

MEETING THE EXIGENCY OF A COMPLEX RHETORICAL SITUATION: PAUL'S STRATEGY IN 2 CORINTHIANS 1 THROUGH 7

DAVID A. DESILVA
Ashland Theological Seminary
Ashland, OH 44805

Much scholarly energy and attention have been spent sorting out the history of Paul's relationship with the Corinthian churches, a relationship which has captured so much interest because, even according to the simplest reconstructions, it is the most extensive apostle-church relationship evidenced in the New Testament writings. An essential part of this reconstructive task is the question of the literary integrity of the canonical letters to the Corinthians. The unity of 1 Corinthians is generally accepted, while that of 2 Corinthians is hotly contested, some scholars discerning as many as five complete or fragmentary letters contained within the canonical letter.¹ If the two canonical letters really contain six actual pieces of correspondence, references to other non-extant letters and references to a number of visits, one may posit a long and complicated history between the apostle and his church.

Questions of the literary integrity of 2 Corinthians are important, however, not only for matters of historical reconstruction, but for the correct reading of passages within the letters themselves. Every passage taken from a larger letter or narrative must be read and interpreted in light of the whole text of which it is a part; the interpretation of any given passage within 2 Corinthians will change (often only slightly, sometimes more dramatically) according to the interpreter's idea of the "whole" which guides the reading of the "part." Furthermore, an understanding of the literary integrity of the letter leads to a comprehension of the strategies pursued within the text and, finally, of the apostle himself, especially in a letter such as 2 Corinthians, which focuses not on the power and abilities of the man so much as on his weaknesses, even his apparent vacillations and insecurities. Understanding the rhetorical strategy and argumentation of 2 Corinthians thus

¹Cf., for example, N. H. Taylor, "The Composition and Chronology of Second Corinthians," *JST* 44 (1991): 67-87.

assists our own struggles with weakness and our encounters with the power of God, which transcends our weakness.

This study seeks to contribute to the demonstration, against those who would divide the text based on its apparent inconsistencies of tone and content, that 2 Corinthians 1 through 9 is a literary and rhetorical whole, and that the explanation for its variations in tone and apparent discrepancies in content is to be found in Paul's strategy for securing the goodwill of his hearers and so gaining an attentive and open hearing for the heart of his argument. I have elsewhere endeavored to argue against the necessity of dividing 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 from the first seven chapters of the letter,² as well as for the acceptance of 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 as native to the letter (whether or not of Pauline origin).³ It is the purpose of this study to explain more fully the role of 2 Cor 1:1-2:13 as an introduction (exordium) to 2:14-7:4, against the view that the former passage contains the introduction and body of a separate letter concluded immediately by 7:5-16. This task will be accomplished by comparing Paul's exordium with the expectations and possibilities of the exordium articulated by ancient rhetorical theorists. Through the lens of Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions one may discern the strategy inherent in Paul's introduction which has eluded so many partition theorists.

Rhetorical Criticism

Much methodological variety exists within the broader rubric of rhetorical criticism, which embraces aspects of literary criticism as well as stricter attention to the rhetorical conventions which provide the framework for understanding a discourse.⁴ In this article, rhetorical criticism seeks to unfold the argumentation of a discourse (spoken or written), to discover what is at issue and what strategies are being used to achieve persuasion by means of careful consideration of the rhetorical conventions and methods of persuasion current in the period. It

²D. A. deSilva, "Measuring Penultimate Against Ultimate Reality: An Investigation of the Integrity and Argumentation of 2 Corinthians," *JSNT* 52 (1993): 41-70, esp. 42-47.

³*Ibid.*, 57-64; cf. also the more detailed discussion in D. A. deSilva, "Recasting the Moment of Decision: 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 in Its Literary Context," *AUSS* 31 (1993): 3-16.

⁴The interested reader may find a fuller introduction to the discipline of rhetorical criticism of New Testament texts in Burton Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) and George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1984). Mack includes an extensive bibliography.

involves, therefore, the study of ancient rhetorical handbooks such as Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric*, Quintilian's *Institutions of Oratory*, Cicero's *The Orator*, and the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium*.

While these works represent different families of oratorical traditions, together they provide a window into the world of ancient argumentation and the ways in which discourses sought to persuade the hearers in a number of different settings, such as the council chamber, the courtroom, and the public square. In the first, the orator tried to persuade the assembly to choose a particular course of action; thus the term "deliberative rhetoric" is applied to these speeches. In the second, the orator sought a verdict of guilty or not guilty; hence the term "judicial" or "forensic rhetoric" is applied to these speeches. In the third, the orator praised a great figure or censured vicious ones, making a display both of the culture's values and the orator's ability; the term "epideictic rhetoric" is reserved for this genre.⁵ Often two or three genres are combined in the service of an overarching goal.⁶ Rhetorical critics seek to discover the aim of a discourse (a decision, a verdict, agreement with cultural mores), and thence how the parts of the discourse work to achieve that end.⁷ The modern interpreter uses rhetorical criticism to recognize an appeal to a certain emotion—and the expected effect of that appeal, to analyze the logic of the argumentation itself, and to determine the smaller units which make up discrete units of discourse within the larger whole through identification of devices such as the *inclusio*.

