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DOI: [https://doi.org/10.38140/
at.vi.7656](https://doi.org/10.38140/at.vi.7656)

ISSN: 1015-8758 (Print)

ISSN: 2309-9089 (Online)

Acta Theologica 2024

Supp 37:207-224

Date received:

9 October 2023

Date accepted:

15 April 2024

Date published:

12 June 2024

A text-centred rhetorical analysis of 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

ABSTRACT

This article analyses 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 from a rhetorical perspective. Unlike previous attempts by scholars to analyse the letter in terms of ancient rhetorical theory, this article illustrates how the rhetorical strategy can be reconstructed from the text itself; therefore, it is identified as a text-centred rhetorical analysis, which follows a minimum theoretical approach. In practical terms, the overall rhetorical strategy needs to be identified and followed by an outline of dominant and supportive arguments, including an overview of the rhetorical techniques employed. This article illustrates how Paul used a second thanksgiving for the believers' actions to benefit his cause and to vilify his opponents. The integrity of Paul's Gospel is confirmed by including the believers' collective experience of suffering in the history of persecution and by pointing to the immanent judgement that awaits their opponents.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article is dedicated to my renowned *Doktorvater*, Prof. D. Francois Tolmie, who supervised my master's dissertation on Galatians and my doctoral thesis on First Thessalonians. My interest in his work started by an introduction to his publication, *Persuading the Galatians* (2005), in which he proposed a text-centred rhetorical approach to explain Paul's persuasive strategy in his Letter to the Galatians. This book profoundly influenced my theological understanding of Paul. Fascinated by its methodology, I was committed to further this research approach by reading



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another letter from Paul, namely First Thessalonians. Consequently, I would like to present a text-centred rhetorical analysis of 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 in this article. Similar to Prof. Tolmie's identification of Paul's usage of vilification in Galatians, my study confirms that this usage was already apparent in his first correspondence in First Thessalonians. In order to prove the integrity of the proclamation of his Gospel, it quickly resulted in the vilification of his Jewish opponents to benefit his cause, which will be illustrated.

An overview of existing rhetorical analyses of Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians has found that scholars tend to assume that it is adequate to use categories and theories based on classical rhetoric. From the current state of scholarship, it has become clear that 2:13-16 is often identified as the *narratio*, as is the case in Jewett (1986:73-74) and Witherington (2006:60). However, scholars do not define *narratio* in the same way: Cho (2013:169) and Verhoef (1998:25) are convinced that the *narratio* serves to prepare the audience; other scholars such as Wanamaker (1990:90-91), Watson (1999:67), and Yeo (2002:530) explain the *narratio* as a description of the narrative that sketches the relationship between Paul, his co-missionaries, and the believers in Thessalonica. Jewett (1986:73-74) and Witherington (2006:60) both explain that the *narratio* serves to portray the apostle Paul as praiseworthy, whereas Hughes (1986:89) relates the *narratio* to changes in Paul's fortune.

Prinsloo (2023:2) identified that there is no agreement on the demarcation of the *narratio* as evident in, for example, Cho (2013:169) and Witherington (2006:60): verses 1:4-3:10; Jewett (1986:73-74): verses 1:6-3:13; Hughes (1986:89) and Wanamaker (1990:90-91): verses 2:1-3:10; Verhoef (1998:25), Watson (1999:67) and Yeo (2002:530): verses 2:1-3:13, and Cornelius (1998:84): verses 2:17-3:13. However, if this section is identified as *narratio*, then the function in the overall rhetorical strategy could, by definition, be summarised as "a preparation for the argument that follows later in the letter" (Mack 1990:41-42). In this article, another approach will be used to explain Paul's correspondence, by approaching it as an integral part of the overall argumentation instead of merely classifying it as *narratio*.

