

ON THE 'REINVENTION' OF RHETORIC ¹

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Abstract

The dominant current conception of rhetoric is defined in this article as 'a less important, formal aspect of the use of language in (oral) human communication, not (necessarily) expressing truth; a practice which consists in essence of the use of stylistic figures with the purpose of evoking an emotional effect in an audience'. This conception, however, differs significantly from rhetoric as it was seen by the ancient Greek and Roman rhetoricians. In the 20th century the study of rhetoric revived - building on classical conceptions but also with significant emphases: genesis (the process of creation) as well as analysis (the process of interpretation) is the mark of modern rhetorics. Thus the wider social relations between speakers and their audience, writers and readers, fall within the rhetorician's purview. This implies that two levels of discourse have to be dealt with: the level of rhetoric in Scripture (i e, how the text 'works' or 'functions'), and the level of the rhetoric of the interpretation of Scripture (i e, how modern scholars - as readers within specific social relations - argue their case about the interpretation and methods of interpretation of the New Testament. It is argued that the 'reinvention' of rhetoric, as seen by the emergence of rhetorical criticism in New Testament interpretation, needs to affect both the practice of New Testament interpretation itself, and the institutionalizing of New Testament scholarship in seminaries, faculties of theology and scientific societies in South Africa. Rhetorical criticism can get us into contact with texts as power once again, and not just with texts as embodiments of content.

1. This article is the result of various prolonged discussions with Professor Wilhelm Wuellner of the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California, to whom I wish to express my sincere appreciation. My stay in the USA was made possible by a scholarship as HRSC University Researcher from the University of Stellenbosch. This financial support is hereby acknowledged. The viewpoints and conclusions presented here are mine, and do not necessarily reflect those of any of these institutions.

*Te totum applica ad textum
rem totam applica ad te*

J A Bengel

(Preface to the hand-edition of the Greek New Testament, 1734)

In his address to the Annual Meeting of the New Testament Society of South Africa (NTSSA) in April 1988, Wilhelm Wuellner made the following provocative statement:

Rhetorical criticism in our days cannot simply continue with rhetoric as we have known it in large parts of western culture in the last three to four centuries. It must first apply itself to the task of 'reinventing' rhetoric in which texts are read as forms of *activity* inseparable from the wider social relations between writers and readers (Wuellner 1988b:5)²

The purpose of this article is to reflect on Wuellner's statement, with a special view towards New Testament scholarship in South Africa.

In the first place it is necessary to spell out what is meant by 'rhetoric as we have known it in the last three to four centuries.' In order to do this I shall try to work inductively towards a definition of rhetoric in current colloquial and scientific usage. To make a case for the 'reinvention' of rhetoric, the nature of rhetoric as it was seen in classical Greek and Rome will then be treated. Against this background the differences and similarities between ancient and modern rhetorics can be demonstrated and by doing so, it can be illustrated what is meant by the 'reinvention' of rhetoric. The article concludes with a reflection on our task as New Testament scholars in South Africa to read the texts of the New Testament 'as forms of *activity* inseparable from the wider social relations in which we live.'

One important terminological clarification is necessary at this stage: *rhetoric* refers to the *practice* of the art of communication as interaction, and *rhetorics* refers to the *theory* about the art of communication as interaction. (Similar is the distinction between *hermeneutic* and *hermeneutics*, and between literary *criticism* and literary *theory*).

1. The Babylonian captivity of rhetoric

What is 'rhetoric'?

2. This quote is from the original manuscript of Wuellner's address, and does not appear exactly in this form in the final publication of his address in *Neotestamentica*. Cf, however, Wuellner 1988:284.

During an election year we frequently hear and read the word 'rhetoric'. Let us begin our inductive search for a definition of the meaning of the word 'rhetoric' with a quote from *Newsweek* (April 4, 1988, p 21):

With the Michigan results, the familiar question of what Jackson 'wants' was beginning to look rhetorical, even silly. He wants to be the nominee, and at first, anyway, will negotiate for nothing less.