These rhetorical handbooks also point to various strategies which a speaker may use to overcome obstacles to persuasion. In so doing, they alert us to a fundamental principle of reading ancient letters or

⁵Aristotle *The Art of Rhetoric* 1.3.1-1.3.6 (LCL); and *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 1.2.2 (LCL).

⁶Cf. Aristotle *Rhet.* 1.3.5: "The end of the deliberative speaker is the expedient or harmful; . . . all other considerations, such as justice and injustice, honour and disgrace, are included as accessory in reference to this."

⁷This is the basis of the approach outlined in Kennedy, 33-38. The interpreter follows a five-part scheme, in a more circular than linear process. First, she or he must determine the boundaries of the *rhetorical unit* by finding signs of opening and closure, such as the device of *inclusio* or signs of a *proem* and *epilogue*; second, the interpreter will attempt to discern the *rhetorical situation*, insofar as a response is conditioned by the situation just as an answer is conditioned by a question; third, he or she will seek to discover whether or not the orator/writer faces an overriding *rhetorical problem*, such as the audience's prejudice against the speaker or the case; fourth, the *species of rhetoric* (deliberative, judicial, epideictic) must be determined; fifth, the interpreter investigates the actual arrangement of the argument, the subdivisions within the whole and the persuasive effect of each of the parts, the development of appeals to logic and to the emotions, etc.

speeches: The rhetorical situation controls the rhetorical performance which responds to that situation.⁸ That is to say, the successful orator will fashion the oration in accordance with the particular needs and obstacles of the situation addressed. This dictum has applied to letters since antiquity, as Demetrius demonstrates in quoting Artemon: "A letter ought to be written in the same manner as a dialogue, a letter being . . . one of the two sides of the dialogue."⁹ The other side of the dialogue establishes the exigencies which must be met by means of the rhetorical response. A complex rhetorical situation, compounded by a rhetorical problem, requires a complex and careful response.

These insights are helpful for considering the piece of rhetorical communication contained in 2 Corinthians 1 through 7. Through careful attention to oratorical conventions and strategies of the period, we may discover some signals in the text which alert us to the exigencies presented by the other partner in the dialogue and thus illumine both the rhetorical situation and Paul's attempt to meet the exigencies which he perceives. The difficulties between Paul and the readers of his letters arise from misunderstandings which have marred Paul's rapport with the church and from the addressees' failure to grasp the consequences of the apocalyptic message of the gospel. These misunderstandings must be removed so that the readers may understand the gospel. Attention to Paul's rhetorical strategy allows for an explanation of the differences in tone and apparent differences in circumstance between the parts of 2 Corinthians 1 through 7 with no need for partition theories.¹⁰

The Alleged Seams and Their Solutions

Partition theories are based largely on the observation of a number of discrepancies between 1:1-2:13 and 7:5-16, and 2:14-7:4. Dieter Georgi, for example, argues that the tone of 2:14-7:4 is "almost entirely polemical," reflecting a situation in which Paul must fight for acknowledgement over against rival preachers, while in 1:1-2:13 and 7:5-16 Paul writes in a conciliatory tone.¹¹ In 2:13 Paul breaks off the narrative of

⁸Kennedy, 34, citing Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1968): 1-14.

⁹Demetrius *On Style* 223 (LCL).

¹⁰This approach has been used by Duane F. Watson to address the questions of literary integrity of Philippians in "A Rhetorical Analysis of Philippians and Its Implications for the Unity Question," *NovT* 30 (1988): 57-88.

¹¹Dieter Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 14.

his travels, but resumes it precisely at the same point in 7:5.¹² The transition from 2:13 to 2:14 is abrupt and obscure. Moreover, 1:1-2:13 and 7:5-16 share a number of key words which appear frequently in those sections but rarely, if ever, in 2:14-7:4. These signs would point to two original letters, one in which 2 Cor 1:1-2:13 flows directly into 7:5-16, and another which is partially represented by 2:14-7:4.¹³ The rationale of the editor of the Corinthian letter, of course, remains inexplicable.

This proposed solution, nevertheless, creates as many problems as it purports to solve. F. F. Bruce notes, for example, that the *καὶ γάρ* would be out of place if 7:5 followed directly upon 2:13.¹⁴ F. B. Watson points out further that in 2:12-13 Paul speaks about his "spirit" not finding rest, whereas in 7:5 he speaks about his "flesh" having no rest. Also, the shift from a singular subject in 2:13 to a plural in 7:5 would need explanation.¹⁵ The transition in the "restored" letter is not smooth. Further, the partition theorists fail to explain the place of 7:4: "I have much confidence (*παρρησία*) with regard to you, I have much ground for boasting (*καύχησις*) over you: I am filled with comfort (*παράκλησις*), I overabound (*ὑπερπερισσεύομαι*) in joy (*χαρά*) in all our affliction (*θλίψις*)." The vocabulary marks a strong return to the key words and themes of 1:1-2:13 and 7:5-16.¹⁶ If, however, one reads the text as part of the "letter of reconciliation," this verse still interrupts—without apparent reason—the narrative of 2:13/7:5. Even if one does not, the verse's place in 2:14-7:4 remains inexplicable. This suggests that the narrative of Paul's travels is not the central concern, but rather provides purely transitional material between the extended exordium of 1:1-2:13, the body of 2:14-7:3, and the peroration of 7:4-16. Paul's itinerary should not, therefore, provide the basis for reconstructing numerous letters in 2 Corinthians 1-7.

¹²Ibid., 12.

