attitudes and induce actions.<sup>30</sup> In my analysis I concur with Burke: "A work has form in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence."<sup>31</sup> Thus rhetorical criticism concerns the arousal and fulfillment of expectations and desires within the reader. Form is present where there is a strategy of communication that causes the reader to become an active participant in the process, anticipating sequences, gaining familiarity through repetition, and identifying with certain people and causes.

From the perspective of socio-rhetorical analysis, most NT criticism during the past century has concerned itself with minor forms in the Gospel of Mark. Certainly the practitioners of form criticism knew that most pericopes in Mark "manifest sufficient evidences of episodic distinctness to bear consideration apart from their context."<sup>32</sup> In other words, forms like controversy stories, miracles, and parables arouse one or more expectations that are satisfactorily fulfilled within the span of the pericope itself, and many forms like this are present in Mark. Also, a series or a chiasmus is a minor form. During the era of form criticism, extended series of controversy stories (Mark 2:1—3:6; 11—12), parables (4:1—34), miracle stories (4:35—5:43), sayings (9:42—50; 13:1—37), and passion events (14—15) attracted attention, and they have received renewed attention with the rise of redaction and composition criticism.<sup>33</sup> Also, recent interest in literary criticism has attracted greater attention to minor forms like metaphor, antithesis, and parallelism.<sup>34</sup>

From the perspective of socio-rhetorical interpretation, the minor forms in the Gospel of Mark represent folklore from sectors of early Christianity that participated in the Jesus movement, as described so well by Gerd Theissen.<sup>35</sup> As the reader now encounters the folklore in this gospel, overarching rhetorical forms produced by the composition of the document have a powerful rhetorical hold on the minor forms contained within it. Nevertheless, the minor forms continue to function both within the document and outside it as "formal events"<sup>36</sup> that perpetuate the identity of the movement through the transmission of sayings and stories attributed to Jesus of Nazareth.

The folklore present in Mark's gospel created a social cohesion within sectors of early Christianity by articulating the antagonisms felt by the movement. The recitation of stories and sayings that perpetuated the antagonisms created a social drama, and at the core of social drama is agonistic interaction.<sup>37</sup> Within any social drama, certain people are identified as adversaries. These stories celebrate fleeting moments of victory and grieve over moments of defeat. While some of the adversaries may be relatively powerless, the majority are established members of society who perpetuate values and norms that are perceived to victimize the ones who transmit the folklore. The minor forms in this gospel express the egotism and hostility of the movement through stories in which Jesus responds with witty, proverbial speech in settings where scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, chief priests, elders, and Herodians are present.<sup>38</sup>

Through the recitation of the social drama in the folklore, a group like the Jesus movement ensures conformity to its own accepted norms. The folklore establishes continuity from generation to generation through its role in education.<sup>39</sup> Folklore, therefore, is recited:

to inculcate the customs and ethical standards in the young, and as an adult to reward him with praise when he conforms, to punish him with ridicule or criticism when he deviates, to provide him with rationalizations when the institutions and conventions are challenged or questioned, to suggest that he be content with things as they are, and to provide him with a compensatory escape from the "hardships, the injustices" of everyday life.<sup>40</sup>

Many of the minor forms in Mark, therefore, are items of folklore that perpetuated the identity of a socioreligious group over against established leaders within Jewish society. The proverbial sayings, parables, and aphoristic stories "work by providing a charter for action, by legislating, by justifying, by educating, by applying social pressure, by providing socially approved outlets for anti-social motives."<sup>41</sup> The folklore within Mark declares its vision to be new and rebellious. Within early Christianity itself, however, it served a traditional, conservative function. The sayings and stories perpetuated the established norms of a recently founded group within eastern Mediterranean society during the first century of the Common Era, simultaneously providing the means for the group to break away from Jewish society and to establish its own identity in the sphere of Mediterranean society.

While practitioners of form criticism were interested in the minor forms outside their setting in the gospels, practitioners of redaction criticism considered the minor forms to be tradition incidental to the redaction that revealed the theology of evangelists. The present investigation is concerned with the role of the minor forms in the setting of three primary

rhetorical forms in the overall document: (a) progressive form; (b) repetitive form; and (c) conventional form.