In the *San Francisco Chronicle* of April 19, 1988, there was a report about a group of University of Utah professors who had prepared an exhaustive questionnaire which was designed to 'cut through the campaign rhetoric and get to the heart of a candidate's philosophy.'

From these quotations it is clear that a statement or question with the adjective 'rhetorical' is not a serious and honest question or statement. It is somewhere between serious and silly.

We are also used to newspaper reports talking about the 'tough rhetoric' of one or another candidate. Again: although 'tough', being 'mere rhetoric' seems to imply that whatever the particular candidate was saying, does not really matter. He does not really mean to put it into practice. It was 'only talk' without any real substance. It was not really the heart of the matter.

In his recently published introduction to the study of the New Testament for college students, Stephen Harris describes the nature of Paul's letters as follows:

Writing to the Corinthians, Paul states that his critics contrast his 'weighty and powerful' letters with his unimpressive physical appearance and effectiveness as a speaker (2 Cor 10:9-11). The apostle may *exaggerate his defects for rhetorical effect*, but he is right about his letters. From the time they were first written until now, they have extended enormous influence on Christian thought and conduct (Harris 1988:203) (my italics).

To exaggerate for 'rhetorical effect' means that Paul does not really mean what he is saying about his defects. He says it only with the purpose to have a particular 'effect' on his audience, but what he says is not the truth.

One final quotation, this time from the scholarly commentary on Romans by C E B Cranfield:

For the most part the real grandeur of Romans as a piece of literature derives from its content and from the sincerity, directness and personal involvement of the author. At the same time, it would be quite incorrect to assume that the epistle is totally devoid of literary elegance; for it affords clear evidence that Paul knew the various figures of speech of the rhetoricians and that it came naturally to him to make use of them from time to time. (Cranfield then gives examples of stylistic figures used by Paul in Romans: assonance, climax, paranomasia and parallelism, and then he continues:) *But these things are used by Paul unselfconsciously, not as ends in themselves but as natural means to the forceful and compelling expression of what he has to say. It is the content that is all-important.* And it is to this content of what has to be

expressed and subordination of outward form to it that at any rate some of his *anacolutha* should be attributed (Cranfield 1975:26) (my italics).

If we analyse this quotation, it is clear that Cranfield subordinates 'form' to 'content', that the stylistic features are part of the less important 'form' of Paul's letter, and that the purpose or function of these stylistic figures is 'a means to forceful and compelling expression', but it is not integral to 'what he has to say' (= the 'content'). The reference to the Greek rhetoricians is made in the context of the presence of 'stylistic figures' in Paul's letters.

In the light of these quotations we can define rhetoric as a less important, formal aspect of the use of language in (oral) human communication, not (necessarily) expressing truth; a practice which consists in essence of the use of stylistic figures with the purpose of evoking an emotional effect in an audience.

With this definition I hope to capture the nature of rhetoric as generally understood today in the colloquial and scholarly use of the term. Although the definition is based on only three quotations (picked at random), it would be possible to quote many more examples of the use of the term 'rhetoric' in this sense. To call attention to one final example: in the new revised edition of their popular beginner's handbook on biblical exegesis, Hayes & Holladay (1987:74-75) discuss what they call the 'rhetorical style of the text' as a subsection of their chapter on 'literary criticism'. Literary criticism is the subject of one of nine chapters on different types of criticism which can be used in biblical exegesis (textual, historical, grammatical, form, tradition, redaction, structuralist, canonical criticism). In their bibliography they mark Wuellner's 1987-article as one of the most important for a student who wants to learn more about rhetoric. Their own treatment of the 'rhetorical style of the text', however, clearly reveals their misreading of Wuellner's article. In an important article Snyman (1988) offers a thorough critique of this limited use of the terms 'rhetoric' and 'style' in standard Greek and New Testament grammars, commentaries and monographs.

It is this notion of rhetoric which Wuellner calls 'the Babylonian captivity of rhetoric reduced to stylistics' (Wuellner 1987:457). One of Wuellner's students, Lauri Thurén (from Finland) calls it 'false preoccupations' in the use of rhetoric:

* Rhetoric is seen as mere stylistics, and then often stylistics reduced to stylistic features. 'Style' is understood to be only technical devices like tropes and figures or the disposition (arrangement) of the discourse.

