INTRODUCTION

In 1969, in his presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature, James Muilenburg

issued a call for moving beyond Form Criticism to what he entitled "Rhetorical Criticism." He

said that his primary interest was:

> in exhibiting the structural patterns that are employed for the fashioning of a literary unit, whether in poetry or in prose, and in discerning the many and various devices by which the predications are formulated and ordered into a unified whole. Such an enterprise I should describe as, rhetoric and the methodology as rhetorical criticism.[1]

Although the name "Rhetorical Criticism" was new, the interest in discovering the

interrelatedness of ideas in a single passage of Biblical literature was not. In the 18th century

Bishop Robert Lowth broke new ground with his influential work, *De sacra Poesi Hebraeorum*.[2]

His work was followed by Bishop John Jebb (1820),[3] Rev. Thomas Boys (1825)[4] and Professor

of Oriental

Languages, John Forbes (1854).[5] In the 20th century new ground was broken by F. C. Burney

(1925)[6] and N.W. Lund (1942).[7] The entire book of Hebrews was analyzed by Vanhoye in

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[1]James Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *JBL* 88 (1969), 8.

[2]Robert Lowth, *De sacra Poesi Hebraiorum*, (Oxford: n.p., 1753), ET *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (London: n.p., 1787).

[3]John Jebb, *Sacred Literature; comprising a review of the principles of composition laid down by the late R. Lowth ... in his Praelections and Isaiah: and an application of the principles so reviewed, to the illustration of the New Testament; in a series of critical observations on the style and structure of that Sacred volume* (London: n.p., 1820).

[4]Thomas Boys, *A Key to the Book of Psalms* (London: L.B. Steely and Sons, 1825). -----*Tactia Sacra, An attempt to develop and to exhibit to the eye by tabular arrangements a general rule of composition prevailing in the Holy Scriptures* (London: T. Hamilton, 1824).

[5]John Forbes, *The Symmetrical Structure of Scripture; or, the principles of Scripture parallelism exemplified, in an analysis of the Decalogue, The Sermon on the Mount, and other passages of the Sacred writings*. (Edinburgh: n.p., 1854).

[6] F. C. Burney, *The Poetry of Our Lord* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925).

[7]N. W. Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942).

1964[8] and, in 1966, John Bligh published a rhetorical study of Galatians.[9] The following is, to

our knowledge, the first attempt at a full rhetorical analysis of I Corinthians and is a follow up

of

our study of the outline of the same book. [10]

Our working assumption in the following rhetorical analysis is as follows:

Paul, as a trained rabbinic scholar, would have memorized at least most of the   Torah and the

Prophets.[11] Thus the various forms of parallelism extensively used by the writing prophets

would naturally be the literary devices which he would instinctively have employed.[12] We make

no attempt at determining what is prose and what is poetry. Rather, with Muilenburg, we have

attempted to discover the "many and various devices by which the predications are formulated

and ordered into a unified whole."[13]

Traditionally commentaries have moved verse by verse or section by section through the Epistle

in a forward moving systematic fashion.[14] Our analysis has uncovered the extensive use

throughout the NT of what we prefer to call "the inversion principle." This is not simply

Inclusio, where the author rounds out his discussion by returning to his point of starting. Rather

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[8] Albert Vanhoye, *A Structured Translation of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, translated from the Greek and the French by James Swetnam (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964.

[9] John Bligh, *Galatians in Greek, A Structural Analysis of St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Detroit: University of Detroit Press, 1966).

[10] K. E. Bailey, "The Structure of I Corinthians and Paul's Theological Method with Special Reference to 4:17," *Novum Testamentum* XXV (1983), 152-188.

[11] Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Copenhagen: Ejanr Munksgaard, 1961), *passim*

[12] Cf. Note 15

[13] Cf. Note 1.

there is a systematic move through a series of topics which is then inverted (this rhetorical form

has been called Chiasm and Chiasmus). This inversion occurs here in I Cor. with a series of

lines (cf. 11:7-13) or a series of paragraphs (cf. 11:17-34). This latter text is an illustration of the

additional layer

of perception that is available to the interpreter only when the rhetorical structure of the material

is uncovered. The passage is organized with an A-B-C-B-A form. The "tradition of the Lord" is

in the center (C) and this center is encased within a double discussion of "the unworthy manner"

of the Corinthian celebration of the Lord's table. What Paul means by "the unworthy manner" is

made clear when the two halves of the single discussion are brought together. The "unworthy

manner" consists of division, drunkenness and indifference to the hunger of the poor. The

"failing to discern the body" is a failure to perceive the body of Christ/the church, and in so

doing to

"despise the church of God." When the reader interprets the passage in terms of a forward

progression of thought only, the two halves of the carefully constructed inversion are never seen

together and Paul's intent is easily missed.

I have placed some catch word summaries in bold type to the right of the various sections to help

the reader perceive the major themes that repeat in the various stanzas. In the one case of pages

23-24 the two pages together form a single extended inversion and must be examined as a whole.

The indentations on the page are simply a visual device to help the reader's eye catch the

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[14] Cf. C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968); H. Conzelmann, *I Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); W. F. Orr and J. A. Walther, *I Corinthians* (New York: Doubleday, 1976).

repetitions and inversions in their various parallelistic forms.[15] The present writer is fully aware

that this work is a first start and that further refinement is yet required. We can but hope that this

beginning will stimulate others to join in the effort of recovering yet another layer of St. Paul's

intent in this famous and influential epistle.

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[15] 15 Cf. K. E. Bailey, "Methodology (2): Four Types of Literary Structures in the New Testmaent," Poet and Peasant, A Literary Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), 44-75. One rhetorical form that is common in I Cor., which is not described in the above essay, we have chosen to call "the encased parable." (The word parable is used here in the Hebrew sense of meshal which includes at least simile, metaphor, and parable.) The above mentioned literary device is where a parable is encased in the middle of two or more matching blocks of material that are informed/illustrated/communicated/clarified by the parable