In recent interpretation of the Gospel of Mark, interpreters have shown an interest in progressive form in the narrative. Progressive form, according to Burke, can be of two kinds: (1) logical progression, which has "the form of a perfectly conducted argument, advancing step by step";<sup>42</sup> or (2) qualitative progression, in which "the presence of one quality prepares us for the introduction of another."<sup>43</sup> On the one hand, Norman Petersen's presentation of temporal plotting is a beginning point for seeing the existence of "logical progression" in Mark.<sup>44</sup> As the narrative proceeds, assertions are made that create specific expectations within the reader. Once the reader sees that many of these assertions are fulfilled within a short span of the text, he or she expects a logical progression within the text that reliably fulfills all the assertions. My analysis suggests that the logic of assertion and fulfillment in Mark has its ultimate source in the logic of promise and fulfillment in biblical literature. In the Gospel of Mark, however, the logic of promise and fulfillment is generalized by allowing assertions both of the narrator and of Jesus to function as powerfully as statements of God or one of his prophets. Thus, when Jesus says that "the bridegroom will be taken away" (2:20) and when the narrator says that the Pharisees and Herodians held counsel to destroy Jesus (3:6), the reader expects as specific a fulfillment of these assertions as he or she does of God's statement through Isaiah that he sends a messenger to prepare the way for the Messiah (1:2). Assertions by God, by the narrator, and by Jesus create logical progressions in the narrative as specific expectations are created and fulfilled in the narrative sequence.

In contrast to logical progressions stand qualitative progressions. Robert Tannehill has identified qualitative progressions where he has observed what he calls "unexpected developments" or "reversal of expectations" in Mark.<sup>45</sup> Qualitative progressions occur when an attribute of speech or action, which the reader had no reason to expect on the basis of a previous assertion, emerges in relation to one or more characters in the narrative. When new attributes and new titles emerge in the portrayal of Jesus, the narrative acquires qualitative progressive form. Likewise, when the disciples react differently from what the reader expects, a qualitative rhetorical progression is occurring in the narrative. Theodore J. Weeden analyzed qualitative progressive form in the portrayal of the disciples when he observed the development from unperceptiveness to misconception and finally to fear and flight.<sup>46</sup> A qualitative progression has occurred when the reader accepts the misconception and flight as an appropriate sequence, and the reader will accept the sequence only if the previous narrative has created the proper state of mind for it. In contrast to a logical

progression, then, the reader recognizes the appropriateness of the progression only after the events have occurred.

While Petersen and Tannehill have given us a start with logical and qualitative progressive form in Mark, much less has been done in recent scholarship with repetitive form in this gospel. Repetitive form is "the consistent maintaining of a principle in new guises, . . . [a] restatement of the same thing in different ways."<sup>47</sup> When current interpreters investigate repetitive form, they may be inclined to engage in a structural rather than a rhetorical analysis of Mark. Yet virtually every commentary on Mark mentions the threefold repetition of the prediction of the passion and resurrection in Mark 8:31; 9:31; and 10:32–34. Also, the repetition of certain words and phrases reveals significant aspects of Markan theology. Usually, however, only minor repetitive forms are analyzed whereas my investigation concerns repetitive form that extends throughout. Therefore, I begin with analysis of a repetitive pattern that spans the document and provides a formal structure for the Gospel of Mark.

In addition to progressive forms and repetitive forms, conventional forms have an important place in socio-rhetorical analysis. In contrast to progressive and repetitive forms, which arouse expectations during the process of reading, conventional forms may exist as a "categorical expectancy . . . anterior to the reading."<sup>48</sup> Great attention has, of course, been given to conventional forms within the minor forms in the gospels. "Any form can become conventional,"<sup>49</sup> and forms like the parable, the eschatological saying, and the miracle story became conventional forms within early Christianity. My investigation, however, concerns the overall document as a rhetorical form and probes the relation of overarching forms in Mark to conventional forms within Mediterranean circles.