* Because of the popular view of rhetoric as a storage of stylistic devices intended to affect people emotionally, a practice inferior to the use of logical argumentation, we have today a perception that rhetorical and persuasive argumentation is something opposite to critical and reasonable thinking. Rhetoric is often seen as discourse based on irrational, emotional devices used to promote an uncritical acceptance of a message.

It is from this captivity which rhetoric has to be liberated and reinvented. Réinvented because this was not always what rhetoric was, not even, or rather, especially not, in antiquity. There was and should again be much more to it.

In certain respects this view of rhetoric as it was defined here, is very old, in fact, as old as Plato's book *Gorgias*. In this polemical treatise against and named after one of the very first and very influential Greek rhetoricians, Gorgias, Plato levelled five charges against rhetoric:

- * Rhetoric is the simple knack of producing pleasure and gratification in an audience;
- * it is merely a species of flattery;
- * possession of power to move men's minds is an evil, since it often feeds on the ignorance of the audience;
- * rhetoric is not an art, but only a 'tool' like swimming or cookery;
- * the claim of teachers of rhetoric that a man who knows rhetoric will therefore be virtuous, is false (cf Kennedy 1963:15; Murphy 1972:17).

These remarks of Plato, however, were only the beginning of the long battle between advocates of philosophical (= theoretical) and of rhetorical (= practical) education in antiquity, or at a more fundamental level, the conflict between philosophy and rhetoric (cf Kennedy 1963:23-25, Leeman & Braet 1987:17, Lyons 1985:24).

2. The nature of rhetoric in classical Greece and Rome

A note of warning is applicable here: classical rhetorics is an 'elephant' - a highly developed intellectual activity and practice stretching over several centuries (cf. Kennedy 1963:13). Thus it might very easily be misrepresented (only the trunk or only the tail of the elephant) if we try to 'systemize' or oversimplify it into a set of 'rules' or propositions. According to Leeman & Braet (1987:146) even the exhaustive and masterful systematization of Lausberg (1973) is Lausberg's system and not a system directly attributable to antiquity since there was no such a 'system' in antiquity.

2.1 Definitions of rhetoric

According to Quintillian (*Institio oratoria* 2.15.21) the following definitions can be regarded as representative of classical views on the nature of rhetoric:

1. πείθους δημιουργός (creator of persuasion) - a definition attributed to Corax and Tisias, Gorgias and Plato (Kennedy 1963:52-67).
2. δύναμις περί ἕκαστον τοῦ θεώρεσαι τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον πείθανον (the faculty of seeing in any situation the available means of persuasion - or, in a more adequate translation: 'the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion with reference to any subject whatever') - Aristotle's definition (*Rhetorica* I,2).
3. δύναμις τοῦ εὖ λέγειν τὰ πολιτικά ζητήματα (the faculty to speak well regarding public affairs) - one of the definitions ascribed to Hermagoras.

4. *Scientia bene dicendi* (the science of speaking well or adequately) - the definition of Quintillian (*Inst.* 2.15), following Stoic rhetoricians.

The differences between them are obvious and it is also important to keep in mind that these are only four of the seemingly endless definitions of rhetoric in antiquity. Classical handbooks on rhetorics differ significantly in their treatment of this kind of meta-theoretical reflection on the nature of rhetoric. In the practical *Rhetorica ad Herennium* it is treated in one short paragraph, in contrast to the thorough and in-depth discussion of meta-theory in Quintillian's *Institutio oratoria*.

Leeman & Braet (1987:52-57) interpret these definitions with regard to the following four elements of meta-theoretical reflection on the nature of rhetoric: (i) the methodological status, (ii) the purpose, (iii) the object and (iv) the value-free character of rhetoric. Some highlights from their discussion will help us to get an insight into the nature of rhetoric as it was seen in antiquity [cf also the thorough discussion of ancient understandings of rhetoric by Kraftchick (1985:62-96)].

