THE RHETORICAL FORCE OF EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITINGS: DEFINITION, DYNAMICS AND DISCOURSES ABOUT MARY

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Introduction

Early Christianity grew from a small band of people following Jesus to a faith that spread across the Roman Empire. How this happened is the subject of multiple theories that have arisen in the absence of substantial evidence.[1] Schor has proposed four models that provide insight into the growth of the Christian movement: the apostolic mission model, the values reproduction model, the social reaction model and the network model.[2] All of these models incorporate some degree of persuasion, especially the apostolic mission model, to convince a person to join the faith. While personal and public speech surely played a key role in the oratorical culture of the ancient Mediterranean, texts must have played some role as well. Furthermore, extant early Christian writings give us the best window that we have into the rhetorically persuasive speech of the early followers of Jesus.[3] This essay explores how one might

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1. As noted by Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964), p. 65, and Robert Knapp, *The Dawn of Christianity: People and Gods in a Time of Miracle and Magic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), pp. 8-10.

2. Adam M. Schor, 'Conversion by the Numbers: Benefits and Pitfalls of Quantitative Modelling in the Study of Early Christian Growth', *JRH* 33 (2009), pp. 472-98.

3. Schor ('Conversion by the Numbers', p. 474) emphasizes the oral nature of this communication. Dreyer points out that '[t]he majority of studies of early Christianity appropriately focus on textual interpretation. By using textual sources in

analyze the rhetorical force of early Christian writings, especially those that became canonical, with the tools and insights of Sociorhetorical Interpretation (SRI). SRI draws upon the insights of various interpretive approaches and criticisms, puts them into dialogue and adds some of its own distinctive elements to provide a flexible and multifaceted interpretive analytical framework that sheds new light on the texts of the New Testament and provides a fresh way to reconceptualize and describe the growth of early Christianity in light of its development as a rhetorical culture in the Mediterranean milieu.[4]

Defining Rhetorical Force

Rhetorical force is the final component of sociorhetorical commentary on sacred texts,[5] but it was incorporated late in the development of the sociorhetorical analytic. SRI began as an exploration of the various textures of scriptural texts—innertexture, intertexture, social-cultural texture, ideological texture and sacred texture—that built upon foundational work in rhetoric and the New Testament.[6] These textures were not the only analytical components of

combination with sociological and quantitative modelling, new lines of enquiry open up'. See Wim A. Dreyer, 'The Amazing Growth of the Early Church', *HvTSt* 68 (2012), pp. 1-7 (6).

4.   Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 240-41. SRI takes a rhetorical-cultural approach to synthesizing New Testament theology in a history-of-religion framework similar to that argued for by Heikki Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology: A Story and a Programme* (London: SCM Press, 2000), pp. 160-81.

5.   For examples, see how rhetorical force serves as a summative analysis of the meaning and impact of an entire book, such as Roy Jeal, *Exploring Philemon: Exploring Freedom, Brotherhood, and Partnership in the New Society* (Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity, 2; Atlanta: SBL, 2015), pp. 203-10, or of major portions of a book, such as B.J. Oropeza, *Exploring Second Corinthians: Death and Life, Hardship and Rivalry* (Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity, 3; Atlanta: SBL, 2016).

6.   For these textures, see Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Sociorhetorical Interpretation* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996). The work of Amos Wilder and George Kennedy both informed the early development of SRI, especially Wilder's *The Language of the Gospel: Early Christian Rhetoric* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964) and Kennedy's *New Testament*

SRI. For example, narrative criticism, intertextuality, social-scientific approaches and ideological criticism were all widely incorporated, but SRI distinguished itself by seeking to put the various textures into dialogue with one another for a more holistic and interactive analysis.[7] This fostered a number of early studies, but the framework did not remain static. Instead, SRI pushed forward by developing the analytical tool of rhetorical dialects, or rhetorolects, in early Christianity: wisdom, prophetic, miracle, priestly, apocalyptic and pre-creation.[8] Each rhetorical dialect carries a cluster of characteristic images, figures, storylines and arguments that could be called upon by a speaker/author. At a later step in this maturing process, the SRI analytic incorporated the analysis of the graphic or pictorial persuasiveness of a text under the label 'rhetography'.[9] Finally, as a summative closing of sociorhetorical analysis, commentators consider the wide-ranging possibilities of the rhetorical force of a passage. Rhetorical force organizes a particular cluster of rhetorical moves gleaned from the analysis of graphic persuasion, the configuration of elements in various textures and the strategic blending of selected rhetorolects and considers how these elements may have influenced various audiences that might have heard (or read) this text.

Rhetorical force as a culminating phase of sociorhetorical analysis arose out of observations regarding the rhetorical power authors could wield when reconfiguring previous traditions. Early in the formulation of SRI,

Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

7.   Robbins, *Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse*, pp. 11-13.

8.   Vernon K. Robbins, 'Beginnings and Development in Sociorhetorical Interpretation' (http://www.religion.emory.edu/faculty/robbins/Pdfs/SRIBegDevRRA.pdf). These rheterolects are somewhat analogous to the 'trajectories' through early Christianity proposed by Robinson and Koester. See James M. Robinson, 'Introduction: The Dismantling and Reassembling of the Categories of New Testament Scholarship', in James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 1-19 (14-18).

9.   Vernon K. Robbins, *The Invention of Christian Discourse: Volume 1* (Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity Series, 1; Blandford Forum, UK: Deo Publishing, 2009), pp. 16-17, and Vernon K. Robbins, 'Rhetography: A New Way of Seeing the Familiar Text', in Clifton C. Black and Duane Watson (eds.), *Words Well Spoken: George Kennedy's Rhetoric of the New Testament* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), pp. 81-106.

'reconfiguration' was analyzed within intertexture as the 'restructuring of antecedent traditions' to explore how the author/speaker used traditions and concepts dialogically within their own rhetorical aims—a common consideration in intertextuality.[10] Early Christian texts configure a variety of culturally embedded rhetorical and conceptual packages, often labelled topoi, to create a framework for their arguments and to make those arguments convincing and convicting.[11] Often, such topoi would be deployed within enthymemes, where the text implies or the audience supplies reasoning that is required to make full sense of verbal argumentation or narrative progression.[12] Such reasoning could be embedded in topoi or in the larger networks of meanings supplied by rhetorolects. When SRI expanded into the analysis of rhetorolects, this attention to reconfiguration was energized by the influence of

10.   Robbins, *Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse*, pp. 107, 123-24. This is a core component of most studies of intertextuality. See Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (ISBL; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 22-38, and Christopher D. Stanley, 'Rhetoric of Quotations', in B.J. Oropeza and Steve Moyise (eds.), *Exploring Intertextuality: Diverse Strategies for New Testament Interpretation of Texts* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), pp. 42-62.

11.   On the role of topoi in rhetoric generally, see Sara Rubinelli, 'The Ancient Argumentative Game: τόποι and *loci* in Action', *Argumentation* 20 (2006), pp. 253-72 (255), and Johan C. Thom, '"The Mind is its Own Place": Defining the Topos', in John T. Fitzgerald, Thomas H. Olbricht and L. Michael White (eds.), *Early Christianity and Classical Culture: Comparative Studies in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (NovTSup, 110; Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 555-73. On the role of topoi in SRI, see Vernon K. Robbins *et al.* (eds.), *Foundations for Sociorhetorical Exploration: A Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity Reader* (Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity, 4; Atlanta: SBL, 2016), pp. 77-150.