I begin with the observation that the Gospel of Mark partakes of the form of a biography that depicts a disciple-gathering teacher—from the high point of his career to his death.<sup>50</sup> This form, it is discovered, existed as a conventional form in circles that perpetuated their patterns of belief through biographical accounts of people who taught and enacted a particular system of thought and action. Within Greco-Roman circles, the literature about Socrates, written during the fourth century B.C.E. and undergoing a revival during the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E., especially provides important comparative data for analysis of conventional forms in Mark. In Jewish circles, the literature about Elijah and Elisha provides especially important comparative data for analysis of conventional forms in Mark.

#### INTERRELATION AND CONFLICT OF FORMS

With the presence of progressive, repetitive, conventional, and minor forms in a piece of literature, both interrelation and conflict arise between

rhetorical forms in the document.<sup>51</sup> In other words, expectations raised by one form may either interrelate with or conflict with expectations raised by another form. To a great extent, the success of the Gospel of Mark is attributable to its complex interrelation of rhetorical forms. This investigation is designed to clarify some of the interrelations. For example, Mark's portrayal of Jesus interrelates logical progression—from conflict to crucifixion—with qualitative progression—from a wonder-working prophet-teacher to a messiah-king who rises after he is killed. Logical progression is manifest in the dramatic plot that portrays the crucifixion as an expected outcome of the conflict that attends Jesus' teaching and action from the beginning. Qualitative progression is present in the systematic unfolding of Jesus' identity through both speech and action that prepares the reader for the next stage of events. The sequences in the qualitative progressions are not perceived by the reader to be necessary results of previous events, but they are perceived as appropriate when they occur. In the setting of logical and qualitative progression, repetitive form features Jesus issuing commands that imply that the appropriate response to the imminence of the kingdom of God is to follow the system of thought and action attributed to Jesus. A great achievement of the author is the successful interrelation of these progressive and repetitive forms in the narrative.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for socio-rhetorical analysis is to sort out the interrelation, and possible conflict, among conventional forms, progressive forms, and repetitive forms in Mark. Analysis of the conventional forms is complicated by the intermingling of ethnic Jewish forms with more general social and cultural forms. Yet this kind of analysis could prove to be the most rewarding of all. My analysis suggests that the portrayal of a cycle of relationships between teacher and disciple from the moment of the call to discipleship until the time of the death of the teacher is a conventional form in Mediterranean literature. This conventional form appears to be well established in Greco-Roman society vis-à-vis the religiophilosophical schools and their traditions. Taking the Elijah-Elisha narrative as a clue on the side of Jewish traditions, it appears obvious that the relation of Elijah to Elisha opened the way for a natural merger of Jewish prophetic narrative with this conventional Greco-Roman cycle. No conflict among conventional, progressive, and repetitive forms therefore appears in the portrayal of Jesus. The presence of the Elijah-Elisha cycle introduces miracle working as a natural part of the activity of the prophet-teacher. Similarly, the presence of the Greco-Roman cycle concerning teachers and disciple-companions introduces repeated scenes of interaction between Jesus and his disciples.

The Gospel of Mark, therefore, is characterized by a major story line that skillfully interrelates progressive, repetitive, and conventional forms.

A subsidiary story line about the disciples, however, portrays a qualitative progression that conflicts with a conventional form in Mediterranean culture. The qualitative progression that prepares the reader for the shift from eager following to flight and denial conflicts with a conventional form. In this conventional form, there is an expectation that faithful disciples will gain a reasonably clear understanding of their teacher's system of thought and action by the end of their time together, even though they resist their teacher's acceptance of death through an unjust verdict. The interrelation of the well-integrated major story line with the unexpected and undesired features of the subsidiary story line creates the particular rhetorical effect of the gospel.

After the analysis of repetitive, progressive, and conventional forms, I will explore the socio-rhetorical implications of the interrelation and conflict of forms in Mark (chapter seven). My thesis concerning messiahship will be compared with the thesis concerning discipleship to see if the same kind of assertion is made about both. From these observations, conclusions will be drawn about the socio-rhetorical nature of Mark's gospel in the milieu of late Mediterranean antiquity.