2.2 The methodological status of rhetoric

Regarding the methodological status of rhetoric, the famous problem of classical discussions was: *an rhetorice ars sit*, whether or not rhetoric is an art (*ars*, τέχνη). Connected to this was the didactic problem of how one can be best trained in eloquence: with or without the rules of rhetorical theory.

According to the teachers of rhetoric, rhetoric was indeed a τέχνη, or even a science (ἐπιστήμη, *scientia*). Knowledge of rhetorical theory was deemed absolutely necessary, in addition to the natural ability (φύσις, *natura*) and practice (μέλητη, *exercitatio*). Philosophers, on the other hand, did not see rhetoric as a science or a τέχνη. They recognized only the rhetorical experience (ἔμπειρία, *usus*) and this experience has didactical value only for natural ability and practice.

The discussion of what a τέχνη is, presents a confusing picture. All four definitions have as common element that τέχνη is defined as a corpus of knowledge which is organized into a system or method in order to accomplish a practical purpose. The concept is used on three levels: (i) τέχνη is used to refer to handbooks, (ii) the term can also refer to the content of such handbooks and, confusingly, it can also (iii) refer to the skill of a person to practice what is taught by the books. The third sense overlaps with the term οἰήματα (ability or skill). The basic difference between Aristotle and Plato was that Aristotle maintained that τέχνη is value-free, while Plato wanted to use the term only when an ethically acceptable purpose is pursued. And here lies the basis of the conflict between rhetoric and philosophy: can rhetoric be a 'neutral' act in itself, employed in each situation to achieve the envisioned persuasion (anything goes, as long as the argument/case is won), or should any argument in the first place be based on truth, which can only be given by philosophy? Later classical rhetoricians such as Cicero and Quintillian maintained that rhetoric is in itself ethically good and thus, it can be seen as a science (according to the Platonic criteria).

2.3 The purpose of rhetoric

In the classical reflections on the purpose of rhetoric, the theoretical level of rhetorics and the practical level of eloquence were not clearly distinguished. When classical authors speak about the purpose of rhetoric, they mean the purpose of *rhetores* (the public speakers). This is clear in the definition of rhetoric as *πελθους δημιουργος*. But, the teacher of rhetorics teaches, he does not persuade. Thus he is only indirectly involved with the purpose of rhetoric, that is, if we accept that persuasion is the purpose of eloquence. And here the question was asked whether the rules of rhetoric are only applicable to persuasive texts, or whether any text can be produced by means of these rules. With Quintillian's definition of rhetoric as *scientia bene dicendi* it seems as if he regards rhetorics as the science of all forms of purposeful speaking. The purpose of speaking is not only persuasion, but speaking adequately (*bene*). Thus, already Quintillianus (and before him also Cicero) have seen rhetorics as a general science of the production of speeches and texts. However, the limitation of rhetoric to the persuasive function was more familiar, as can be seen in the first two definitions.

2.4 The object of rhetoric

In the discussion of the object of rhetoric, classical authors again have in mind the object of eloquence as such (and not the theory of eloquence). A minimalistic and a maximalistic view on the object of rhetoric can be distinguished.

In the minimalistic view the object of rhetoric is limited to discourse about public affairs (*πολιτικά ζητήματα*, *quaestiones civiles*). In terms of the theory of rhetoric, this means that only the three well-known types of public discourse (forensic, deliberative and epideictic) fall within the rhetoricians purview (cf the definition of Hermagores).

The proponents of the maximalistic view of the object of rhetoric were not willing to confine rhetoric only to this. Aristotle represents the formalistic variant of the maximalistic view: rhetorics is an objectless, not subject-bound discipline. For him the rules of rhetoric were applicable to any subject, regardless of whether special knowledge of the subject is required. Cicero (and before him also Gorgias and Isocrates) represents the materialistic variant of the maximalistic view: the ideal orator must be able to speak adequately (that is, with expertise) about any subject. For them rhetorics became a super-science having the total reality as object.