12.   On the role of topoi in enthymemes, see Eugene E. Ryan, *Aristotle's Theory of Argumentation* (Montreal: Bellarmin, 1984), pp. 48-49. For the use of enthymematic analysis within SRI, see Vernon K. Robbins, 'From Enthymeme to Theology in Luke 11:1-13', in Richard P. Thompson and Thomas E. Phillips (eds.), *Literary Studies in Luke–Acts: Essays in Honor of Joseph B. Tyson* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), pp. 191-214. Robbins's analysis of enthymemes as truncated syllogisms is criticized by David E. Aune, 'The Use and Abuse of Enthymeme in New Testament Scholarship', *NTS* 49 (2003), pp. 299-320. Robbins is more interested in the various permutations of argumentation, while Aune wants to keep the enthymeme anchored in the ancient rhetorical tradition.

critical spatiality and conceptual blending theory.[13] The language of 'emergent structure' was employed to label novel and creative blends of traditions, storylines, spaces and persons in ways that became characteristic of Christian discourse.[14] These emergent structures carried the possibility to become generative contexts for further elaboration.[15] In good sociorhetorical form, these very emergences became foci for analysis, and in a way a kind of ultimate analysis, for here one attempts to understand and explain how the most creative edges of Christian discourse affected the diverse audiences that may have been listening. Thus, in a recent summary, Robbins speaks of analyzing the 'rhetorical force of the emerging Christian discourse' as the closing step in a sociorhetorical approach.[16] This climactic and wide-ranging task seeks to explicate the rhetorical effects of early Christian writings 'in relation to the social, cultural, ideological, and religious environments' of the Mediterranean world.[17]

Examining the rhetorical force of emerging discourse emphasizes the innovative elements of a text's persuasive presentation, believing that the fresh blends, compelling enthymemes, new insights and creative reconfigurations of existing traditions would have the greatest affect(s) on its audience(s). Embedded in the language of rhetorical 'force' is the notion that texts *do* things, that texts influence people to think and act differently. Yet, we must always keep in mind that despite all the intentions of the author and all the interpretive constraints put into a text, it may have widely divergent effects on later

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13.   Insights on critical spatiality were largely drawn from Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996), and insights on conceptual blending were taken from Giles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). See the collection of informative pieces on critical spatiality and conceptual blending in Robbins *et al.* (eds.), *Foundations for Sociorhetorical Exploration*, pp. 151-234 and 235-366, respectively.

14.   Robbins, *Invention of Christian Discourse*, pp. 188, 240-41, 261, 403-406.

15.   Robbins, *Invention of Christian Discourse*, pp. 270, 378.

16.   Vernon K. Robbins, 'Sociorhetorical Interpretation', in David E. Aune (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament* (Chichester: Wiley–Blackwell, 2010), pp. 192-208 (207).

17.   Robbins, 'Sociorhetorical Interpretation', p. 207.

audiences.[18] The compelling nature of the contents and configurations in a text is never fixed because the force must always have a point of impact—an audience in a particular context that hears/reads and responds to the text in numerous ways. The analysis of rhetorical force relies on other texts, either preceding texts that help illustrate the forces and rhetorolects deployed within the text under analysis, contemporaneous ancient texts that illuminate the contexts and responses of possible audiences or later texts that display further creative reconfigurations. This is necessarily a selective and limited picture, but it provides a window into the creativity of a text and its potential effects and a way to summarize key points of a sociorhetorical interpretation.

While this understanding of rhetorical force is native to sociorhetorical analysis, it bears some resemblance to the study of reception history. The analysis of *Wirkungsgeschichte* has played a key role in some commentaries.[19] Reception history can open up the interpretive potential of passages and display the multifaceted meanings of a text when seen from different

18.   Barthes's philosophical reflections on the death of the author and the freedom to read a text apart from the presumed author is also a recognition of the historical reality of divergent uses of a single text. Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image–Music–Text* (trans. Stephen Heath; New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), pp. 142-48. Paul Ricoeur speaks of the 'semantic autonomy' of the text apart from its author: 'What the text means now matters more than what the author meant when he [sic] wrote it' (*Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* [Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976], p. 30). Vanhoozer balances this disjunctive perspective by arguing that the communicative trustworthiness of language in texts can and should be resurrected and maintained by responsible authors and readers. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), pp. 204-207. The resulting view is that texts can truly and effectively communicate persuasion but can also be sites of further creativity and fresh, playful reconfigurations.

19.   Perhaps the best example of this is Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (EKKNT, 1; 4 vols.; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1985–2002). Bovon aims to have a dialogue with the interpretation and reception of Luke, but unfortunately does not include a history of interpretation at the end of his analysis of the annunciation. See François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), p. xiii.

angles.[20] Renewed interest in the reception history of Scripture has come to fruition in works like the *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* and the Blackwell Bible Commentary Series.[21] The analysis of rhetorical force can be distinguished from the variegated discipline of reception history in three ways. First, it limits its scope to the geography of biblical traditions from western Asia through the Mediterranean basin and to the time ranging from the origins of the Hebrew Scriptures in the Iron Age through late antiquity, because this geographical-chronological scope forms a cultural-rhetorical frame for the rhetorical dialects and topoi employed in early Christian discourse.[22] Secondly, it emphasizes the original sacred text under consideration, claiming that later reception and reconfiguration is often an outworking of forces that arise from the creative blends of prior traditions and topics in these early Christian writings. The reception of a text helps to reveal both the rhetorical resources it contains and *how* they were creatively blended and deployed. Thirdly, it considers not only extant receptions of the text under consideration but also hypothesizes about probable effects of a text (lost to history) in light of cultural and religious dynamics that would have carried a Christian text along so that it could have the effects that are still available to us. The analysis of rhetorical force sees the text under consideration as a

20.　Jonathan Roberts, 'Introduction', in Michael L. Lieb, Emma Mason and Jonathan Roberts (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 1-9 (3-4).

21.　The *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* is currently midway through publishing an anticipated thirty-five volumes (ed. Hans-Josef Klauck *et al.*; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002–). The Blackwell Bible Commentary Series aims to explore what a sacred text 'can mean and what it can do, what it has meant and what it has done, in the many contexts in which it operates' (Ian Boxall, *Matthew Through the Centuries* [Oxford: Wiley–Blackwell, 2019], p. xvii). The Luke volume in the Blackwell Commentary Series has not appeared yet.

22.　Thus, the analysis of rhetorical force is again resonant with Robinson and Koester when they urge interpreters to set aside canonical boundaries and consider the biblical text within the broader Christian and Hellenistic-Roman literature of the first three centuries of the common era. See Helmut Koester, 'Conclusion: The Intention and Scope of Trajectories', in James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 269-80 (273).

snapshot of the cultural resources available to an author that flow into and out of that rhetorical moment in early Christianity.[23]

The aim of this investigation is to explain and exemplify how the analysis of rhetorical force can be carried out. Drawing on the subtitle, the first step presented in this first section offered a working definition and understanding of rhetorical force as employed in SRI. The second step is to present a few of the ways that rhetorical force can work—to unpack the dynamics of rhetorical force. The third and final step is to explore a range of options for exploring rhetorical force by examining discourses that illuminate Luke's presentation of the annunciation to Mary in 1.26-38.

The Dynamics of Rhetorical Force

With this operating definition of rhetorical force in place, I can move on to describing some of the ways that rhetorical force works. In other words, what are the dynamics of this force? The theoretical possibilities here are innumerable, for a text can have persuasive effects in a myriad of ways on a wide range of different audiences. The SRI analytic illuminates certain dynamics of rhetorical force in distinctive ways. This attempt to theorize the dynamics of rhetorical force will examine rhetorical invention, conceptual blending and counterfactual thinking as three possibilities. These three dynamics are not the end but rather the beginning of an exploration of the various ways that rhetorical force might work.

The study of rhetorical invention draws on both classical sources and more recent theories to offer insights for analyzing rhetorical force, especially in terms of the very first impact of a text—its impact on the author(s) that composed it. Developments in the study of rhetorical invention in the twentieth century drew attention to the fact that rhetorical invention does not merely take preexisting truth and make it compelling, but it actually participates in the creation of truth.[24] This epistemological and/or heuristic approach

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23. In this way the analysis of rhetorical force resonates with the fluidity of textual boundaries explored by Brennan W. Breed, *Nomadic Text: A Theory of Biblical Reception History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), pp. 1-6.

24. Robert Scott, 'On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic', *Central States Speech Journal* 18 (1967), pp. 9-17 (12). Scott reaches back to the first sophistic, and Gorgias

construed rhetorical invention as a way for writers to explore possibilities beyond what was already known, to reach new understanding or insight.[25] The images, language, topoi, rhetorolects and other resources available to an author/speaker are not limiting but generative, for language has the power to create meaning in the rhetorical moment.[26] The role of rhetorical force within SRI resonates with this epistemic approach to invention because it seeks to analyze the creative processes at work in the dialectic of the author and context that generates emergent structures with fresh persuasive power.