### GOALS

In summary, the ultimate goal of this investigation is to read the Gospel of Mark in the context of a wider range of literature from the Mediterranean world than is usual in Markan scholarship. Rather than reading Mark simply in the context of biblical and Jewish literature, I intend to read this gospel in the context of literature that lies both within and outside Jewish and Christian circles of influence. Documents like Josephus's *Antiquities* and Philo's *Life of Moses* are taken into account, as well as Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, Plato's dialogues, and Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*. This range of literature provides the setting for discovering features that are in common and features that separate the documents from one another.

In order to understand the Gospel of Mark within this broader sphere, it is necessary to use a comparative method of analysis<sup>52</sup> rather than the traditional methods of source, form, and redaction criticism. The method is called socio-rhetorical criticism. From the perspective of socio-rhetorical analysis, the entire literary product is the result of the compositional activity of an author. The question for the analysis is not so much What changes did Mark effect within traditions about Jesus? as How is the Gospel of Mark similar to and different from other literature about people who are considered by certain sectors within the culture to be important leaders or heroes? Whether the author of Mark has collected, copied, or freely composed the material which he has written down, he himself has

performed an act of selection, arrangement, revision, and composition that has created a literary document—somehow like and somehow unlike other literary documents in the sphere of Mediterranean culture.

The socio-rhetorical analysis used here is perceived to be a bridge between traditional exegetical interpretation and more recent literary and structuralist approaches. The approach provides a means for biblical scholarship to move beyond the limitations in its present methods without breaking radically with previous achievements. One of the results of the shift in method is to consider the distinction between narration and discourse more important than the distinction between tradition and redaction. This approach allows the interpreter to utilize widespread rhetorical procedures of analysis which are more amenable to social and anthropological investigations than source, form, and redaction criticism.

This project is envisioned as a contribution to the social, cultural, literary, and religious history of early Christianity. The approach begins by exhibiting the formal structure, or outline, of Mark that arises through repetitive forms in the document. Chapter two, therefore, explores well-known repetitive forms in Mark to show the means by which the narrative contains an introduction followed by six sections of material and a conclusion. The next step is to analyze the relation of repetitive forms in Mark to conventional repetitive forms in the portrayal of prophets and teachers in the literature of Mediterranean antiquity. Chapter three, therefore, contains an analysis of repetitive forms in prophetic literature, Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, and the Gospel of Mark. After the analysis of repetitive forms in Mark, progressive forms are analyzed in relation to conventional forms in biblical, Jewish, and Greek literature. This leads to the observation that logical and qualitative progressions disclose the role of Jesus and the role of the disciples through the sequence of a teacher/disciple cycle that begins with summons and response, continues with teaching and learning, and ends with farewell and death. Chapters four through six probe the intermingling of biblical and Jewish patterns of understanding with Greek and Hellenistic patterns of understanding in order to discover the sociocultural perceptions that provided an environment of plausibility for the portrayal of Jesus and his disciples within first-century Mediterranean culture and society.

Chapter seven summarizes the rhetorical argument of Mark's gospel about Jesus and about the disciples, and it attempts to answer why the Gospel of Mark was preserved when 99 percent of it is duplicated in Matthew and Luke. The thesis is launched that the Gospel of Mark played a significant role within early Christianity by successfully meeting Jewish messianic expectations with role enactment that was widely known and esteemed in popular Greco-Roman culture. Instead of prophetic expecta-

tion and historical fulfillment, Mark's gospel is dominated by messianic expectation and cultural fulfillment. The fluid concept of the Jewish Messiah during the first century was filled with activity by a religious teacher who was killed as a result of his teaching and action.<sup>53</sup> Since a majority of the people in the Mediterranean world valued the role of the religio-ethical teacher and understood that he might have to accept an unjust death in order to maintain congruence between his words and his actions, they could accept Jesus' activity as a significant fulfillment of their own expectations.