Rather than yet another attempt to reapply classic rhetorical categories and theories, as previous scholars have illustrated, this article prioritises another methodology, namely, to reconstruct the persuasive strategy of the author through a close reading of the original text itself. This approach, developed by Tolmie in *Persuading the Galatians* (2005), is described as "text-centred rhetoric". Instead of applying a particular ancient rhetorical theory to the text, this application requires a "minimum theoretical approach"

(Gombis 2007:348). In practice, one identifies the overall rhetorical strategy and the dominant and supportive arguments during the first phase before applying several rhetorical techniques during the second phase. This article aims to demonstrate how one can reconstruct Paul's rhetorical strategy in this part of the letter through a close reading of the fourth pericope: 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16.

2. THESSALONIANS 2:13-16: AN ADDITIONAL THANKSGIVING FOR THE CONGREGATION AS CONFIRMATION OF PAUL'S APOLOGETIC AUTOGRAPH

The pericope can be outlined as 2:13-16. Paul uses the first verse (v. 13a) to express his thanks to God. This is followed by his reason for thanksgiving (v. 13b), which is extended in verses 14-16. The choice of the demarcation is confirmed by the change in the rhetorical strategy in verse 2:13, which indicates the beginning of a new pericope. There is no difference of opinion regarding the delimitation of this pericope. There are doubts as to whether the pericope is authentic. It seems best to accept this pericope as a whole as genuine Pauline and as part of the original letter.

In contrast, some scholars such as, for example, Pearson (1971:79-94) and Schmidt (1983:269-279) argue that this pericope is a later insertion. Such preference is usually motivated as follows: the occurrence of non-Pauline vocabulary; the assumption that *ὀργή*, "wrath" (v. 16) is associated with historical events prior to AD 70, cannot be identified, and the only possibility involves Paul and all Jews with verses 14-16 outright condemned. As the following description of Paul's usage of the thanksgiving element will show, none of these arguments can be accepted as convincing. However, some scholars motivate an opposing argumentation. Bell (2005:58-60) is convinced that the notable irregularity in Paul's vocabulary could be explained by the insertion of some earlier traditional material. Still (1999:35-39) accepts Paul's first-hand knowledge about the persecution experienced by believers; he therefore refutes the argument, in which the meaning of *ὀργή*, "wrath" (v. 16) is limited to historical events prior to AD 70, by accepting Paul's first-hand knowledge about the persecution experienced by believers. Weatherly (1991:79-98) denies the inclusion of all Jews in the condemnation, by considering the geographical orientation of the term. This article, however, accepts the pericope as an authentic Pauline letter of thanksgiving.¹

1 For a detailed discussion in favour of Pauline authorship, see Weatherly (1991:79-98).

The overall rhetorical strategy can be explained as follows. By including an additional thanksgiving for the believers' actions in verses 13-16 (Malherbe 2000:166), Paul can present evidence to benefit his own cause.² He can confirm his autographic apology (Prinsloo 2023:1-23)³ in verses 1-12, by referring to their actions. The fact that they not only received, but also accepted his proclaimed word as the word of God confirms that he did not act for self-gain, but rather with integrity and by divine authority (Weima 2014:163). By connecting the congregation with him and his co-missionaries to a line of persecution (Rollens 2016:128), he can confirm that neither he nor his co-missionaries shied away from persecution. By pointing to the previous experience of the opponents' judgement, he can confirm that God approves their proclamation of the gospel (Juel 1985:232).

Paul uses the typical elements of a thanksgiving to achieve his rhetorical strategy in this pericope. In 1:2-10, he already includes an extensive thanksgiving in comparison to the typical length.⁴ He thus repeats only some of the elements in this pericope (O'Brien 1977:145; Johnson 2016:73). The additional thanksgiving looks like this: 2:13a offers the statement of thanksgiving, *εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ*, "we thank God", through which they can express their gratitude to God for the believers' actions. Verse 2:13b offers a reason for thanksgiving; they accepted the heard word as the word of God with sustained faith. Verses 2:14-16 extend this motivation: their suffering is connected to the persecution of both the prophets and Jesus.⁵

Various arguments are used in the pericope to bring Paul's overall strategy to fruition. Some are dominant and others are sub-supportive. The discussion of how Paul used these arguments will be explained in more detail. The arguments include praise, divine control/initiative, ethos, experience, warning, and vilification.