Hawhee posits that rhetorical invention should be considered in the middle voice where 'an emergent subject becomes a force in the emerging discourse'.[27] She points out how Gorgias is credited with the invention and application of several figures of speech such as tropes, metaphors, hypallage and apostrophe, many of which are drawn from concepts of movement or change.[28] The rhetor embodies and expresses in speech these movements and changes and seeks to thus enact the same movement or change in the audience. All these movements are caused by forces, forces acting on and adapted by the rhetor to the situation at hand. These forces are condensed into the power (δύναμις) of the words. Thus, invention in the middle voice is rhetorical performance, which selects and amplifies certain forces, cuts out others, shapes them into language and seeks to move the audience.[29] The audience is crucial to the creative process of rhetorical invention, for the audience provides the issue or question that prompts the rhetor's invention. The audience must also receive and affirm the rhetoric in order to activate and sustain its force. In the rhetorical performance, the forces brought together in the *kairos* form an emerging *ethos* for the rhetor who channels the available forces into

in particular to explore this notion. There is an interesting connection to Hawhee's work discussed below.

25.   Janice M. Lauer, *Invention in Rhetoric and Composition* (Reference Guides to Rhetoric and Composition; West Lafayette, IN: Parlor Press, 2004), p. 80.

26.   Ann Berthoff, *The Making of Meaning: Metaphors, Models, and Maxims for Writing Teachers* (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton–Cook, 1981), p. 70.

27.   Debra Hawhee, 'Kairotic Encounters', in Janet Atwill and Janice M. Lauer (eds.), *Perspectives on Rhetorical Invention* (Tennessee Studies in Literature, 39; Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), pp. 16-35 (17).

28.   Hawhee, 'Kairotic Encounters', p. 22.

29.   Robert Scott, 'On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic: Ten Years Later', *Central States Speech Journal* 27 (1976), pp. 258-66 (261-62).

logoi that create a *dunamis* that can move the audience.[30] The perspective of rhetorical invention displays that a rhetor selects some forces, is altered by some forces, redirects some forces and terminates others. When Luke writes about Mary, he is shaped by forces that come upon him and is shaped in turn by the words that he records in his particular *kairotic* encounter within 'the social, cultural, ideological, and religious environments' of the Mediterranean world. He composes the story of the annunciation aiming to generate persuasive force that leads audiences to act in certain ways.[31]

As mentioned above, rhetorical force entered into the SRI approach initially through the notion of emergent structures in texts, structures that enacted fresh reconfigurations or blends of previously existing topoi, characters, spaces, rhetorolects or other features of available traditions.[32] The theoretical basis for this kind of creativity was drawn from the domain of cognitive science, especially the explication of conceptual blending by Fauconnier and Turner in *The Way We Think*.[33] Fauconnier and Turner frame their entire work as a scientific study of the nature and mechanics of the imagination.[34] New ideas, fresh insights and emergent structures do not arise *ex nihilo* but are creative and selective blends of existing 'mental spaces' that have an

30.   Hawhee, 'Kairotic Encounters', p. 32.

31.   That Luke writes with an eye to persuasion and with some of the techniques of ancient rhetoric is widely affirmed. For some examples, see William S. Kurz, 'Hellenistic Rhetoric in the Christological Proof of Luke–Acts', *CBQ* 42 (1980), pp. 171-95; Mikeal C. Parsons, 'Luke and the *Progymnasmata*: A Preliminary Investigation into the Preliminary Exercises', in Todd C. Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele (eds.), *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse* (SymS, 20; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), pp. 42-64; and Sean A. Adams, 'Luke and *Progymnasmata*: Rhetorical Handbooks, Rhetorical Sophistication and Genre Selection', in Matthew Ryan Hague and Andrew W. Pitts (eds.), *Ancient Education and Early Christianity* (LNTS, 533; London: Bloomsbury T. & T. Clark, 2016), pp. 137-54.

32.   Robbins, *Invention of Christian Discourse*, pp. 79-83.

33.   See the frequent references to this development in cognitive science in Robbins, *Invention of Christian Discourse*, pp. 8, 11, 116-18. For a fuller description and application of conceptual blending that illustrates how it can work in SRI, see Robert von Thaden Jr, *Sex, Christ, and Embodied Cognition: Paul's Wisdom for Corinth* (ESEC, 16; Dorset, UK: Deo Publishing, 2012).

34.   Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, pp. 8-11.

interesting collection of similarities and differences.[35] Furthermore, these 'blends are not only possible but also so compelling that they come to represent, mentally, a new reality in culture'.[36] That is, creative blends are often influential and persuasive: to persuade is to convince someone of something new or different, so being creative and being persuasive are mutually constitutive.[37]

The operation of the human imagination is fluid, flexible, variegated and nearly infinite, but Fauconnier and Turner provide a description of the dynamics by which it works. Blends occur within a conceptual integration network. This network includes at least two input spaces, a generic space and a blend, and possibly many more of each in more complex blends. The two inputs provide various points that hold together in a cognitive pack, which are often akin to a topos in SRI analysis. The generic space combines the structures that the inputs share, and the blend then combines the relevant selected elements of the generic space plus emergent structures that arise by composition (new relationships among prior elements), completion (new elements or structures needed to make the blend coherent) or elaboration (new elements that arise from various ways when the blend is run in a kind of simulation).[38] Blends often work due to compression—the human ability to compress meanings and operations into a single image, symbol or term (e.g. virginity is not only about the lack of sexual intimacy but carries other strong notions of youth, moral purity, social status and even power).[39] Blends can occur at various levels since mental spaces are typically framed by larger mental spaces (e.g. the symbol of a tree is embedded in the larger mental space of plant life). Blends can occur at the level of topoi (smaller clusters of images and

35. Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, pp. 21-22. See also the description of creativity as the projection of selected properties into the development of novel ideas in Thomas B. Ward and Yulia Kolomyts, 'Cognition and Creativity', in James C. Kaufman and Robert J. Sternberg (eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 93-112 (97).

36. Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, p. 21.

37. Aaron Kozbelt, Ronald A. Beghetto and Mark A. Runco, 'Theories of Creativity', in James C. Kaufman and Robert J. Sternberg (eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 20-47 (24).

38. Fauconnier and Turner describe this blending process in *The Way We Think*, pp. 47-48.

39. Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, p. 92.

meanings) or at the level of rhetorolects (larger frames that contain wider references and overarching sense). These blends can become 'entrenched'—what was once emergent can become stable and traditional, fodder for new blends.[40]

Fauconnier and Turner provide a list of 'vital relations' that help structure blends (e.g. change, part-whole, time, analogy, etc.) and various types of blends (simplex, mirror, single-scope), but they highlight double-scope blends as one of the most interesting and creative (and thus also most persuasive).[41] A double-scope blend occurs when the input spaces have very different or clashing structures or frames. For example, the statement 'You are digging your own grave' clashes over intentionality and cause-effect. On one hand you are doing this yourself on purpose (reflexive action input), but a grave can only be dug for a dead person (burial input) with some influence from an 'unwitting failure' input. This conflicting blend results in the notion that the grave causes the death rather than death leading to a grave. In other words, a smaller and logically consequent action actually precedes and causes a major catastrophe.[42] Luke achieves a double scope blend of a young Israelite girl who has no named family and yet is a person 'highly favored by God' (1.28) by closing with the notion of a character who is a 'mere' servant yet a servant of the almighty God (1.38). Thus, in the analysis of rhetorical force, one can attend to the various input spaces, some of the ways that blends work (elaboration, compression, vital relations), and pay special attention to the intersection of inputs, topoi or other elements that are in tension with one another and generate emergent structures that are particularly creative and persuasive.

The dynamic of 'counterfactuality' can also play a role in emerging structures and their rhetorical force.[43] A consideration of counterfactual thinking

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40. Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, p. 103.

41. Fauconnier and Turner*, The Way We Think*, pp. 101, 119 and 131 (respectively).

42. See how this is unpacked by Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, pp. 131-34.

43. L. Gregory Bloomquist, 'Subverted by Joy: Suffering and Joy in Paul's Letter to the Philippians', *Int* 61 (2007), pp. 270-82, and Ehud Ben Zvi, 'The Voice and Role of Counterfactual Memory in the Construction of Exile and Return: Considering Jeremiah 40:7-12', in Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin (eds.), *The Concept of Exile*

appears in Fauconnier and Turner's work, but it also represents a long-standing arena of research in social psychology and cognitive science.[44] Some analyses of counterfactual thinking deal only with attempts to re-think and cope with disappointing circumstances from the past: 'If only I had ... '.[45] However, counterfactuality can be used in other creative ways. People show a tendency to run mental simulations of negative events that they witness or experience in order to change future behavior or empathize with others.[46] Fauconnier and Turner emphasize the futuristic and hypothetical nature of counterfactual thinking that deals with various alternative possibilities and outcomes: 'I wonder what would happen if I ... '.[47] The creative element of each temporal direction and mode is evident. Looking into past events and considering what 'might' have happened can actually lead to fresh interpretations of those events, especially when the radical surprises of divine activity provide a plethora of new meanings.[48] Or, counterfactual thinking might come into play in seemingly impossible present situations, such as how a pregnant woman could still be a virgin, as in Mary's question in Lk. 1.34.[49] Finally, future-oriented counterfactual thinking engages experience and the imagination to consider a range of possible juxtaposed circumstances and all of the potential outcomes.

in Ancient Israel and its Historical Contexts (BZAW, 104; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), pp. 169-88.