¹³For a fuller discussion of these views, see V. P. Furnish, *II Corinthians* (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 32-33.

¹⁴F. F. Bruce, *I and II Corinthians* (London: Marshall, Morgan, & Scott, 1984), 171.

¹⁵F. B. Watson, "2 Cor. X-XIII and Paul's Painful Letter to the Corinthians," *JTS* 35 (1984): 336.

¹⁶Watson, 338; see also M. J. Harris, "2 Corinthians," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (ed. F. E. Gaebelin; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 10:302. C. K. Barrett, *Essays on Paul* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 114, also offers a conceptual connection between 7:4 and 7:5-16. The cause of Paul's "confidence," "boasting," and "joy" in 7:4 is revealed in the positive report from Titus about the Corinthians' reception of Paul's letter and their change of heart.

Moreover, Georgi overstates the difference in tone and content between the parts. The first part of the epistle (1:1-2:13) is not all peace and reconciliation, but, as the analysis below shows, contains a fully developed judicial case for Paul's self-defense against misunderstandings which have arisen in the wake of his change of travel plans and his painful letter. The defense is too elaborate to be unnecessary, and so must be taken to reflect tensions and strains between Paul and the church as part of the situation he addresses. Rhetorical analysis provides an alternative explanation for the preparatory function of 1:1-2:13 with regard to the body of the letter, 2:14-7:4.

2 Corinthians 1 through 7 as a Rhetorical Unit

George Kennedy's plan for analyzing a passage through rhetorical criticism begins with the establishing of a *rhetorical unit*. According to Kennedy,

the most difficult cases [in determining rhetorical units] involve portions of longer works which are not immediately evident self-contained units, as is a speech. Here we must experiment by seeking signs of opening and closure (for which the term *inclusio* is sometimes used), of *proem* and epilogue. . . . It has to have within itself a discernible beginning and ending, connected by some action or argument.¹⁷

Our passage meets these criteria admirably. The concentrated incidence of repetition in 1:1-2:13 and 7:4-16 suggests that in these sections we find a "beginning" and "ending," better defined by the term *inclusio*. Key words in the "beginning" reappear in similar concentrations in the "ending." Thus *παράκλησις* in 1:3, 4, 5, 6, 7, returns in 7:4, 7, and 13. *Θλίψις* in 1:4, 8, and 2:4 returns in 7:4 (appearing also in 4:17 and 6:4). *Χαρά* and the related verb *χίρειν* appear in 1:15, 24, and 2:3 (twice) and again at 7:4, 7, 9, and 13. *Λυπή* appears as a noun or verb (*λυπέω*) in 2:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, again in 7:8 (twice), 9, and 10 (twice). Similarly the words *καύχησις* (and related words) and *περισσότερος* appear to relate our "beginning" to the "end"; additionally they form significant links to the "middle."

According to the rhetorical handbooks, one may further define the "end" in relation to the "beginning" and the "middle." As the "end" provides thematic as well as lexical resonances with the "beginning," one may call it the *peroratio* to the main part of the letter. The handbooks are agreed that a *peroratio* "serves as a last chance to remind the judge or the audience of the case, and tries to make a strong emotional

¹⁷Kennedy, 33-34.

impression upon them."¹⁸ The content in 7:4-16 meets this double requirement in a most intriguing way.

In these verses Paul returns to the topic of 1:15-2:11, touching on all the points of that apologetic section: writing a harsh letter rather than making a visit as he said he would, presenting a reason for that act, and laying the responsibility on the "offender." Paul goes a step further in the *peroratio*, enumerating the beneficial consequences of his supposedly harmful act. Thus far his "recapitulation" has been of the argument of the judicial part of the exordium (as recommended in *Rhet. ad Her.* 2.47), but his recapitulation extends even to the proem, speaking of "God who comforts . . . comforting us." While the *Rhet. ad Her.* discourages this as a sign of artificiality, Paul finds it useful in reestablishing the initial impact on his addressees.

Here 7:4-16 accomplishes the second task of the *peroratio*, namely to make a particular emotional impression upon the judge or audience. While the handbooks speak at length about the arousal of pity or anger at this point, neither is particularly useful for Paul's situation, which, although he often employs the language of the courtroom, is not identical to the court situation. He therefore returns to making the impression which deals most directly with the *rhetorical problem* which he has had to face in the initial stages of the communication. This has to do with establishing his goodwill toward the addressees and his complete confidence in them to do the necessary thing—to the extent that he speaks of the repentance called for within the main body of the letter as completely accomplished. It has equally to do with removing any remaining obstacles between the addressees and the apostle, as reconciliation there carries significant salvific weight. The *inclusio* or recapitulation is completed by returning to the narrative at the point where Paul left off at 2:13. This has the effect of bracketing the rigorous argumentation and exhortations in the central part of the communication (2:14-7:3) and returning completely, although only rhetorically, to the state of reconciliation envisaged and prepared for in 1:1-2:11. At this point, recapitulation of the arguments and appeal of 2:13-7:3 would be detrimental to Paul's overcoming of the rhetorical problem. He therefore places shorter recapitulations within the argument to free the *peroratio* proper to return to the exigencies of the rhetorical problem.