2.1 1 Thessalonians 2:13a (statement of thanksgiving)

A dominant argument of praise characterises the statement of thanksgiving. Note verse 13a: *καὶ διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἡμεῖς εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ ἀδιαλείπτως*, "and therefore we also thank God without ceasing". The statement of thanksgiving is introduced with the words *καὶ διὰ τοῦτο*, "for this cause also", whereby, according to Donfried (1984:199), Paul refers back to the

2 For a discussion of the term *ethos*, see Anderson (2000:61-62).

3 For an illustration of Paul's usage of an "autographic apology", see Prinsloo (2023:1-23).

4 For an explanation of Paul's usage of the thanksgiving element, see Prinsloo (2022:1-19).

5 For an overview of Paul's usage of thanksgivings, see O'Brien (1977:141-166).

content of the previous pericope. Whereas the previous pericope describes Paul's integrity and his co-missionaries' initial actions as characterised by divine authority, in this pericope, Paul prioritises thanksgiving to God for the believers' initial and sustained response to the gospel 2:13b-16 (Johnson 2016:73). Their response is evident from the statement in which *εὐχαριστέω*, "thank", is repeated: *καὶ ἡμεῖς εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ ἀδιαλείπτως*, "we thank God for you without ceasing" (Juel 1985:231). The insertion of such a thanksgiving element was not unique to Paul; it could be identified in some Graeco-Roman letters dated during that time. However, according to Weima (2016:53), most of the Graeco-Roman letters did not include a thanksgiving element. Taking into account that the recipients would have listened to the letter being read out aloud, the unexpected insertion of the repeated *εὐχαριστέω*, "we thank", is rhetorically effective. It immediately draws the recipients' attention to the ensuing content. Paul thanks God for the congregation, by using a second thanksgiving that characterises them as praiseworthy (Klauck 2006:365). The usage of a thanksgiving element reaffirms the congregation's favourable relationship with Paul, including his co-missionaries (Schreiber 2014:151). Thus, this argument of praise supports his case and gratitude because the believers' response furthers his previous claims in 2:1-12 (Lamprecht 2001:269).

2.2 1 Thessalonians 2:13b (reason for thanksgiving)

Green (2002:139) identifies verse 13b as "the reason for thanksgiving", which is used for the dominant argument of experience. Note verse 13b: *ὅτι παραλαβόντες λόγον ἀκοῆς παρ' ἡμῶν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐδέξασθε*, "after you received the word of God which you heard from us and accepted it". The conjunction *ὅτι*, "because", is used to indicate that the preceding statement (2:13a) is now to be explained as the reason for the thanksgiving (Malherbe 2000:166). Paul can assume their experience of being evangelised by simply alluding to the participle *παραλαβόντες*, "to receive", including the phrase *λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ*, "a word of God" (Haufe 1999:43). The words *λόγον ἀκοῆς παρ' ἡμῶν*, "a word you heard from us", presuppose a process unique to Rabbinic teaching, in which one learns tradition through an attentive listening practice (Best 2003:110). The effectiveness of the proclamation of the gospel message is confirmed by the selective inclusion of the aorist verb *ἐδέξασθε*, "accepted". They heard the announcement and took it to heart (Weima 2014:163). In doing so, Paul can assume the benefit of the congregation's memory of the initial encounter.

The first supporting argument is ethos. Note verse 13b: οὐ λόγον ἀνθρώπων ἀλλὰ ἐστὶν ἀληθῶς λόγον θεοῦ, “not as a word of men, but as it truly is, a word of God”. Their reliability is now clarified by an antithetical sentence explaining how they responded to the gospel message. Already from the unique construction παρ’ ἡμῶν τοῦ θεοῦ, “From us, from God” (v. 13b), the inextricable interweaving of Paul’s word and God’s word is evident, for Paul’s word was received as divine (Harris 2015:136; Malherbe 2000:167). This notable interweaving confirms that the Thessalonians not only heard the gospel-centred preaching from Paul and his fellow missionaries but, knowing the radical social-political consequences and persecution soon to follow (Haufe 1999:44), they also completely accepted the message (Johnson 2016:73). Rhetorically, this is adequate because of the believers’ reception and persistence as the reason for their thanksgiving; it provides Paul with much-needed proof, which confirms his previous claims about their ministry (2:1-12). Therefore, the young believers in Thessalonica function as the testimony that confirms both the reliability and integrity of their actions (Juel 1985:231).