44.   See Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, pp. 217-19 and the collected essays in Neal J. Roese and James M. Olson (eds.), *What Might Have Been: The Social Psychology of Counterfactual Thinking* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1995).

45.   For an example of this, see Neal J. Roese, 'Counterfactual Thinking', *Psychological Bulletin* 121 (1997), pp. 133-48 (134).

46.   Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, 'The Simulation Heuristic', in Daniel Kahneman, Paul Slovic and Amos Tversky (eds.), *Judgment under Certainty: Heuristics and Biases* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 201-208.

47.   Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, p. 219.

48.   For examples of this process, see Cecelia L. Thomas and Harriet L. Cohen, 'Understanding Spiritual Meaning Making with Older Adults', *Journal of Theory Construction & Testing* 10 (2006), pp. 65-70, and JoAnn Vis and Heather Marie Boynton, 'Spirituality and Transcendent Meaning Making: Possibilities for Enhancing Posttraumatic Growth', *Journal of Religion & Spirituality* 27 (2008), pp. 69-86.

49.   Or, how suffering can possibly be considered as joy, so Bloomquist, 'Subverted by Joy', pp. 280-82.

Rhetorical invention, conceptual blending and counterfactuality present three ways to theorize the dynamics of rhetorical force. They capture the creative formulation of meaning making and explore how that may affect a variety of audiences. Many other theories of meaning making exist and may provide additional insight into the dynamics of rhetorical force. Yet, with these three in place, I can now turn to explore the points of impact of rhetorical force, recalling that rhetorical force is not a single, abstract feature but a potentiality that comes to realization as an author speaks to a particular audience. The following seven categories provide a typology to help identify the possible domains of rhetorical forces. These seek to be comprehensive, but they are not exhaustive:

    (1) The influence of previous Jewish traditions
    (2) The influence of previous (non-Jewish) Mediterranean traditions[50]
    (3) The influence of the passage on the book/corpus
    (4) The influence on the ideal (Christian) audience
    (5) The influence on other contemporaneous Christian writings
    (6) The influence on a general, Mediterranean (non-Christian) audience
    (7) The influence on later religious traditions and practices
    (8) The influence on developments in the larger Mediterranean world

These categories require a few more words of explanation. The categories contain the three time elements of past, present and future, much as was seen in the analysis of counterfactuality. One can explore the force of past traditions on the author with a nod to the creative and fluid subject of the rhetor.[51] One can explore the force of the text on contemporary audiences. And one can explore the effects of this text on later religious and cultural developments. While the word 'traditions' will often rely primarily on extant texts, one can also consider material remains (e.g. art and architecture) or other practices and resources as well. Good rhetorical force commentary may consider only one of these in depth, but most of the time such analysis will need to consider a combination of forces active in and through a text. The choice of possible dynamics and points of impact lies with the interpreter, the

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50.   While Jews and Jewish religion were surely part of Mediterranean culture, they were a significant subculture, and sometimes counterculture, that had particular influence on the authors and audiences of the New Testament and later related literature. Thus, Jewish traditions are due special attention.

51.   This is as noted in the discussion above on Hawhee's work.

available evidence and the ways in which the text seems to have exerted its potential force, which may be rather surprising.

Rhetorical Force and Discourses about Mary

Now I will turn from theory to practice. The rest of this essay will explore the various categories of impact for rhetorical force highlighting the ways in which rhetorical invention, conceptual blending and counterfactuality may be at work using Lk. 1.26-38, the story of the annunciation, as a test case. The following discussion is meant to be a representative example of the discussion thus far and provide possible directions for exploring the rhetorical force of early Christian writings.

The Influence of Previous Jewish Traditions

This is the level at which much of New Testament scholarship has already been engaging in some consideration of rhetorical force for a long time—how do the authors of the New Testament adopt and adapt prior Jewish traditions? SRI has expanded this in two ways. First, it expanded by considering Jewish tradition beyond the canonical documents, especially deuterocanonical and pseudepigraphal writings. Secondly, it expanded by considering the ways in which the New Testament authors have profoundly reconfigured these traditions for their rhetorical moment, rather than just seeking to find connections and coherence with these traditions. This and the next category primarily look backward at the forces that have come before the author and the rhetorical moment captured in the text under analysis to see how those potential textual forces and resources are employed and reshaped in emerging ways.

Many scholars have drawn attention to the various traditions of the Hebrew Scriptures that Luke selects in the composition of 1.26-38.[52] The narrative includes the theme of the righteous but barren woman who receives a

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52.   For examples, see Kenneth D. Litwak, *Echoes of Scripture in Luke–Acts: Telling the History of God's People Intertextually* (JSNTSup, 282; London: T. & T. Clark, 2005), pp. 66-69; John Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20* (WBC, 35a; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1989), pp. 41-43; and Michael Wolter, *The Gospel According to Luke: Volume 1 (1–9:50)* (trans. Wayne Coppins and Christoph Heilig; Baylor–Mohr Siebeck Studies in Early Christianity, 4; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), pp. 77-84.

child from God, as exemplified in the lives of Sarai (Gen. 17.15-22) and Hannah (1 Sam. 1). The double mention of David's name, and especially the language of v. 32, reverberates with God's covenant with David in 2 Sam. 7.12-16.[53] The use of these two traditions is interesting because of the way Luke blends them together in a way that the Hebrew canon does not. Luke inserts a righteous but childless woman into the Davidic lineage, drawing the two storylines together to cast Jesus as both promised son and king. Luke must also deal with the counterfactual dilemma of how Mary can become pregnant and still remain a virgin. Neither Sarai nor Hannah was a virgin, so Luke must creatively make sense of this scenario in a way that is compelling to the audience by engaging the topos of virginity with the associated concept of righteousness and purity.[54] Luke finds nothing in the Hebrew Scriptures to help him here; he does not cite Isa. 7.14 as Matthew does. But relevant Jewish tradition can be found in the story of Joseph and Asenath, where the name 'Joseph' and the topic of virginity appear together as they do in Lk. 1.27.[55] In *Jos. Asen.* 4.9, Joseph and Asenath as virgins have the Spirit of the Lord *upon* them (ἐπί; cf. Lk. 1.35) and have God's favor (χάρις; cf. Lk. 1.28, 30). In 8.10, Joseph blesses Asenath in the name of the 'most high' (ὕψιστος) and the 'mighty one' (δυνατός) so that God might give life to her body. Luke 1.35 brings together these same two terms with the topos of God giving life, this time the life of Jesus in Mary's womb. *Joseph and Asenath* stresses the purity and ongoing virginity of its two main characters, delaying their consummation and then protecting her marital fidelity. Luke draws mildly on these forces to portray Mary as righteous and pure, aspects that are confirmed by her presumably innocent and sincere question about her virginity (v. 34) and by her obedience at the end of the story (v. 38). Luke makes a primary point about the Davidic significance of Jesus (vv. 32-33), but in the course of doing

53. Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 88.

54. This statement assumes Luke as a single author for the sake of simplicity. Luke's Gospel and many other biblical texts probably have a substantial history of oral transmission and written editing. This statement and others compress that process to help illuminate the creative and compelling elements.

55. Foskett discusses *Joseph and Asenath* as part of her survey of ancient notions of virginity that impacted the portrayal and reception of Mary. See Mary F. Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived: Mary and Classical Representations of Virginity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 99-104.

so he creatively blends in traditions and topoi about virginity to deal with the counterfactual situation that will have ongoing rhetorical force as shown be-low.