According to the rhetorical tradition, 1:1-2:13 and 7:4-16 appear to function as a thoroughly integrated beginning and ending. As such, they call for a "middle" which is supplied by 2:13-7:3. If 7:5-16 had been originally attached to 2:13, the result would be rhetorically unsatisfying. There would be no need for the lengthy recapitulation of themes and

¹⁸H. D. Betz, *Galatians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 313.

affirmations of confidence in 7:5-16 were there nothing to separate that section from 1:1-2:13. The communication would degenerate from a rhetorically constructed attempt to put the hearers in a receptive frame of mind, into an overly repetitive piece of "sweet-talk." It would become, truly, a beginning and an end without any significant middle.

What shows that 2:14-7:3 provides this "middle" for which 1:1-2:13 prepares? How does this "middle" explain the disjunction within Paul's travel narrative? One of the major purposes of the exordium was to provide "a sample of the subject, in order that the hearers may know beforehand what [the speech] is about, and that the mind may not be kept in suspense, for that which is undefined leads astray."¹⁹ We should not, however, expect to find much obvious exposure of the heart of Paul's argument, as this would only undermine the attempt by Paul to place his hearers in a receptive and nondefensive state of mind. The interconnectedness between the exordium and the body is subtle in 2 Corinthians, due to the particular constraints of the rhetorical situation.

First, the narrative serves a transitional function, as in Galatians, where it also serves as a leaping-off point for the theological argumentation.²⁰ Paul begins his *narratio* at 2 Cor 1.8, where he speaks of the troubles he encountered in Asia Minor. The narrative prepares for a theological claim, namely the need for Paul and his team to "rely not upon ourselves but upon the God who raises the dead" (1:9). This almost hidden phrase announces a principal theme of 2 Cor 2:14-7:3. In 3:1-6, Paul differentiates himself from rival preachers by claiming that he and his team do not reckon their sufficiency as coming from themselves, for some intrinsic quality or credential of which they can boast, but from God. Again in 4:7, after describing the climactic grandeur of the "light of the glory of the knowledge of God in the face of Christ," Paul juxtaposes the unattractiveness of the vessels in which this treasure is stored. The apostles, whose poor appearance opens them up to criticism from "those who boast in appearances," in fact serve God's plan. God seeks, through the apostle's unimpressive appearance, to demonstrate "that the surpassing greatness of the power may be from God and not from ourselves" (4:7). Paul's failure to measure up to external criteria actually establishes him as an emissary of God.

A second sampling of the body of the letter in 1:1-2:13 is found in the prominence of Paul's trials in the opening proem together with the declaration that this experience of suffering leads to salvific benefits for

¹⁹Aristotle *Rhet.* 3.14.6.

²⁰It has long been under debate where the *narratio* ends in Galatians 2, whether with 2:14 or somewhere between 2:15 and 2:21 (cf. Betz, 113).

the congregation. The afflictions (παθήματα, θλίψεις, 1:4) are a participation in the sufferings of Christ (παθήματα τοῦ Χριστοῦ), which carries with it a bountiful return, not only for the apostolic team's experience of God's encouragement (1:5), but also for the congregation's experience of encouragement: "Whether we are afflicted, it is on behalf of your comfort and salvation; or whether we receive comfort, it is on behalf of your comfort working through the endurance of the same sufferings which we suffer" (1:6). Paul develops these themes at length in 2:14-7:3. In 4:8-9 he connects his experience of trial and hardship with the congregation's experience of the life which Jesus brings. In 6:4-10, Paul develops further this mystery of the apostle's sufferings, through which the sincerity of God and power of God manifest themselves and produce fruit in the believers.²¹

Much common subject matter is shared by 1:1-2:13 and 2:14-7:3, the latter section developing themes introduced in the former.²² It thus fulfills one of the two major functions of the exordium, to provide the hearers with a sample of what is to come in the main body of the argument. A second function of an exordium, however, is at least as important as the first. This concerns the gaining of a favorable hearing from the audience, as an unreceptive or hostile audience will not be moved by argumentation. Aristotle (*Rhet.* 3.14.6-7) advises:

All the other forms of exordia in use are only remedies. These are derived from the speaker, the hearer, the subject, and the opponent. From the speaker and the opponent, all that helps to destroy or create prejudice. But this must not be done in the same way; for the defendant must deal with this at the beginning, the accuser in the epilogue. The reason is obvious. The defendant, when about to introduce himself, must remove all obstacles, so that he must first clear away all prejudice; the accuser must create prejudice in the epilogue, that his hearers may have a livelier recollection of it.

Later rhetoricians also advise that an essential step in convincing one's hearers is dispelling prejudice and negative evaluations of the speaker, reestablishing a sense of confidence and association with the speaker,

²¹For a fuller discussion of these points of interconnectedness, see deSilva, "Measuring Penultimate Against Ultimate Reality," 52-57.

²²Watson and J. M. Gilchrist offer other notable connections between 1:1-2:13 and 2:14-7:4. Watson compares 1:14 ("we are your cause of boasting, as you are ours, on the day of our Lord Jesus") and 5:12 ("we are not again commending ourselves to you, but giving you grounds for boasting about us"), and concludes that "in v. 12 Paul sums up the purpose of the whole section in words which must deliberately recall i.14." Gilchrist observes that "in the earlier chapters, Paul had argued that his 'letter of tears,' partly misunderstood by the Corinthians (1.14), had been composed without guile (1.12, 17). In the middle chapters, he extends the idea, by saying that his whole gospel, veiled to some (4.3), is a sincere, open statement of truth (2.17, 4.2)" ("Paul and the Corinthians—The Sequence of Letters and Visits," *JSNT* 34 [1988]: 49; Watson, 337, 338).

and assuring the hearers of one's confidence and interest in them and their decision. The argumentation and affirmations of 1:1-2:11 fulfill this function in order to make the hearers receptive to the argument of 2:14-5:20a and the appeal of 5:20b-7:3. As a corollary, the section delineated by 7:4-16 functions rhetorically as a peroration to the whole, designed to leave a particular impression upon the hearers, that of being held in confidence and affection by the speaker, again as the rhetorical handbooks recommend.