The second supporting argument is divine control/initiative. Note verse 13d: λόγον θεοῦ, ὃς καὶ ἐνεργεῖται ἐν ὑμῖν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν, “word of God which also works in you who believe”. After their forced departure from Thessalonica, this word continued to work in those who received it by faith, despite the missionaries’ present absence in person (Weima 2014:163). The λόγος, the “word” the believers received from Paul was divine in terms of content and power. The Thessalonians heard the message about Jesus Christ, and God initiated the necessary faith in them through the divine power of his Spirit (Johnson 2016:73-74). Put differently, the believers’ (continued) faith is inseparable from God’s control/initiative.

2.3 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16a (motivation for thanksgiving)

As explained earlier, Paul’s rhetorical strategy can be outlined as the identification of his dominant arguments, followed by his supportive arguments, and concluded with his usage of rhetorical techniques.

2.3.1 The dominant arguments used by Paul

The first dominant argument is an argument of praise. Note verse 14: Ὑμεῖς γὰρ μιμηταὶ ἐγενήθητε, ἀδελφοί, τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν οὐσῶν ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ὅτι τὰ αὐτὰ ἐπάθετε καὶ ὑμεῖς ὑπὸ τῶν ἐδίων συμφυλετῶν καὶ αὐτοὶ ὑπὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων, “For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you suffered the same things from your own fellow countrymen as they did from the Jews”. This part begins

with the vocative ἀδελφοί, “brothers”, which Paul uses to address the young believers. It also has an epistolary function to identify a transition in Paul’s argument (Weima 2014:165). The motivation for his thanksgiving in 2:14, similar to 1:6, deals with the believers’ imitation: ὑμεῖς γὰρ μιμηταὶ ἐγενήθητε, “for you became imitators”. At the time, imitation was understood as a process in which *logos* is understood and *ethos* is imitated (Martin 1999:41). The imitation process that Paul has in mind involves the imitation of the believers in Judea by the believers in Thessalonica (Hoppe 2004:539). With the concept of μιμητης, “to imitate”, Paul succeeds in creating a comparison, in which the experience of the Thessalonian believers is compared to the similar, yet different, experiences of the Judean believers (Taylor 2002:788). Paul’s choice to include the congregations of Judea and their experience in his comparison in 2:14 has a broader function in his overall persuasive strategy. Rhetorically speaking, he presupposes their identity; the specific experience is a secondary matter. By mentioning the Judean congregations, he does not only make the comparison with the Thessalonian believers possible, but it also enables him to connect the Thessalonians’ suffering and persecution experience with that of the congregations in Judea. Although their experiences are not identical, there is an apparent similarity, namely “suffering” (Castelli 1991:94). Both experience suffering and are persecuted, due to their faith. Therefore, based on their willingness to endure suffering for the sake of their faith, the Thessalonian believers are portrayed as imitators and thus characterised as praiseworthy (Weima 2014:166).

The second dominant argument is experience. It assumes the congregation’s existing knowledge about the persecution of the congregations in Judea, including their own experience of persecution. **Note verse 14b:** ὅτι τὰ αὐτὰ ἐπάθετε καὶ ὑμεῖς ὑπὸ τῶν ἰδίων συμφυλετῶν καθὼς καὶ αὐτοὶ ὑπὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων, “because you also suffered among the same fellow countrymen, as they also suffered among the Jews”. The persecution is probably about the suffering of the congregations in Judea under some Jews (Gillard 1989:501; Lamp 2003:427)⁶ who, Paul assumes, are well-known to the Thessalonians (Best 2003:113), although scholars do not fully agree with one another about which historical event he has in mind.⁷ To Paul’s mind, the detail of the historical event is less important than

6 *Contra* Verhoef (1995:41-46) who considers that Paul refers to *all* Jews by the presence of the article τῶν. However, with the portrayal of the Jews’ negative actions in mind (v. 2:15-16), it becomes clear that Paul did not intend to include all Jews, but only a selective group of Jews. For confirmation, see Rydelnik (2008:58-67).