The Influence of Previous Mediterranean (non-Jewish) Traditions
While Jewish traditions clearly have a strong influence on the communities that produced and used the documents of the New Testament, Jewish communities lived as part of the broader Mediterranean world. Also, their writings, and the oral traditions that preceded them, must have made enough sense within that world to spread through that world with increasing converts and influence. The store of texts and traditions that precede the New Testament is vast, so it is a challenge for explicators of rhetorical force to try to discern and select a few items from the broader Mediterranean milieu that might have influenced the rhetorical moment captured in these Christian texts. Then, once we have selected these, we take the even more challenging step of trying to identify how they might feed into the concoction of forces swirling in our text.

It is hard to imagine that traditions about Zeus impregnating women with sons ('of God') who then go on to do great deeds and even become gods would not come to mind in a general Mediterranean audience that heard the story of Mary in Lk. 1.26-38.[56] The women of these stories are typically por-trayed as beautiful but also wise and faithful: Semele mother of Dionysius (Nonnus, *Dion.* 7.22-25), Leda mother of Helen (Hyginus, *Astron.* 1.8), Danae mother of Perseus (Homer, *Il.* 14.319-329) and Alcmene mother of Heracles (Hesiod, [*Scut.*] 1.1-9). Luke reconfigures the honorable character

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56.   Brown is interested in the origin of the virgin birth stories when he says that 'one can scarcely attribute to pagan converts what we know of the setting of the vir-ginal conception'. See Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in The Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (New York: Double-day, 2nd edn, 1999), p. 523. However, our question here is not about the *origins* of Luke's version of Jesus' birth but rather how it would have been received and made sense of by potential converts, especially those who knew little of the Old Testament. Robbins notes the lack of analysis of the reconfiguration of 'Mediterranean stories' in this 'multicultural' text. See Vernon K. Robbins, 'Socio-rhetorical Criticism: Mary, Elizabeth, and the Magnificat as a Test Case', in Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Edgar V. McKnight (eds.), *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament* (JSNTSup, 109; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), p. 176.

of the female lead of his story, expressing it in the divine favor that Mary enjoys (v. 28) and again in her obedience (v. 38). In most cases, Zeus arrives in some other-than-human form, and the conception and birth of the child occurs under numinous conditions.[57] Semele dies in a theophany, and Dionysius is gestated in the thigh of Zeus. Leda is visited by Zeus in the form of a swan, and Helen arrives in an egg. Danae is impregnated in a dungeon cell by a shower of golden rain. According to Aeschylus's retelling, Zeus impregnates Io with his breath (*Suppl.* 17-18, 40-44). In Luke's account, Mary presses the angel for details about the conception, and the angel's reply is allusive and metaphorical: The Holy Spirit will 'come upon' you and the power of God will 'overshadow' you. This latter term may recall the cloud of God filling the Tabernacle (Exod. 40.35; cf. Mk 9.7).[58] Luke, like these Hellenistic traditions, attempts to explain the supernatural conception.[59] However, Luke's reconfiguration spiritualizes the event ('the Holy Spirit will come upon you') rather than finding alternative physical means for impregnation (e.g. swans, rain, breath, etc.). The main point of Luke's rhetorical moment is the magnification of Jesus and his divine origins as a preparation for his heroic career.[60]

57.   Strauss says that parallels between the annunciation of Jesus' birth and pagan accounts of divine and miraculous births are few and unconvincing. See Mark L. Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke–Acts* (JSNTSup, 110; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), p. 93. Nolland (*Luke*, p. 45) discusses possible connections between this story and miraculous divine conceptions in the broader Hellenistic background but only cites disjunctions. Bovon (*Luke 1*, pp. 44-48) states that the 'legend of the annunciation developed in a Hellenistic-Jewish milieu' and even that the birth narratives 'depended on Egyptian concepts', but his commentary primarily engages Jewish texts.

58.   Wolter, *Luke*, pp. 83-84. Religious cultures across the Mediterranean elide the role of the male in conception of important figures while keeping the female centrally in view: Luke in the annunciation, the various Hellenistic-Roman stories referenced above and the absence of an account of Manoah 'lying with' the mother of Samson in Judg. 13. See Andrew T. Lincoln, 'Luke and Jesus' Conception: A Case of Double Paternity', *JBL* 132 (2013), pp. 639-58 (651-52).

59.   Charles H. Talbert considers a birth from a human mother and a divine father, often through non-sexual means, as the best cultural pattern available to Luke (*Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel* [Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, rev. edn, 2002], pp. 19-24 [22-23]).

60.   Green*, Luke*, p. 90. In this respect, the Hellenistic-Roman parallels are more fitting than biblical ones, which do not emphasize the future accomplishments of the

The children of Zeus enumerated above often have momentous prophecies that surround their births: Dionysius is 'twice-born' in certain versions of the myth (*Homeric Hymn* 1, *To Dionysius*), Helen would have the beauty to launch a thousand ships, Perseus was prophesied to kill his grandfather, Heracles would be a great leader (Homer, *Il.* 19.95-100). Luke follows in this same vein, telling the mysterious birth of a divinely conceived child in a good woman, prompting the audience to expect the momentous predictions about his authoritative rule in 1.32-33.[61] Thus, Luke maintains the main point of many of these Mediterranean tales—the character of the child and hero-to-be—while blending in somewhat different resources (probably from the Hebrew Scriptures) to help explain the divine origin of the child.

The Influence of the Passage on the Book/Corpus
A given text also has a rhetorical impact on the rest of the work that contains it. What an author has written provides resources and constraints that influence the progress and coherence of the rest of the work. This is especially true for the opening of a work like Lk. 1.26-38. This sets tone, characters and themes for Luke's entire opus.[62] What we find here is a string of connected rhetorical moments that all bear some influence on one another and in a complex fashion are shaped by the author(s) to meet the various needs of the audience. While the previous two categories primarily looked back to find previous resources that might have impacted or been reconfigured by an author,

child. The absence of this component in Hebrew Bible annunciation stories is noted by Brown (*Birth*, p. 309). Prescendi affirms the link between divine paternity, virgin mothers and the 'illustrious future' (p. 14) of their child in Francesca Prescendi, 'Divine Fathers, Virgin Mothers and Founding Children: Italic Myths about Conception and Birth', in C. Clivaz *et al.* (eds.), *Infancy Gospels: Stories and Identities* (WUNT, 281; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), pp. 3-14.

61.   This combination of supernatural prodigies and prophecies of future greatness is noted by Charles H. Talbert, 'Prophecies of Future Greatness: The Contributions of Greco-Roman Biographies to an Understanding of Luke 1:5–4:1', in Charles H. Talbert (ed.), *Reading Luke–Acts in its Mediterranean Milieu* (NovTSup, 107; Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 65-78 (71). Luke 1.26-38 is entitled 'Jesus, God's Act' in Talbert, *Reading Luke*, pp. 19-24.

62.   The force of relevant passages could be explored across books or entire corpora in the instance of Pauline or Johannine writings.

this category can look backward or forward depending on where a given passage falls in the larger work or corpus.

Mary appears as a silent character a few more times in the infancy narrative (Lk. 2.5, 22, 33, 43), but twice Luke tells his audience that she 'treasured all these things in her heart' (2.19, 51), probably indicating Mary's insight into the divine events afoot in her son's life.[63] Mary is also referred to in 8.19-21 and possibly 11.27-28. These passages initially seem to contrast Jesus' mother with those who 'hear and obey' the word of God, but the author and audience have already been impacted by the rhetorical force of the earlier story where Mary obediently accepts the angel's word (1.38). These passages have a backwash force that causes the reader to understand the annunciation even more through the lens of obedience, once again making her a model of discipleship. Corresponding to her role in the Gospel, Mary also appears at the beginning of Acts where she joins with the other believers (1.14) and presumably shares in the coming of the Spirit (2.1).[64] Mary serves as a model of discipleship, and female discipleship in particular.[65] This sets the reader on a path to expect other positive female characters in Luke–Acts: Anna (Lk. 2.36-38), female supporters of Jesus (Lk. 8.1-3), a believing hemorrhaging woman (Lk. 8.43-48), another Mary (Lk. 10.38-42) and Lydia, the first convert in Europe (Acts 16.11-15). Thus, Luke's early telling of this story bears a force on later positive portrayals of women, but it is also influenced by later statements about obedience that reveal part of the intended rhetorical force of that earlier episode.