The "Subtle Approach" and 2 Cor 1:1-2:13

The author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* agrees with Aristotle's discussion of the proper aims of the exordium of a speech, to present a sampling of what the main body of the speech will contain and to gain the goodwill of the audience. For this reason, the exordium is also called the *captatio benevolentiae*, the "securing of good will," in Ciceronian oratory. In cases where the orator stands on a firm footing with the audience, he may begin the speech with a "direct opening," summarizing the case, telling the audience what new and important matters the speaker will introduce or demonstrate, and bidding them listen attentively. However, if the audience is prejudiced against the speaker, the orator must remedy this situation. The author of the *ad Herennium* recommends the "subtle approach" as a sort of remedial exordium:

Now I must explain the Subtle Approach. There are three occasions on which we cannot use the Direct Opening: (1) when our cause is discreditable, that is, when the subject itself alienates the hearer from us; (2) when the hearer has apparently been won over by the previous speakers of the opposition; (3) or when the hearer has become wearied by listening to the previous speakers. (1.9)

The first seven chapters of 2 Corinthians were written at a time of tension between Paul and his congregation in Corinth—a tension which knows even greater strain in 2 Corinthians 10 through 13. The rhetorical situation of 2 Cor 1:1-2:13 is not one of reconciliation and mutual trust, but rather one ruled by suspicion and emotional pain. The text itself offers precise information about this misunderstanding which has to some extent alienated apostle from church.

The immediate problem which Paul must overcome if he is to enjoy successful communication of his message to the Corinthian believers is indicated in 1:15-17 and 2:1-4. Paul had previously indicated to the Corinthians that he would make a double visit to them, on both

going to Macedonia and returning from there.²³ These plans could not be carried out in their entirety because of the events which transpired between Paul and the Corinthians, which he calls the "painful visit." Rather than fulfill the originally projected itinerary, Paul instead sent a letter which was harsh in tone and the cause of much grief. While 2 Corinthians 10-13 is not the "painful letter" spoken of in 2:3-4,²⁴ it does afford an indication of the rough tone of which Paul was capable.

From these data it is clear what sort of "rhetorical problem" Paul needed to overcome at the outset if he was to get anywhere with the Corinthians. There had arisen questions about his integrity, doubts about his commitment to fulfill the promises he had made, and damaged feelings which needed assuaging.²⁵ Indeed, Paul may well have been accused of writing the harsh letter rather than facing the Corinthians in person because of cowardice (cf. Paul's reference to rebukes from the congregation, imagined or indeed offered, in 2 Cor 10:1, 9-10).²⁶ Remembering again that the writers of the rhetorical handbooks had very specific situations in mind which fit Paul's only by analogy, one nevertheless may say that Paul was opening with a "subtle approach." His own cause was somewhat discreditable and, given the references to the "offender" of 2:5-8 and 7:12 and the possible presence of rival preachers, the hearers might have also been somewhat persuaded by voices opposing Paul, some from within the believers' group in response to their confusion, disappointment, hurt, or resentment.

Paul had a definite "rhetorical problem" here. He could not simply gain the goodwill of his audience by the normal means, although he profusely employed expressions of confidence in and language of association with the addressees in 1:1-2:12 and again in 7:4-15. He had also first to explain his actions and restore confidence in himself as a trustworthy representative of the gospel in order to make the case he attempts in 2:12-7:3. Therefore Paul undertook a fairly formal judicial argument (1:15-2:11) before moving into the deeper concern which had arisen out of the situation.

The circumstances surrounding this falling out, if one can derive anything from 1 Corinthians 1-4, may have been connected to the Corinthians' desire to persist in knowing and valuing according to the

²³Cf. C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 74-75; Furnish, 141-145.

²⁴Against F. B. Watson, "2 Cor X-XIII," for reasons enumerated in Furnish, 37-38.

²⁵Cf. Furnish, 144-155; Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 75-76.

²⁶Cf. Furnish, 460; Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 247.

“wisdom of the world,” a “wisdom” which the apocalyptic gospel ought to have overturned, since the very foundations of that wisdom are “perishing” as the new creation comes into being. If the circumstances surrounding the painful visit involved a challenge to Paul’s authority—based on these worldly criteria, perhaps spearheaded by the “offender,” whether in favor of another group of preachers of the gospel who met the criteria or not (3:1b; 5:12b)—Paul rightly perceived that the same stumbling blocks which created the relational difficulty also indicated a deeper difficulty in apprehending the content and consequences of the apocalyptic gospel which must be lived out in the Body of Christ as in the new creation.