7 For a more detailed description of the possible interpretations of the suffering that the congregations in Judea experienced among the Jews, see Bockmuehl (2003:55-87).

the analogy between the Judeans and the Thessalonians; both accepted the gospel in the face of opposition because both groups experienced persecution and suffering at the hands of the Jews (Malherbe 2000:169). By including the allusion to their suffering *ἐπάθετε*, “you suffered”, he can assume that the recipients’ memories, based on their own experience, would confirm his statement: *ὑπὸ τῶν ἰδίων συμφυλετῶν*, “under your own fellow countrymen”. As for the identity of these peoples, it is worth noting that they included Jews and non-Jews; the concept does not have a strict ethnic meaning but it is understood as geographical (Bell 2005:63-65; Weima 2014:167). Although the initial experience of opposition was attributed to the Jews, the distinction between the synagogue and the newly-found congregation grew, with the opposition increasing among the non-Jews (Taylor 2002:789-790). In this way, Paul can use the believers’ existing knowledge and experience to lend weight to his wider argument.

The dominant argument of experience can also be identified in verse 15: *τῶν καὶ τὸν κύριον ἀποκτεινάντων Ἰησοῦν καὶ τοὺς προφήτας καὶ ἡμᾶς ἐκδιωξάντων*, “who also killed the Lord Jesus and persecuted the prophets and us”. Paul’s description of the actions of the Jews fulfils a broader function in his overall strategy. It enables him to connect himself, his colleagues, and the believers in Thessalonica to the prophets of the Old Testament, Jesus the Lord, and the other Christian congregations. Through their communal experience of suffering, Paul, his co-workers, and the congregation are portrayed as part of the historical line of suffering (Juel 1985:232). It offers them an identity that extends far beyond the borders of Thessaloniki, making them part of the larger narrative (Rollens 2016:124). Therefore, the Thessalonians are encouraged by the prospect that justice will be done through the completeness of the judgement of the Jews (Still 1999:195).

Two categories and final destinations are in question. The first category is indicated by faith in Jesus through faithful perseverance. It is connected to the congregation of Thessalonica and the other believers, with the final destination of salvation in Christ (2:13-14). The second category is indicated by unbelief in Jesus, which is characterised by hostile actions. It is, consequently, connected to the Jews, with their final destination, namely the wrath or judgement of God (2:15-16). Through this dualistic or binary frame of mind, the believers can understand their experience of rejection, opposition, and separation (Still 1999:200). In this way, they are encouraged to persevere.

2.3.2 The supportive arguments used by Paul

The first supporting argument is divine control/initiative. Note the following phrase in verse 14: τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν οὐσῶν ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus”. Best (1972:114) explains the description of the congregations as follows: αἱ ἐκκλησίαι, “the churches”, implies several house churches in this area; ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ, “in Judea”, is not limited to the Roman area only but also includes Samaria and Galilee, in other words, the whole of Palestine; τοῦ θεοῦ, “of God”, whereby the believers are identified as belonging to God, in other words, God’s own – a description that distinguishes them from other assemblies; ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “in Jesus Christ”, is added to distinguish them from the Jews. By the time of writing, no distinction had yet been made to distinguish the term ἐκκλησία, “church”, as Christian assembly from the local Jewish synagogue (Weima 2014:166). A similar description is found in the opening of Paul’s letter, where the congregation of Thessalonica is described as ἐκκλησία Θεσσαλονικέων ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ, “(the) church of Thessalonica in God the Father and Jesus Christ”. The same is true of the congregations in Judea and of the one in Thessalonica (Martin 1999:45). Both are also based exclusively on the action/faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their existence cannot be explained without God’s control and salvific initiative in Christ (Fee 2009:15).