## NOTES

1. J. Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, 242.
2. For discussion of the social nature of early Christianity, see W. A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism"; R. Scroggs, "The Earliest Christian Communities as Sectarian Movement"; A. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity*; W. A. Meeks and R. L. Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era*; G. Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*; L. E. Keck, "On the Ethos of Early Christians"; idem, *The New Testament Experience of Faith*; J. Gager, *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity*; J. A. Wilde, "The Social World of Mark's Gospel."
3. E.g., C.-H. Kim, *Form and Structure of the Familiar Greek Letter of Recommendation*; J. L. White, *The Form and Function of the Body of the Greek Letter*; idem, *The Form and Structure of the Official Petition*; J. L. White and K. A. Kensinger, "Categories of Greek Papyrus Letters"; H. D. Betz, *Der Apostel Paulus und die Sokratische Tradition*; idem, "The Literary Composition and Function of Paul's Letter to the Galatians"; idem, "In Defense of the Spirit"; F. F. Church, "Rhetorical Structure and Design in Paul's Letter to Philemon"; W. H. Wuellner, "Paul's Rhetoric of Argumentation in Romans."
4. G. Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*; E. A. Judge, *The Social Pattern of the Christian Groups in the First Century*; idem, "The Early Christians as a Scholastic Community"; idem, "Contemporary Political Models for the Inter-relations of the New Testament Churches"; idem, "Paul's Boasting in Relation to Contemporary Professional Practice"; idem, "St. Paul and Classical Society"; idem, "St. Paul and Socrates"; idem, "St. Paul as a Radical Critic of Society"; R. F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry*; idem, "Paul's Tent-making and the Problem of His Social Class"; idem, "Simon the Shoemaker as an Ideal Cynic."
5. H. J. Cadbury, *The Style and Literary Method of Luke*; idem, *The Making of Luke-Acts*; idem, *The Book of Acts in History*.
6. E. Plümacher, *Lukas als hellenistischer Schriftsteller*; C. H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes and the Genre of Luke-Acts*; idem, *What Is a Gospel?* F. W. Danker, *Luke*; F. Veltman, "The Defense Speeches of Paul in Acts";

V. K. Robbins, "By Land and By Sea: The We-Passages and Ancient Sea Voyages"; idem, "Prefaces in Greco-Roman Biography and Luke-Acts"; idem, "Laudation Stories in the Gospel of Luke and Plutarch's *Alexander*"; M. Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity*; W. S. Kurz, "Hellenistic Rhetoric in the Christological Proof of Luke-Acts"; D. Ladoucleer, "Hellenistic Preconceptions of Shipwreck and Pollution as a Context for Acts 27—28"; G. B. Miles and G. B. Trompf, "Luke and Antiphon."

7. E.g., D. L. Tiede, *The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker*; H. D. Betz, ed., *Plutarch's Theological Writings and Early Christian Literature*; idem, *Plutarch's Ethical Writings and Early Christian Literature*; J. H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless*; W. H. Wuellner, "Der Jakobusbrief im Licht der Rhetorik und Textpragmatik."

8. S. Schulz, "Die Bedeutung des Markus für die Theologiegeschichte des Urchristentums"; L. E. Keck, "Mark 3:7–12 and Mark's Christology"; H. D. Betz, "Jesus as Divine Man"; P. J. Achtemeier, "Toward the Isolation of Pre-Markan Miracle Catenae"; idem, "Gospel Miracle Tradition and the Divine Man"; idem, "The Origin and Function of the Pre-Markan Miracle Catenae"; M. Smith, "Prolegomena to a Discussion of Aretologies, Divine Men, the Gospels and Jesus"; and H. C. Kee, "Aretology and Gospel."

9. S. Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine*; idem, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*; M. Hadas, *Hellenistic Culture*; M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*; idem, *Jews, Greeks and Barbarians*.