In their rift with Paul, the Corinthians were showing themselves to be still rooted in the values and “wisdom” of this world. Paul therefore used himself as the starting or reference point throughout the argumentation, as the deliberation grew out of judicial concerns and cause. If Paul could successfully meet the rhetorical problem, then he would have a chance to develop his argument so as to lead the Corinthian believers to understand that their conversion had not yet taken place on the deepest level, that of knowing, valuing, and finding security or confidence. As in Galatians, we find reconciliation with the apostle inseparable from reconciliation with God and the recovery of the truth of the gospel. On this basis Paul develops his argument in 2:15-5:20a and makes his climactic appeal in 5:20b-7:3.

Rhetorical Function of 2 Corinthians 1:1-2:11

As discussed above, the rhetorical handbooks provide the background against which 1:1-2:11 appears to fulfill the role of the exordium, namely the part of the speech in which the speaker on the defensive must “destroy prejudice” and set the hearers in a particular frame of mind. Paul does this so as to gain a hearing for his argument and a favorable disposition toward his appeal in 2:13-7:3.

The epistolary prescript, 1:1-2, is very simple. Unlike Galatians, for example, it does not appear to encode major concerns of the text. The reserve which Paul displays at this point must be related to the need of the situation, explored earlier, and his decision to engage the Corinthians through the *insinuatō* or “subtle approach.” The prescript will not serve this end if it announces challenges or claims that might put the addressees on the defensive.

The exordium appears to occupy only 1:3-7, demonstrating a strategic reserve in not presenting immediately the congregation’s imperfect grasp of the significance of the gospel for their evaluation of the apostles. The double function of an exordium, however, is not truly completed until 2:11. Even though 1:3-2:11 contains a complete judicial

argument, it also serves as the exordium to the body of the letter, 2:14-7:3. Paul's extensive apologetic prelude (1:15-2:11) indicates that he is entering into an unfavorable rhetorical circumstance. His argumentation functions to remove the prejudice of his hearers. As noted above, the formal exordium (1:3-7) fulfills a chief requirement of Aristotle's description (*Rhet.* 3.14.6), introducing subject matter that will be developed in the body of the letter. The particular restatement in 1:5-6 of the more general announcement of the cause for the benediction (1:4) intimates the chief aim of the letter, to restore the relationship between the apostle and the believers and to return them to the enjoyment of the salvific benefits mediated through that relationship. As Kennedy said of 1 Corinthians 1:4-9, we may say that Paul reveals "none of his anxiety about the Corinthians" and aims "to secure their goodwill."²⁷ Just as Paul strategically hides his anxieties in the exordium of 1 Corinthians, so in this letter he suppresses them in order to regain confidence and rebuild the rapport with the Corinthians, to assist them in deciding for him and his gospel.

Paul often employs highly associative language in the exordium, returning to it frequently throughout the letter (1:11, 14, 21, 24; 2:1; 4:5, 12, 14; 5:12; 7:7, 11, 14-15), becoming dissociative only in the appeal. There, likewise, the content of the appeal aims at the reestablishment of association. In his discussion of how to put the judge or hearers in the most favorable frame of mind for one's cause, Aristotle urges the use of associative language: "he is a friend who shares our joy in good fortune and sorrow in affliction, for our own sake and not for any other reason" (2.4.3). Paul, in effect, uses a friendship *topos* in 1:3-7 to place the hearers in an amicable frame of mind. Paul, therefore, demonstrates a high level of awareness of the rhetorical problems facing him and the strategies for overcoming them. The form this takes, however, corresponds to what is appropriate for the apostle-believer relationship, which goes beyond Aristotle's definition of the "friend" towards an eschatologically oriented, mutually supportive relationship, where each party becomes the other's "claim to honor" on the day of the Lord Jesus (1:14).

The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* adds some specific considerations regarding the securing of the hearers' good will:

From the discussion of our own person we shall secure goodwill by praising our services without arrogance and revealing also our past conduct toward the republic, friends, or audience; . . . From the discussion of the person of our hearers goodwill is secured if we . . . reveal what esteem they enjoy and with what interest their decision is awaited. (1.8)

²⁷Kennedy, 24.

Both sides of this advice are present in Paul's exordium as well as in the closing *peroratio*. In 1:6 Paul announces the benefits which accrue to the hearers as a result of his service to them, without arrogance as he acknowledges God as the source of this service. To this theme Paul returns repeatedly in the course of developing his arguments, both in the preliminary judicial case and the central deliberative issue (cf. 1:19, 24; 2:15-16; 4:12, 15; 5:12-13). In 1:7 he expresses confidence and esteem toward the hearers. This technique is even more prominent in the *peroratio* (7:4, 7, 11, 14-16), indicating the importance for Paul of leaving his hearers with this positive impression of his expectations and attitude toward them.

A new section of the letter appears to begin at 1:8, with a verb of knowing, as is Paul's custom (cf. Rom. 1:13; Gal. 1:11; Phil 1:12; 1 Thess 2:1). In reality, however, the exordium continues to develop appropriate thematic material.²⁸ The desire to inform the hearers of the troubles Paul experienced in Asia continues the process of securing the goodwill of the hearers and, at the same time, introduces an essential theme in 1:9b. According to the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, one may also pursue the securing of the hearers' goodwill by "setting forth our need, loneliness, and misfortune, and pleading for our hearers' aid, and at the same time showing that we have been unwilling to place our hope in anyone else" (1.8). This is accomplished in 1:8-9, with the important twist that Paul locates his help not in his hearers, as the handbook advises, nor in himself, but only in "God who raises the dead." Indeed, he specifically interprets his experience as an object lesson: The trials came "in order that we might not place confidence in ourselves, but in God, who raises the dead." The correct placement of confidence, trust, or faith dominates the argument of chapters 4 and 5. Here again, Paul gives a "sample" of the theological and eschatological argument which necessitates his appeal.