The second supporting argument is vilification. Note verses 15-16a: (τῶν Ἰουδαίων), τῶν καὶ τὸν κύριον ἀποκτεινάντων Ἰησοῦν καὶ τοὺς προφῆτας καὶ ἡμᾶς ἐκδιώξαντων καὶ θεῷ μὴ ἀρεσκόντων καὶ πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις ἕνασιν, “(the Jews) who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. Thus, they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins”. Consider the following descriptions confirming Paul’s utilization of vilification. τῶν καὶ τὸν κύριον ἀποκτεινάντων Ἰησοῦν καὶ τοὺς προφῆτας, “who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets” (2:15a). With these words, Paul is probably quoting pre-synoptic material, which may also have been included in the Q source (Bell 2005:60). He connects the Jews to the death of Jesus. Historically, the Romans crucified Jesus, the Jews did not kill him (Simpson 1990:56). Based on Paul’s Jewish background, he knows that Jewish law does not approve crucifixion; only Roman law does. He probably has some Jewish leaders in mind, those whose instigation of Roman actions led to Jesus’ crucifixion (Weima 2014:168). With his word order, namely the separation of ὁ κύριος and Ἰησοῦς, he emphasises the shame of the Jews. Together with this, he also connects the Jews to the death of the prophets. With the concept

προφήτης, he explicitly refers to the prophets of the Old Testament (Best 1972:115). Therefore, one can conclude that, in this instance, Paul assumes the Jewish tradition about the prophets of Israel, which typically explains that Israel killed its own prophets.⁸ και ἡμᾶς ἐκδιωξάντων, “and drove us out” (2:15b). Marshall (1983:79) confirms that this probably relates to the events when Paul and his associates, in response to the opposition of the Jews, were forced to leave the city of Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-10a). και θεῶ μη ἄρεσκόντων, και πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις ἐναντίων, “they displease God and oppose all men” (2:15c). According to Bell (2005:69), Paul probably has the impact of the Jews’ opposition to his ministry in mind, which he then describes (2:16a). The Jews’ opposition to Paul’s gospel-centred preaching and to all non-Jews displeases God. The implicit claim is that Paul and his associates please God through the gospel they preach to non-Jews (Juel 1985:233). κωλύόντων ἡμᾶς τοῖς ἔθνεσιν λαλῆσαι ἵνα σωθῶσιν, “by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved” (2:16a). This statement does not only repeat the initial ἐκδιώκω, “persecute/drive out” event, but it highlights the continuing nature of their opposition (Hiebert 1992:221). If the account of the narrative in Acts is correct, the opposition in Berea (Acts 17:13) and Corinth (Acts 18:6) may be relevant in understanding Paul’s position (Still 1999:134). The ἵνα clause confirms the purpose of Paul’s speeches to the Gentiles, so that they may be saved through their acceptance of the preached gospel (Weima 2014:173-174). Paul’s description of the Jews’ actions fulfils a broader function in his overall strategy. It also enables him to vilify his opponents (the Jews) and emphasises his divine authority. By holding the Jews accountable for the suffering and emphasising that they are always prone to judge, he may suggest divine approval of gospel-centred preaching. Therefore, the congregation no longer has to be concerned about their Jewish opponents because God already wills their salvation (Still 1999:197-198).

The third supporting argument is ethos. Note the following words in verse 15: και ἡμᾶς ἐκδιωξάντων, “and we persecuted”, and in verse 16a: κωλύόντων ἡμᾶς τοῖς ἔθνεσιν λαλῆσαι ἵνα σωθῶσιν, “we prevented from speaking to the Gentiles so that they might be saved”. With this argument, Paul wants to reaffirm their integrity and reliability. Paul’s motivation can be understood with reference to the rhetorical situation. Shortly after Silvanus and Timothy returned from Macedonia, they joined Paul in Corinth. Upon their arrival, Paul responded to Timothy’s feedback and together, with input from his co-missionaries, Paul corresponded with the believers in

8 *Contra* Gillard (1989:259-261, 270) who denies that “prophets” refers to the Old Testament prophets. For confirmation that this is indeed the case, see Omanson (2006:452) and Simpson (1990:42-72).