2.5 The value-free character of rhetoric

Another major point of difference in antiquity was whether rhetoric should be ethically neutral or ethically committed. Plato was the champion of the view that rhetoric should be ethically committed and responsible, while Aristotle was of the opinion that it should be a neutral systemizing of the means of persuasion which were the most effective. For Aristotle the responsibility to use these means of persuasion responsibly, is was not something in the rhetorical system itself, but it lies outside it in the orator. The orator is the one who has to decide whether he or she will use the rhetorical principles for good or bad purposes. The definition of Quintillian (to speak *bene*) represents the normative view. *Bene* means purposeful as

well as ethically acceptable. For Quintillian eloquence is a virtue (*virtus*) and the orator is a *vir bonus* who is able to speak well (*dicendi peritus*).

2.6 The place of stylistic devices in classical rhetorics

From the definition of rhetoric in current colloquial and scientific use above, it is clear that rhetoric is seen first and foremost as an elevated and artificial way of speaking. Defined as such, rhetorics is primarily a science of style and recitation. However, this is not the original Greek view of rhetoric. For the first rhetoricians rhetorics was a system or collection of advice on how to find and arrange the content of a speech (Kennedy 1963:88). In the two oldest rhetorical handbooks, the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* and the *Rhetorica* of Aristotle, almost three quarters of each are devoted to the finding and arrangement of the content of the material, so that there is not much attention given to style, while recitation is treated only in passing. In the later Roman rhetorics style became indeed more important, but it always remained less important than the finding and arrangement of the material (Leeman & Braet 1987:58).

After a development of several centuries, by the time of Cicero, rhetorics was considered to be a discipline that encompassed five 'offices' - *inventio* (analysing the speech topic and collecting the materials for it), *dispositio* (arrangement of the material into an oration), *elocutio* (fitting words to the topic, the speaker, the audience and occasion), *actio* (or pronunciation: delivering the speech orally) and *memoria* (lodging ideas within the mind's storehouse) (Cicero, *De oratore*, 2.114-290, 307-67, 3.19-230, cf also Sloane 1975:806).

Stylistic figures are treated under *elocutio*. Although *inventio* and *elocutio* are treated separately, Cicero is emphatic that it is not possible in principle to separate 'content' and 'form' because neither can exist without the other. He also typifies the old conflict between rhetoric and philosophy as a fateful separation: 'Socrates, himself a master rhetorician, separated philosophy and rhetoric, and as unfortunate consequence, we must now learn to think with the guidance of philosophers and to speak with the rhetoricians' (*De oratore*, 3.55).

Because of the dominance of *inventio* in all of classical rhetoric, it is justified to conclude that 'stylistic features' were not as prominent as we hold it today when we speak about rhetoric or eloquence. In his proposed method for rhetorical criticism of New Testament texts Kennedy (1984:1-30) follows this classical priority: the study of the rhetorical situation should precede the study of rhetorical devices (among which are stylistic features). This implies that a 'rhetorical criticism' of a New Testament text should first consider aspects such as the purpose for the writing of that particular text (=the exigence), the premises for the argumentation, the social codes, the ideology of the participants in the communication and the world in which they lived, which basic issues are addressed, etc., before the devices and techniques which the author uses to meet the rhetorical situation are considered. Thus, it is clear that the study of 'stylistic features' is only one small element of a 'rhetorical criticism' and it is also clear that 'all discourse falls within the rhetoricians purview' (Sloane 1975:804) (*contra* for example Polan (1986), and his reviewer Clifford (1987:707): 'Because rhetorical criticism as such neglects the historical context and

studies only the formal qualities (the texture, the image patterns, the semantic associations), it favours poetry over great intellectual literature such as history, oratory and philosophy’).

From this short discussion of the nature of rhetoric as seen by classical authors, it is clear that already in antiquity there were differences of opinion of what rhetoric is or what it should be. But it is also clear that our contemporary understanding of rhetoric is at odds with of the major concerns of some of the ancients. While busy with ancient times, a short digression to consider an aspect of Paul’s treatment of the nature of rhetoric, may be illuminating.