The Influence on the Ideal (Christian) Audience
Exploring how the passage under this lens meets the immediate rhetorical aims of the author(s) for the intended or ideal audience is perhaps the most natural component of the analysis of rhetorical force. This is the consideration

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63. Bovon, *Luke 1*, p. 92.

64. Surprisingly, Rubin largely ignores these later appearances of Mary in Luke's narrative. See Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 7-8. Similarly, Myers stresses the absence and silence of Mary in Luke's narrative after the Magnificat. See Alicia D. Myers, *Blessed among Women? Mothers and Motherhood in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 58.

65. Raymond E. Brown *et al.* (eds.), *Mary in the New Testament* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), pp. 162-63, 177.

that comes out most strongly in the review of the development of SRI above and the discussion by Hawhee—the text before us is a snapshot of a rhetorical moment. SRI brings the context to bear on understanding a text by considering social and cultural intertexture, historical intertexture and social-cultural texture. In rhetorical force, we take that information, together with a larger picture of the context gleaned from the book, and focus on the impact this particular constellation of forces might have had on its first audience. As best as we can, we ascertain the specific context of the book and seek to trace how the creative combination of traditions, forces, meanings and techniques explicated in the preceding components of sociorhetorical analysis may have exerted its force in that setting, evaluating how it may have affected its target audience.

Luke states his purpose explicitly in 1.4. He wants his audience, here named only as Theophilus, to 'realize the reliability of the things about which you have been instructed'.[66] Given the rhetorical moment and the configuration of resources in 1.26-38, what affect might this passage have on the audience? Luke emphasizes through repetitive texture that everything about the birth of Jesus was divinely initiated and orchestrated: God sends the angel (v. 26), God is with Mary (v. 28), God has favor upon Mary (v. 30), the Most High will be identified as the boy's father (v. 32), God will give him the throne of David (v. 32), God's Spirit and power will accomplish this miracle (v. 35), God's words never fail (v. 37) and Mary is God's servant (v. 38).[67] If one takes Theophilus as representative of a larger audience, Luke is speaking to Gentiles but also to those who know the traditions of Israel concerning the

66.   On the notion of 'reliability' in Lk. 1.4, see I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian & Theologian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 3rd edn, 1988), p. 85. Loveday Alexander prefers the translation 'assured knowledge' to contrast the Gospel with mere word of mouth in *The Preface to Luke's Gospel: Literary Convention and Social Context in Luke 1.1-4 and Acts 1.1* (SNTSMS, 78; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 140-41.

67.   The activity of God in the infancy narratives is summarized by John Squires, *The Plan of God in Luke–Acts* (SNTSMS, 76; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 27-32, and Darrell L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts* (Biblical Theology of the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), pp. 100-103.

person and ministry of Jesus.[68] Both Jews and Gentiles may need to be convinced that God, specifically the God of Israel, was definitively at work in the life of Jesus, and Luke repeatedly emphasizes this theme in the speeches of Acts (2.22-24; 10.38; 13.30-32; 17.30-31). While Acts stresses that God was at work in Jesus' ministry and resurrection, Lk. 1.26-38 emphasizes that divine involvement goes back to the very conception of Jesus. In a competitive religious landscape, this claim raises the status of Jesus.

This leads into a second element common throughout the infancy narrative—the connection of Jesus to the traditions of Israel, and specifically David, in Lk. 1.27 and 32-33. Luke draws on Jewish intertextual forces, focuses them on the body of Mary, and draws in elements of apocalyptic rhetorolect with the announcement of an angel (1.26, 38) and references to the power of God (1.34, 37) to confirm that Jesus fulfills an ancient prophecy to David. This may have added more credibility to the story among Roman members of Luke's audience because of the tradition's antiquity,[69] while also serving an apologetic aim regarding Jesus' status as Messiah among Jewish hearers.[70] Luke weaves these two forces together to reinforce one another: the direct and regular involvement of God in the coming of Jesus certifies his status as a regal Messiah.

The Influence on Other Contemporaneous Christian Writings

Comparing and contrasting documents within the canon has been done by typical New Testament scholarship, but SRI can bring its attention to rhetoric and rhetorical forces to illuminate new dimensions of this familiar arena. Rather than seeking to trace textual, conceptual or historical genealogies, SRI can draw attention to the creative ways in which various compositions in the New Testament draw on different or similar traditions in different or similar ways to meet different or similar rhetorical moments. Sometimes these will involve points of connection, but more often we will see more clearly the ways that the available rhetorical forces are being deployed in our own text

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68. Alexander, *Preface*, p. 192, and Jennifer M. Creamer, Aida B. Spencer and Francois P. Vijoen, 'Who is Theophilus? Discovering the Original Reader of Luke–Acts', *IDS* 48 (2014), pp. 1-7 (3-4).

69. Philip F. Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke–Acts* (SNTSMS, 57; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 214.

70. Robert L. Brawley, *Luke–Acts and the Jews: Conflict, Apology, and Conciliation* (SBLMS, 33; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), pp. 155-59.

by looking at how a roughly contemporaneous Christian text worked with a similar set of available forces to address a different rhetorical moment.

Matthew's Gospel has the other major narrative development of the story of Mary. The genealogy of Mt. 1.1-17 sets up the reader in a curious way. Three of the five women mentioned in the genealogy could have their sexual purity questioned: Tamar pretended to be a prostitute and slept with her father-in-law, Rahab was labelled a prostitute (v. 5; cf. Heb. 11.31) and the unnamed 'wife of Uriah' was raped by David (v. 6).[71] Then, the reader comes to Mary in v. 16—perhaps she too could have her purity and virginity questioned (as was done by Celsus [Origen, *Cels*. 1.32] and in the *Toledoth Yeshu*).[72] Matthew answers this very charge repeatedly in vv. 18-25.[73] Mary was engaged but was found to be with child 'before they lived together', and this child was 'from the Holy Spirit' (v. 18). An angel appears to Joseph and affirms that 'the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit' (v. 20). This has a precedent grounded in the Hebrew Scriptures, for 'the virgin shall

71.   The other major interpretive perspective regarding the women in Matthew's genealogy is that they all represent characters on the margins of Jewish identity. Including them points to a motif related to outsiders in general and women in particular in Matthew's Gospel. See E. Anne Clements, *Mothers on the Margin? The Significance of the Women in Matthew's Genealogy* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2014), pp. 3-5 and 194-230. This emphasis is present, and it coexists with sexual accusations against these women.

72.   This possibility is affirmed by Brown (*Birth*, pp. 73-74). Accusations of Jesus' illegitimacy are emphasized by Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), pp. 195-97 and Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Doubleday), pp. 15-20. However, Crossan has argued that the primary rhetorical aim of the pre-Gospel claims of Mary's virginity was to outdo claims about the miraculous births of Roman emperors. See John Dominic Crossan, 'Virgin Mother or Bastard Child?', *HTS* 59 (2003), pp. 663-91 (686-89). Such a Roman framing is also suggested by Amy-Jill Levine and Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Luke* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 36.

73.   Edwin D. Freed, 'The Women in Matthew's Genealogy', *JSNT* (1987), pp. 3-19, and Robert C. Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings: Early Encounters of Jews, Christians, and Muslims* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 463-64. However, Keener disagrees, saying that Matthew is stressing the non-Jewish background of these women (Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], p. 79).

conceive' (v. 23). Finally, Matthew ends the story emphasizing again that Joseph 'had no marital relations with her' (v. 25). Luke appears to emphasize the righteousness and obedience of Mary as exemplified in her virginity, but he does this in a positive way to stress the divine origins of Jesus rather than defending her sexual purity.[74] Matthew, on the other hand, appears to be engaged in an apology for the virginity of Mary, who may have been under some suspicion in his rhetorical situation.[75]

Mary appears briefly in a few other texts of the New Testament. In Jn 2.5 in the story of the Wedding at Cana, she says to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you'—appropriate advice coming from the one who obediently accepted the word of the Lord to her (Lk. 1.38). Paul picks up on some elements of the Davidic lineage of Jesus, which may have been affirmed matrilineally (Rom. 1.3; cf. Lk. 1.27, 32),[76] but Paul also develops birth traditions about Jesus in ways that fit his own distinctive arguments about the Law and salvation (Gal. 4.4).[77] In sum, Luke's situation appears less polemical than Matthew's, all of the authors place Mary within the family line of David and Paul shows how flexible Jesus' birth can be to rhetorical reconfiguration. The annunciation in Luke emphasizes the superiority of Jesus over John and touches on Luke's theme of the Holy Spirit.[78] Luke's story is focused on the

74.   Brown *et al.* state that Luke intended to portray a virginal conception even if he did not stress it as much as Matthew (*Mary*, p. 120). Given that Luke later sets Jesus' birth in the context of a census ordered by Augustus (2.1-20), Crossan's thesis about the virgin birth functioning primarily in response to Roman imperial birth stories is more fitting for Luke's framing than for Matthew's.