Thessalonica. In Acts 18:5, it is told that Silvanus and Timothy arrived from Macedonia while he was in Corinth intensively trying to persuade the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. In the next verse, one reads that Paul said in response to their opposition and insults: “From now on, I will go to the Gentiles” (Still 1999:136-137).⁹ The Jews were, broadly speaking, responsible for charges against Paul in Thessalonica. He feared that they were still attempting to place their authority and integrity under suspicion (Wortham 1995:41). Paul’s letter expresses his displeasure at his immediate experience with the Jews in Corinth (Acts 18:6), and his delight in the return of his co-missionaries (Acts 18:5) and their favourable report (3:6), as well as their writing of the first correspondence followed (Still 1999:270). With the vilification of the Jews (2:15-16), Paul can reaffirm the integrity of their authority and actions. The fact that God will punish the Jews who persecuted Paul confirms that his ministry carries God’s approval. It also serves as an encouragement for the suffering congregation to know that God will punish their opponents.

The next supporting argument is a warning. Note verse 16b: ἔφθασεν δὲ ἐπ’ αὐτούς ἡ ὀργὴ εἰς τέλος, “for the wrath has come upon them ultimately”. Because the negative actions are not merely a single occurrence in history but also continue, Paul adds the following conclusion: εἰς τὸ ἀναπληρῶσαι αὐτῶν τὰς ἁμαρτίας παράτης, ἔφθασεν δὲ ἐπ’ αὐτούς ἡ ὀργὴ εἰς τέλος, “to fill up the measure of their sins always, for the wrath has come upon them ultimately” (2:16b). According to Green (2002:147), this presupposes the negative actions of the Jews of the past, including their ongoing actions in the present (2:15-16a). In this verse, the infinitive ἀναπληρῶσαι, “to complete”, has the specific meaning that a certain measure, for example, the contents of a measuring cup, has been filled. In Jewish scriptures, the image of a filled cup symbolises the pending judgement based on the accomplished measure of sins. These sins of the Jews resulted in punishment (Best 2003:118-119). Such a statement is rhetorically effective because he does not merely point to the sins of others; simultaneously, he formulates a severe warning to the believers.

2.3.3 The rhetorical techniques used by Paul

Various rhetorical techniques are included to further Paul’s strategy. His first technique is *inclusio*. It is noted between 1:2 and 2:13 regarding the expression εὐχαριστέω τῷ θεῷ, “we thank God”. In both pericopes, Paul uses the characteristic of a typical element of thanksgiving (Shogren 2012:88).

9 From existing research, it appears that no study recognises Acts 18:6 as a key to argue the interpretation presented, except Still (1999:136-137), who mentions Acts 18:6 as one of several prooftexts from Acts to motivate Paul’s displeasure with the Jews.

His second technique is the antithetical formulation in 2:13 regarding the statement: *οὐ λόγον ἀνθρώπων ἀλλὰ λόγον θεοῦ*, “not a word from men, but a word from God”. Through this antithetical formulation, he dismisses any attempt of charges to be brought against him, in order to reaffirm his divine authority.

His third technique is the inclusion of a metaphor – the well-worn metaphor *ἀδελφοί*, “brothers”, in 2:14. By including this metaphor, Paul assumes the favourable, yet hierarchical relationship which he continues to have with the believers; one that ensures the favour of the recipients, while allowing him the necessary authority to teach and instruct the believers (Aasgaard 2004:285).

His fourth technique involves word order, notably in 2:15, in the separation of *κύριος*, “the Lord”, and *Ἰησοῦς*, “Jesus”, by *ἀποκτείνω*. This emphasises the shame of the Jews’ actions. Not only have they killed someone by the name of Jesus, but they have also killed, in fact, the Lord Jesus himself (Best 1972:115).