10. For a selection of works on Pharisaic participation in Greco-Roman culture, see L. Baeck, *The Pharisees and Other Essays*; D. Daube, "Rabbinic Methods of Interpretation and Hellenistic Rhetoric"; idem, "Alexandrian Methods of Interpretation and the Rabbis"; S. Stein, "The Influence of Symposia Literature and the Literary Form of the Pesach Haggadah"; E. J. Bickerman, "The Maxim of Antigonos of Socho"; idem, "The Civil Prayer for Jerusalem"; M. Smith, "Palestinian Judaism in the First Century"; idem, "The Image of God"; H. A. Fischel, "Story and History"; idem, "Studies in Cynicism and the Ancient Near East"; idem, *Rabbinic Literature and Greco-Roman Philosophy*; idem, *Essays in Greco-Roman and Related Talmudic-Midrashic Literature*.

11. Fischel, "Story and History," 61–63.

12. *Ibid.*, 60–61.

13. For discussions of this early tradition, see B. W. Bacon, *The Gospel of Mark*, 22–49; W. R. Schoedel, *Polycarp, Martyrdom of Polycarp, Fragments of Papias*, 105–9.

14. W. Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*.

15. The first clear signs of this point of view emerged in N. Perrin's *What is Redaction Criticism?* and T. J. Weeden's *Mark—Traditions in Conflict*. Now a more specifically literary analysis of Mark is available in N. R. Petersen's *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics* and in D. Rhoads and D. Michie's *Mark as Story*.

16. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 347.

17. The most comprehensive statement of the parallels was made by C. W.



Votaw, *The Gospels and Contemporary Biographies in the Greco-Roman World*. Cf. D. Georgi, "The Records of Jesus in Light of Ancient Accounts of Revered Men," 541-42.

18. The stage was set for emphasis on the uniqueness of Mark by K. L. Schmidt, "Die Stellung der Evangelien in der allgemeinen Literaturgeschichte." Bultmann shared this point of view, *Synoptic Tradition*, 371-74. For recent work, see N. Perrin, "The Literary *Gattung* 'Gospel'"; H. Koester, "One Jesus and Four Primitive Gospels," 161-62. For a survey of assertions that Mark is unique, see V. K. Robbins, "Mark as Genre."

19. See Talbert, *What Is a Gospel?* 11; A. Fowler, "The Life and Death of Literary Forms," 77.

20. See R. C. Tannehill, *The Sword of His Mouth*; idem, "The Disciples in Mark"; idem, "The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology"; C. H. Talbert, *What Is a Gospel?* idem, "Biographies of Philosophers and Rulers as Instruments of Religious Propaganda in Mediterranean Antiquity"; idem, "Prophecies of Future Greatness"; H. D. Betz, "The Sermon on the Mount."

21. Works by K. Burke especially pertinent for analysis in this book include *Counter-Statement*, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, and *Language as Symbolic Action*. See the major work of C. Geertz in *The Interpretation of Cultures*. For the relation of Geertz's work to literary analysis, see G. Gunn, "The Semiotics of Culture and the Interpretation of Literature."

22. Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 5.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, 9.

25. Burke, *Rhetoric of Motives*, 49-55.

26. *Ibid.*, 20.

27. *Ibid.*, 25.

28. *Ibid.*, 26.

29. *Ibid.*, 46.

30. M. Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, 7; Bultmann, *Synoptic Tradition*, 2-7. Cf. J. A. Wilcoxon, "Narrative."

31. Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 124.

32. *Ibid.*, 127.

33. See M. Alberty, *Die synoptischen Streitgespräche*; Achtemeier, "Isolation of Pre-Markan Miracle Catenaes"; idem, "Origin and Function of Pre-Markan Miracle Catenaes"; H.-W. Kuhn, *Ältere Sammlungen in Markusevangelium*; R. Pesch, *Naherwartungen*; W. H. Kelber, ed., *The Passion in Mark*.

34. Tannehill, *The Sword of His Mouth*.

35. Theissen, "Itinerant Radicalism"; idem, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*.

36. Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 127.

37. R. D. Abrahams, "Introductory Remarks to a Rhetorical Theory of Folklore," 147.

38. In the Gospel of Mark, scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, chief priests, elders, and Herodians stand in the place of policemen, mayors, sheriffs, and ethnic minorities in American folklore.