75.   Rubin (*Mother*, pp. 15-16) treats the apologetic and polemical problems faced by early Christians about the origins of Jesus as the primary rhetorical setting for discussing Mary. This fits Matthew's Gospel better than Luke's.

76.   Matthew W. Bates, 'A Christology of Incarnation and Enthronement: Romans 1.3-4 as Unified, Nonadoptionist, and Nonconciliatory', *CBQ* 77 (2015), pp. 107-27 (117-21). However, Brown *et al.* are agnostic about whether Rom. 1.3 makes any reference to Mary (*Mary*, pp. 34-38).

77.   Paul probably refers to Jesus as 'born of a woman' in order to affirm his humanity. See Brown *et al.*, *Mary*, pp. 41-44, and Klaus Scholtissek, '"Geboren aus einer Frau, geboren unter das Gesetz" (Gal 4,4): Die christologisch-soteriologische Bedeutung des irdischen Jesus bei Paulus', in Hans Hübner (ed.), *Paulinische Christologie: Exegetische Beiträge* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), pp. 194-219 (200-202).

78.   Both are noted by Gregg, *Shared Stories*, pp. 470-71.

character and the body of Mary, for the miraculous conception that takes place in her reveals the activity of God and the exalted status of Jesus in ways that Luke wants his audience to realize are fully reliable.

The Influence on a General, Mediterranean (non-Christian) Audience
The development of rhetorical force within SRI features this particular affect: How does this New Testament text emerge into the world around it? How would the 'average' person in the Mediterranean world, especially someone unfamiliar with Judaism and early Christianity, be affected by the creative discourses emerging in these early Christian texts?[79] A major challenge here is delineating these 'average Mediterranean persons'. One must also beware of not simply sliding into another analysis of intertexture but instead doing the imaginative work of how the rhetorical force of the New Testament text, most likely directed at an insider audience, might have affected an outsider. It is helpful to have a specific textual or artefactual basis for this analysis in order to link it to ideologies and discourses in the broader Mediterranean world.

Luke's Gospel emerged into a literary scene in the late first century and early second century that witnessed a fresh proliferation of Latin epics. While Luke–Acts does not match the length or genre of these epics perfectly, this literature is still a source for fruitful comparisons that were current for the earliest audiences of Luke's Gospel.[80] The topics of virginity, purity, motherhood, salvation and identity found in Luke's recounting of the annunciation also appear in Silius's narration of the arrival of the Magna Mater icon at Rome near the end of the Punic Wars. The entire episode had been foretold by the Sibyl, setting the importance of female power and prophecy over the story (*Pun*. 17.1-2). She had prophesied that Rome would not win over the

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79.   The importance of this question is highlighted by the need to make sense of how early discourses about Mary in the canonical Gospels and apocryphal infancy gospels can be linked to the rise in her veneration in the Christian empire of the late Roman period. Rubin moves quickly from the earliest period in which very little is written about Mary to her importance in and around the rule of Constantine in the late third and early fourth century with few comments about how we move from one to the other (Rubin, *Mother*, p. 16-21).

80.   On the relationship between Luke and the Latin epics see Marianne Palmer Bonz, *The Past as Legacy: Luke–Acts and Ancient Epic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2000).

Carthaginians until they welcomed Cybele, the Mother of the Gods, to be worshipped in Rome (17.2-4). The meteorite rock that was the cultic object of her worship was brought to Rome on a ship and guided up the Tiber with ropes, but at a certain point the ship lodged in the riverbed and would not move. Cybele was attended by virgin priests, one of whom announced that only a chaste woman would be able to move the ship any further. Claudia, a defamed vestal virgin, steps forward, asks Cybele to affirm her purity, and proceeds to pull the ship single-handedly down the river accomplishing the goddess's arrival in Rome (17.33-45).[81]

Thus, Silius portrays a foreign mother deity welcomed into Rome by a pure virgin. The Great Mother brings salvation, but that salvation must be facilitated by a chaste woman. Silius implies that the defeat of decadent and masculine Rome can be remedied by a woman of purity, who symbolizes moral renewal.[82] The male construction of Roman identity in this story must adapt to a foreign female deity and submit to a chaste female mediator.[83] Thus, the rhetorical force of Luke's portrayal of Mary may have struck a resonating chord in the Mediterranean world. He tells of a chaste, righteous and graced woman, Mary (Lk. 1.27-28), who is chosen by God to be the conduit for a foreign deity who will offer salvation and life to the people (1.30-33). The strangeness of Jesus as a 'messiah' of a foreign God is mediated by the purity of the chosen woman who delivers him to the larger world for their ultimate good. In the broader culture, Luke finds the salvific valence of motherhood, the welcoming of a foreign savior and the mediating authority of a chaste woman. Thus, the rhetorical forces of his portrayal of Mary could have affected a larger Mediterranean audience who were familiar with such storylines.

The Influence on Later Religious Traditions and Practices
The analysis of rhetorical force also looks forward to a work's effect on later contexts as noted in these last two domains of consideration. This is the case for two interconnecting reasons. First, the texts of the New Testament were

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81. See the review of this episode in Krishni Schaefgen, *The Magna Mater Romana: A Sociocultural Study of the Cult of the Magna Mater in Republican Rome* (unpublished PhD diss.; State University of New York at Buffalo, 2015), pp. 49-72.

82. Anthony Augoustakis, *Motherhood and the Other: Fashioning Female Power in Flavian Epic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 233-34.

83. Augoustakis, *Motherhood*, p. 236.

highly generative and impactful in their creative blending of forces. These texts were kept and canonized because of their rhetorical power in the early Christian communities and beyond. Thus, fully understanding these texts can involve analyzing the rhetorical force that they themselves exerted on traditions that would develop after them. Secondly, hindsight may not be 20/20, but examining the history of the effects of a text provides a helpful perspective on the text itself—by explicating what a text *did* we might better grasp what that text was originally *doing*. Given the sacred texture and religious aims of the New Testament, investigating the currents of influence that these documents had on later religious traditions will often be especially illuminating.[84]

Such is the case when we look into later traditions about Mary, for writers across a wide spectrum extract certain forces activated by Luke to include in their own writing.[85] For Irenaeus, the intersection of Mary's virginity (Lk. 1.34) and her obedience (1.38) sets up an analogous contrast with the figure of Eve who was also a virgin but was defined by her disobedience.[86] As Eve opened the door to death through her disobedience, so Mary opened the door to life and salvation through her obedience (*Haer.* 5.19.1). Irenaeus himself engages in dynamic blending, drawing the obedience element from Luke into a constellation of other elements from the Old Testament and New Testament but leaving out several other elements of Luke's presentation (*Haer.* 3.22.1-

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84.   Thus, the analysis of rhetorical force within SRI provides a bridge between an emphasis on the interpretation of texts in the Christian canon and the analysis of the broader history of early Christianity—an unresolved dichotomy in Räisänen's work (*Beyond New Testament Theology*, pp. 160-62).

85.   A major issue faced across the second century, but not discussed in this survey, is the defense and precise definition of Mary's virginal status in polemical contexts. For this theme, see Brown *et al.*, *Mary*, pp. 267-78 and Lincoln, 'Luke', pp. 653-57.

86.   M.C. Steenberg describes Mary's role as one of 'co-recapitulation' in 'The Role of Mary as Co-Recapitulator in St. Irenaeus of Lyon', *VC* 58 (2004), pp. 117-37 (118).