His fifth technique is the usage of a stacking effect, which is visible in 2:15-16, where various crimes of the Jews are piled up, namely *ἀποκτείνω*, “to kill”; *ἐκδιώκω*, “to persecute”; *μὴ ἀρέσκω*, “to displease”; *ἐναντίος*, “to oppose”, and *καλύω*, “to hinder”, followed by the judgement, *ἡ ὀργή*, “the wrath”. This emphasises the extent of their sins or wrongdoing, followed by God’s response.

His sixth technique concerns hyperbole, whereby the extent of their wrongdoing and God’s response to it is overemphasised in 2:15-16: *Ἰησοῦς καὶ οἱ προφῆτας ἀποκτείνω*, “killed Jesus and the prophets”, and *πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις ἐναντίος*, “oppose all men” (Schlueter 1994:90-91,105).

Paul’s seventh technique is the usage of vilification in 2:15-16, where the crimes of the Jews are described: *ἀποκτείνω*, “to kill”; *ἐκδιώκω*, “to persecute”; *μὴ ἀρέσκω*, “to displease”; *ἐναντίος*, “to oppose”, and *καλύω*, “to hinder”, followed by the judgement upon them *ὀργή*, “the wrath”. With this, the Jews, his opponents, are explicitly vilified with the following outcomes. By emphasising the extent of their guilt, not only is God’s approval of preaching the gospel implied, but he can ensure that the congregation will no longer bother with the Jews if they continue to put Paul’s integrity under suspicion. By emphasising the extent of their guilt, he can point to his own innocence. By emphasising the realisation of the immanent eschatological judgement of the opponents, Paul is able to underscore his realised eschatology about the salvation of the Thessalonian believers (Marshall 1983:9; Still 1999:98).

To summarise, Paul's overall rhetorical strategy in this pericope involves an additional thanksgiving for the congregation's actions as evidence for the claims in his apologetic autograph. He implements this strategy by offering several arguments. The dominant arguments are praise and experience. His supporting arguments are divine control/initiative, vilification, ethos, and warning. He also uses the following rhetorical techniques: antithetical formulation, hyperbole, *inclusio*, metaphor, a stacking effect, vilification, and word order.

3. CONCLUSION

A reading of the current state of scholarship confirmed that the existing rhetorical analyses are typically based on ancient rhetorical categories, although none of these studies agree in their attempt to outline the rhetoric of Paul's letter. This article identified another methodology that reconstructs the rhetorical strategy from the text itself; it does not merely reapply classical rhetorical theory to the text. This reading is called text-centred rhetorical analysis, which is based on a minimum theoretical framework. The text was demarcated as one pericope, 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16, another thanksgiving element used by Paul to benefit his cause and vilify the opponents. This usage enabled him to reaffirm the outcomes of his apologetic autograph by confirming the integrity of their gospel proclamation, while the immanent judgement awaited their opponents. Paul's overall rhetorical strategy can be outlined by the identification of his dominant arguments, explained by his supportive arguments and furthered by the usage of rhetorical techniques. The dominant arguments included are praise and experience. His supporting arguments are divine control/initiative, vilification, ethos, and warning. He also uses the following rhetorical techniques: antithetical formulation, hyperbole, *inclusio*, metaphor, a stacking effect, vilification and word order.

When comparing the outcome of a text-centred rhetorical analysis with the existing state of scholarship, it becomes clear that this study does not merely repeat the identification of this pericope as *narratio*. Instead, it accounts for a more nuanced understanding of Paul's persuasive strategy in the text itself. Thus, from this article, it seems clear that the vocabulary and categories of ancient rhetoric, in the absence of a close reading of the text, do not suffice to outline Paul's rhetorical strategy or to highlight his persuasiveness. A close reading of Paul's letter is, therefore, considered a prerequisite for deepening one's understanding of the text, prior to any responsible attempt of appropriation to follow.

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Keywords

Text-centred rhetorical analysis

1 Thessalonians

Pauline Literature

Trefwoorde

Teksgesentreerde retoriese analise

1 Tessalonisense

Pauliniese literatuur