39. W. Bascom, "Four Functions of Folklore," 349.

40. *Ibid.*

41. Abrahams, *Rhetorical Theory of Folklore*, 147.

42. Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 124.

43. *Ibid.*, 125.

44. Petersen, *Literary Criticism*, 49-80; idem, "The Composition of Mark 4:1-8:26." Apart from Petersen's analysis, logical progression has usually been investigated from the perspective of tragic plot in Mark. See G. G. Bilezikian, *The Liberated Gospel*; H. B. Carre, "The Literary Structure of the Gospel of Mark"; E. W. Burch, "Tragic Action in the Second Gospel"; D. W. Riddle, *The Gospels*, 141-45; C. Beach, *The Gospel of Mark*; F. G. Lang, "Kompositionsanalyse des Markusevangeliums," 21-22.

45. Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark"; idem, "The Gospel of Mark."

46. Weeden, *Mark—Traditions in Conflict*, 26-51.

47. Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 125.

48. *Ibid.*, 127.

49. *Ibid.*, 126.

50. The recent discussion of "aretalogy" has sparked interest in overarching conventional form in Mark. See M. Hadas and M. Smith, *Heroes and Gods*. Recently, C. H. Talbert has shifted the discussion of conventional form to biography. See *What Is a Gospel?* idem, "Biographies of Philosophers and Rulers."

51. Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 128-30.

52. D. L. Barr uses the term "comparative analysis" to describe his generic comparison of Plato's *Crito*, *Phaedo*, and *Apology* with the synoptic gospels in "Toward a Definition of the Gospel Genre." He compares both bodies of literature with "a known genre that has been adequately described, tragedy as defined by Aristotle in his *Poetics*" (p. iii). By contrast, I attempt to encourage "comparative socio-rhetorical analysis" whereby specific passages in the gospels are analyzed in the setting of specific passages in both the biblical-Jewish and Greco-Roman literature. Such a form of exegesis moves beyond analysis of specific literary and cognitive influences (historical perpetuation of tradition) into analysis of sociocultural patterns and conventions known to us from extant literature. For other examples of comparative socio-rhetorical analysis, see V. K. Robbins, "Mark I. 14-20"; idem, "Laudation Stories."

53. For an excellent discussion of the fluidity of the concept of Messiah during the first century, see M. de Jonge, "The Use of the Word 'Anointed' in the Time of Jesus."

Jesus also became the best teacher. He would explain difficult things in ways that made them easy to understand. Jesus taught people everywhere he met them. Why was Jesus such a Great Teacher? One reason is that Jesus himself had been taught. And he knew how important it is to listen. Jesus is the greatest teacher who ever taught. In this sermon we discuss what made Him such a great teacher, and what His teachings will do for our lives.

A. Did you hear the story about the teacher who was helping one of her kindergarten students put on his boots? 1. She pulled while he pushed and the boots still didn't want to go on. 2. Finally, after the second boot was on, and she had worked up a sweat, the little boy said, "Teacher, they're on the wrong feet." She looked and sure enough, they were. Teachers, in a way, govern the direction of the world. We humans have a deep need to learn and constantly "shop" for teachers who will stir our minds. Something inside us hungers to be taught. The Israelites of Jesus day were no different. They hungered to be taught the ways of truths of God. And, so they programmed their lives to attending synagogue every Sabbath. There the Scriptures were read and the local scribes would try to give their opinions and explanations. Jesus, the teacher. 387 likes

57 talking about this 26 were here. A page dedicated to directing people to Jesus Christ and what He said. Jesus said... It is all about Jesus; the savior, the son of God, the teacher, the prophet, the way, truth and life See more. Community See all. The Teacher of Righteousness (in Hebrew: מִשְׁכַּל־צְדָקָה מִשְׁכַּל־צְדָקָה Moreh ha-Tzedek) is a figure found in some of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran, most prominently in the Damascus Document. This document speaks briefly of the origins of the sect, probably Essenes, 390 years after the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and after 20 years of "groping" blindly for the way. "God raised for them a Teacher of Righteousness to guide them in the way of His heart".