Paul has introduced at this point an argument which is entirely suppressed in form. As Aristotle endorsed the use of the argument that "those things which are available in greater need are greater goods" (1.7.35) as appropriate to deliberative argument, so Paul has concisely defined at the outset that God's deliverance, rather than deliverance wrought by human competence, is the greater good, as it was available in such great need. The corollary which Paul develops later in the argumentation of 2:13-5:20a is that confidence in God will be the greater expedient, rather than confidence in appearance, in the flesh, or in anything belonging to that which is "passing away."

²⁸Cf. Furnish, 122.

Although it is particularly appropriate for the judicial case made in 1:15-2:11, 1:12 announces what appears to be the *propositio* for the speech.²⁹ Another proposition appears in 2:15-16 and introduces more clearly the apocalyptic categories which form the presuppositions for Paul's argument; it is in fact the conclusion reached, formally at least, by the argumentation (cf. 5:20). It is the "boast" of 1:12 which stands in question, however, because of the unfortunate developments in the relationship. This proposition is followed by a *transgressio* or transition to the narrative. Quintilian (4.1.79) advises that the move from exordium to narrative be accomplished by a smooth but noticeable transition. Paul has transposed the proposition to a place prior to the statement of facts (the *narratio*), but still employs a transition, consisting of an expression of confidence in the hearers' ability to understand the argument and expression of eschatological conviction which returns to the highly associative language of the exordium (1:13-14).

Here we must consider the double aim of the argument which follows. Paul must clear himself of the "charges" of vacillating, acting as a worldly person, being unreliable, or writing a needlessly harsh letter. He must also reestablish an atmosphere of confidence, in himself as a reliable authority and in the possibility of moving past these difficulties. Aristotle has advice to offer on fulfilling these tasks.

Confidence is inspired . . . if remedies are possible, if there are means of help, either great or numerous, or both; if we have neither committed nor suffered wrong. . . . We feel confidence . . . if we believe we have often succeeded and not suffered, or if we have often been in danger and escaped it. (2.5.17-18)

Paul makes "confidence" a noticeable topic in 2 Corinthians (*παρρησία* in 3:12 and 7:4, *πεποιθήσις* in 1:15 and 3:4, *θαρρέω* in 5:6, 8, and 7:16), developing both of Aristotle's criteria. Paul's own confidence in 1:8-11, for example, springs directly from his awareness of the nearness and greatness of the "remedy" or "help" on which he relies, the "God who raises the dead." Often he has been in danger and escaped it, as he informs the Corinthians throughout the letter. It may be that Paul has the restoration of confidence in mind when he asserts that not only has he not committed wrong, but that he also has not really suffered wrong (2:5). His desire to set the wrongs behind the Corinthians and himself forms part of his strategy for the reestablishment of the confidence of which he speaks.

On the need for destroying prejudice in the first part of the speech, Aristotle further offers: "Another topic, when men have been attacked by slander, in reality or in appearance, consists in stating the

²⁹So Furnish, 129.

reason for the false opinion; for there must be a reason for the supposition of guilt. . . . When the reason is explained, the slander is quashed" (2.23.24). Such is Paul's situation, in which he has given cause for slanderous interpretations of his actions. Aristotle notes that "since the same thing may have been done from several motives, the accuser must disparage it by taking it in the worse sense while the defender must take it in the better sense" (*Rhet.* 3.15.10). Paul seeks to dispel the slander and clear himself by explaining why he did what he did.

Paul begins this defense with a brief "statement of the facts." Aristotle notes that "in defense, the narrative need not be so long; for the points at issue are either that the fact has not happened or that it was neither injurious nor wrong" (3.16.6). The whole of the *narratio* for the judicial concerns appears in 1:15-16. The statement shows that Paul freely admits a change in his plans. According to the *ad Herennium*, this case would be "juridical," as "there is agreement on the act, but the right or wrong of the act is in question" (1.24). The point of adjudication, therefore, was not the fact but the rightness of Paul's action.

Scanning the argument, one notes that Paul makes use of two "inartificial" proofs—proofs which the speaker does not have to invent through clever arguments. He calls God as a witness for the defense (1:23) and uses two oath-like formulations (1:18, 23) as guarantees of the truthfulness of his explanation. He also attempts an ethical argument through associating the truthfulness of his word with the truthfulness of God whose promises Paul has mediated to the believers (1:17-20).³⁰ All of this serves as a prelude to the presentation of the explanation of the act. There are no fewer than five reasons offered, the last one appearing in the *peroratio* (7:12). Paul's explanation reflects again the rhetorical tradition:

The Assumptive subtypes are four: acknowledgement of the charge, rejection of the responsibility, shifting of the question of guilt, and comparison with the alternative course. . . . A cause rests on a comparison with the alternative course when we declare that it was necessary for us to do one or the other of two things, and that the one we did was better. . . . A cause rests on the rejection of the responsibility when we repudiate, not the acts charged, but the responsibility, and either transfer it to another person or attribute it to some circumstance. (*Rhet. ad Her.* 1.24-25)

One may also substitute one motive for another, and say that one did not mean to injure, but to do something else, not that of which one is accused, and that the wrongdoing was accidental. (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 3.15.3)

³⁰Cf. Furnish, 145: Paul's "response is not to say, 'Trust me! I know what I'm doing and it's for your good.' Rather, he is saying, in effect, 'Trust God! His promises have been fulfilled in Christ, and our faithfulness in dealing with you has been assured by our preaching of Christ to you.'"