4; he leaves out the role of Davidic fulfillment).[87] Mary's obedience is the scarlet Lukan thread that Irenaeus weaves into his own rhetorical moment.[88]

The later infancy gospels often feature Mary as a key character for reconfiguration in their rhetorical moment. The *Protevangelium of James* also idealizes Mary but for her purity rather than for her obedience.[89] This text pushes behind Luke's story to the birth of Mary to her parents Joachim and Anna, with several echoes of the birth of John the Baptist (*Prot. Jas.* 4.1-2).[90] Mary's purity is further certified through the purity of her parents (5.1-2). In her own infancy, Mary's own purity was protected at home (6.1) and in the temple (7.1; 8.1). In this text, she is not even engaged to Joseph, for he is merely an older man given charge over her (9.1-2).[91] Her virginity is vouchsafed by the dreadful fire that burns the midwife's hand who doubts her chastity (20.1-3).[92] The Qur'an leads into its discussion of Mary with a mention of John the Baptist and an angelic annunciation that echoes elements in Lk. 1.27-31,[93] but it omits the fuller Christology of 1.32-33 and 35.[94] Mary then

87.   Thus, Irenaeus is a good example of how the early Church drew on various scriptural analogies and typologies (e.g. Eve and Daughter Zion) to fill out the limited material on Mary in the New Testament. On this dynamic, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 23-25.

88.   See the emphasis on Mary's obedience in contrast to Eve (and Adam) in Irenaeus (Steenberg, 'Role', pp. 128-29).

89.   Hock says that 'Mary's purity is the text's unifying theme'. See Ronald Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (The Scholars Bible, 2; Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 1995), p. 14. Also see Mary F. Foskett, 'Virginity as Purity in the *Protevangelium of James*', in Amy-Jill Levine (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Mariology* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2005), pp. 67-76.

90.   Gregg points out the similarity of the annunciation to Anna and the annunciation to Mary in Lk. 2 (*Shared Stories*, p. 473).

91.   Mary's protestation that she 'does not know a man' is made to Joseph (*Prot. Jas.* 13.2) rather than to Gabriel (Lk. 1.34).

92.   See the review of the purity theme in this part of the story by Gregg, *Shared Stories*, pp. 477-79.

93.   'The structural similarities between the Lukan and qur'anic accounts [of Mary] are striking, including the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth', states Michael Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qur'an Side by Side* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), p. 138.

94.   Pelikan, *Mary*, pp. 70-71.

enters into monastic seclusion in the desert (Q Maryam 19.16, 22), which also includes vows of fasting and silence (19.26).[95] Mary does not just protest to the angel that she is a virgin but emphasizes that she has not even been touched by a man (19.20). The son to be borne by her is a 'pure one' (19.19).[96] The Qur'an makes a nod to the *Protevangelium of James* by referring to the purity of Mary's parents as well (19.28).[97] Thus, the Qur'an picks up on the blended topos of virginity and purity that occurs in *Joseph and Asenath*, that Luke maintains in terms of virginity and obedience, that the *Protevangelium of James* extends backwards and intensifies and that the Qur'an takes and shifts into a monastic mode that deploys Mary's character to certify the calling and purity of Jesus as a prophet of Allah (19.31-32). The force of purity picked up by Luke appears to be the primary force developed by later religious texts and traditions.

The Influence on Developments in the Larger Mediterranean World
The previous category remains largely within the texts and traditions of religious movements indebted to and emerging out of Judaism and Christianity. However, Christian texts continued to interact with and influence the peoples and cultures of the Mediterranean for hundreds of years into the future. What gave the texts of the New Testament such staying power and persuasive power in the early centuries after they were written? Something about the unique power captured in the forces at the original rhetorical moments of the New Testament continued to sway the hearts of women and men. Thus, our analysis of the rhetorical force of a text can also include how the force of that text may have continued to exert itself over and over in the gradually shifting contexts of late antiquity. Again, these texts were kept and used in apologetics, edification and evangelism, testifying to their ongoing cultural relevance and rhetorical force.

Two trends developed in the Mediterranean world during the years of the later Roman Empire that energized certain elements of the rhetorical force of

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95.   The Qur'an may be picking up on an analogy between Mary and Hagar, who also fled into the wilderness (Pelikan, *Mary*, p. 73).

96.   Mary's purity and doubly chosen status is also stated at 3.42 (Gregg, *Shared Stories*, pp. 555-56).

97.   Lodahl (*Claiming Abraham*, p. 139) sees this purity emphasis coming from the *Protevangelium of James*, but I have already noted how it is present in Luke's account.

this passage. First, we see the rise of powerful women in Roman society and politics. Julia Domna reigned with her husband Septimus Severus and then alongside her unmarried son Caracella, wielding broad influence for over 20 years.[98] In the dissolution and controversies that followed Caracella's death, Julia Mamaea (niece of Julia Domna) rose to power and took control of the affairs of the empire.[99] She remained a widow in her power for many years, receiving titles that reflected her effective control of the empire.[100] High ranking, powerful women at the apex of the Roman Empire would have impacted the broader culture, paving the way for the veneration of Mary alongside her son Jesus.[101]

At this same time, the prestige of virginity was on the rise in the Mediterranean world.[102] The chastity of the vestal virgins was critical to the religious life of the empire as was the sexual faithfulness of matrons who offered rituals and prayers on behalf of the state.[103] Cooper argues that the Romans left themselves with a bit of a cultural conundrum by insisting that men must rise above the vagaries of attraction to women while also fathering sons and heirs. The Christians were able to step into this counterfactual challenge by portraying their own moral heroes as those who set aside the trappings of the world for higher goods. The virgin woman was one of the most potent images in

98.   Barbara Levick, *Julia Domna: Syrian Empress* (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 57-73, and Jasper Burns, *Great Women of Imperial Rome: Mothers and Wives of the Caesars* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 181.

99.   Burns, *Great Women*, p. 215.

100. Burns, *Great Women*, p. 217.

101. One could also consider the influence of the worship of mother goddesses in the Roman Empire. This matrix of the feminine in religion may have also played a reciprocal role in the veneration of Mary in this era. The confluence and interaction of these traditions is explored in Stephen Benko, *The Virgin Goddess: Studies in the Pagan and Christian Roots of Mariology* (SHR, 59; Leiden: Brill, 1993). This would be an example of how an interpreter must select some materials in the analysis of rhetorical force. The text considers women with political influence, but the religious angle could also be analyzed.

102. Rubin (*Mother*, p. 23) speaks of the lifestyle of virginity among Christians as gaining the respect of non-Christians but does not explore the broader cultural changes that informed this trend.

103. Lynn H. Cohick, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians: Illuminating Ancient Ways of Life* (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2009), pp. 162-63, 183.

this cultural shift.[104] Cooper traces the ideal of marital fidelity and concord that emerged in the Augustan era alongside the enduring Roman desire for masculine self-mastery and stoic reserve.[105] The Christians offered a solution, a solution that had a personal anchor in the rhetorical forces that Luke blended together in his portrayal of Mary. She was an honorable servant of God and experienced divine power. She was also a pure virgin, but she was also married to Joseph. Mary was virgin, bride and mother—Luke's rhetorical moment had linked forces that would come to meet this later cultural dilemma.[106] The Christian tradition had a female figure connected to its Lord and Savior who became a paradigm of a new model of the male-female relationship where men and women could live together apart from the corrupting powers of sexuality, freeing them to do good in this world and be prepared for the next.

Conclusion

The emerging religious discourse found in the New Testament was creative and generative, bringing together various topoi and traditions in ways that effectively met the rhetorical exigencies of a moment—but not just of that moment, for these texts continued to have rhetorical force for years to come. This overview provides examples of how one might analyze the rhetorical force of a particular New Testament text to see how its persuasive effects may have contributed to the persistence, growth and influence of the Christian movement. Luke's presentation of Mary at the annunciation portrays her as the model of a morally pure virgin, casts her child in the paradigm of other prodigious offspring of deities, prepares Luke's readers for other important women in the narrative, marks the direct activity of God in Jesus' origins, echoes the paradigm of chaste female mediators of divine gifts, sets the stage for development of religious discourse around virginal purity and offers a

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104. Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. ix-x. Cooper's book is a model of analyzing rhetorical force as emerging discourse. She avows taking a distinctly 'literate, Roman perspective' that could make sense of the rise of the role of Mary that took place in this era.

105. Cooper, *Virgin*, pp. 10-20.

106. Cooper, *Virgin*, p. 145 and Rubin, *Mother*, pp. 23-24.

model of a powerful woman who was both virgin and mother. Thus, rhetorical force can do a lot of things, and correspondingly our analysis of rhetorical force must look in several directions as outlined in this essay. The aim is not to delimit the rhetorical force of a passage but to select a perspective from which one may trace out some of the forces of a text to see where they came from, where they went, what they might have done and what they can still do today.