Having acknowledged his action in the statement of facts, Paul offers a reason which rests his cause on each of these defenses. He applies the comparison with the alternative course in 1:23 and 2:1-3, arguing that it was better for both parties that he had stayed away rather than making a visit which would only have increased the pain and further damaged the relationship. He substitutes one motive for another in 2:4 (returning to this method in 7:12), asserting that the letter was not sent with the intention of causing pain, but rather to show the depth of his love for the believers. The rejection of responsibility, which might be more properly analyzed as a shifting of the question of guilt, begins in 2:5 with an indefinite pronoun ($\tau\iota\varsigma$) and is concretized fully in 2:6-8. Paul shifts in 2:5 from speaking as if he bears guilt or has done injury to defining the injury done by the "certain person" and advising the Corinthians how to handle that person. This is a complex verse, effecting not only this shift, but also drawing the legal distinction between wrongs done against an individual and a community as well as employing the figure of speech known as understatement. The judicial case ends in an appeal for forgiveness for the offender and an affirmation of Paul's forgiveness.

Although Paul has developed a complete judicial argument in order to address the need of the situation, only at this point is the task of the exordium fully realized.³¹ He has dispelled prejudice, cleared himself of the charges on which the prejudice was based, and also expressed his confidence in and close association with his hearers, both overtly at the outset and subtly through shifting the question of guilt to another party and so associating with the Corinthian believers in giving recommendations of forgiveness.

³¹Indeed, the prominence of judicial language in the extended exordium of 1:1-2:13 and Paul's frequent return to the topic of his own person (and that of his colleagues in ministry), throughout the body of the letter, has led Kennedy to claim that "Second Corinthians is largely judicial except for chapters 8 and 9, which are deliberative" (87). He analyzes chapters 1-7 entirely as a judicial speech, finding 5:20 alone as the basis for the extended appeal. Paul's use of his own ministry as the basis for his argumentation in the body of the letter reflects the connectedness between the parts of the letter—again an instance of the exordium providing a sample of what is developed in the body of the speech. The way in which the *topoi*, around which the deliberative argument develops, grow organically out of the material presented within the judicial section, and which appear to continue to treat and expand the judicial topics, hides the fact that the thrust of the letter actually points at the hearers, not the speaker, calling on them to make a proper response. A similar rhetorical strategy characterizes 2 Cor 10-13, where Paul can claim near the peroration, "Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves before you?" (12:19). Paul's explanation of his apostolic witness is not a self-defense, but rather an occasion for the believers' self-examination—indeed, a "test" which they will either pass or fail depending on their response to Paul (13:5).

From this point, Paul introduces the parts of the speech as if he had just finished his exordium, presenting a brief *narratio* in 2:12-13, with a transition in the form of a thanksgiving in 2:14, then a fresh *propositio* or thesis to be proven in 2:15-17, followed by the *probatio* ("proof") proper to a deliberative speech. This second *narratio* serves the purpose of "effecting a transition or setting the stage for something" (*Rhet. ad Her.* 1.12). It does not truly announce anything essential to the discussion which follows, but rather makes it possible to move with some degree of smoothness from the end of the extended exordium of the judicial argument into the new concern.

Conclusion

Partition theories do not provide the best explanation for the difference in tone and content between 1:1-2:13 and 7:5-16, and 2:14-7:4; they create a number of problems in the very attempt to solve them. Such theories miss both the ancillary function of narration in Paul's letters and the constraints that a complex rhetorical situation compounded by a rhetorical problem can put on the form of a discourse. In 1:1-2:13 we have not simply a celebration of the restoration of relations between apostle and congregation urged in 2:14-7:4, but a clear concern with dispelling prejudice and hostility against Paul. This is shown by Paul's construction of a complete judicial speech within this section. As such, the section performs one of the two essential functions of the exordium of a speech: the preparation of the hearers to listen with openness and goodwill to the arguments and appeal of 2:14-7:3. It represents an example of the "subtle approach," in which Paul masks his deeper concerns (although these are hinted at, for example, in 1:9) in order simply to "clear the air" and move beyond the mistrust and hurt feelings which up to that point have dominated the situation.

Paul returns to the language and themes of this extended exordium in 7:4-16, the peroration, in order to leave a particular impression on the hearers, namely a sense of Paul's confidence in them, his association with them. The language of the exordium and peroration aims at facilitating the full reconciliation and realignment of the believers with Paul, which forms the central thrust of the arguments and appeals of 2:14-7:3. At the same time, the exordium provides a "sample" of the topics to be developed in 2:14-7:3. In particular, the theme of placing one's confidence in God alone and not in appearances (1:9), and the emphasis on the salvific benefits of association with the apostle Paul dominate the central section. Therefore, 2 Cor 1-7 reflects, not two stages in Paul's relationship with the church in Corinth, but rather the complexities and tensions of one stage.