3. Digression: the formula *ἐν παντί λόγῳ καὶ πάσῃ γνῶσει* in 1 Corinthians 1:5

H D Betz made an excellent study of how Paul saw the relationship between theology and rhetoric in his practical situation of proclaiming the gospel (1986:16-48). His interpretation of the formula *ἐν παντί λόγῳ καὶ πάσῃ γνῶσει* is of particular relevance for the topic of this article.

Betz goes so far as to say that ‘Paul’s correspondence with the Corinthians is basically nothing but an extended wrestling with this claim [of the Corinthians], concisely stated in the words “rich ...” in every kind of speech and every kind of knowledge’ (Betz 1986:26-27). Part of Paul’s problems with the Corinthians was the fact that they were in a different social class compared to the social and cultural level of the other Pauline communities. It seems that the Pauline mission succeeded in Corinth for the first time to win converts from the better educated and cultured circles of a prosperous and cosmopolitan city. Thus, the Corinthians did not simply accept the gospel Paul gave them, but they went ahead and interpreted that gospel in terms of their hellenistic religiosity. This resulted in things such as prophetic inspiration and ecstasies, because they searched for wisdom as Greeks are expected to do. In addition to this, moral problems and even scandals were treated with indifference: both libertinism (1 Cor 5-6) and radical ascetism (1 Cor 7) were tolerated and, the older moral catalogues (1 Cor 6:9-11) were set aside in the name of freedom - a word that had always tickled the fancy of the Greeks. All these developments led to the development of factions (some acting more avant-garde, other restrained or outright conservative) which threatened the congregational life. Amidst a new sophistication and enlightenment, Paul was actually faced with a community which was falling apart. This is a possible reconstruction of the historical situation of 1 Corinthians. The rhetorical situation faced by Paul is how to address a community in these circumstances in order to prevent it from disintegrating.

In the opening sentences of the letter he wrote to address this rhetorical situation, Paul states in summary fashion what must have been the claim of the Corinthians (1:5):

‘in everything you have been made rich in him,

in every form of speech and in every form of knowledge’

ἐν παντὶ ἐπλουτίσθητε ἐν αὐτῷ
ἐν παντὶ λόγῳ καὶ γνώσει

Thus Paul seems to agree with the conclusions drawn by the Corinthians: they were right in expecting 'an abundance of speech and knowledge' (λόγος καὶ γνώσις), since they were given a divine gospel message, revealed by an ambassador from the deity (as he understood himself to be) and they were experiencing ecstatic phenomena accompanying the proclamation of this message in their worship services.

According to Betz (1986:27) this claim of the Corinthians (to have abundance of 'every form of eloquence and every form of knowledge') must have been felt excessively in antiquity. It brings to mind elements of the philosophy versus rhetoric dispute since the time of Socrates and Plato. The formula 'speech and knowledge' corresponds remarkably to the philosophical program of Isocrates, one of the first rhetoricians. He made a serious attempt to meet the critique of sophistic rhetorics begun by Socrates and carried out by Plato and Aristotle, namely, that they (the sophists) have no concern for truth or knowledge. Isocrates' aim is to bring into a synthesis what seems to be unrelated: eloquence, knowledge of the subject matter with which speeches are dealing, and practical political experience. Only in such a synthesis can rhetoric be successful, i.e. persuasive.

When Paul uses the formula 'eloquence and knowledge', he must have known its nature and origin and the issues connected to it. Thus, Paul admits the presence of 'eloquence' and 'knowledge' among the Corinthians, but the deficit he sees in them concerns their maturity in the practical conduct of their church life. There should be a synthesis of eloquence, knowledge and practice.

This concern of Paul is thus directly related to the point argued in this article, namely, that our biblical interpretation must move beyond the study of 'form and content' (linguistics, literary criticism, and theology or 'revelation history' as some prefer to call it) towards interactional reading which implies a commitment to involvement in our wider social relations. This is what is meant by a call for the 'reinvention' of rhetoric. It is not enough to understand the 'content', we must also act in response to it. That is the Spirit or the power in this collection of texts. But in order to give warrant to justify the move towards this claim, we have to consider briefly some developments in the history of rhetorics as well as the differences between classical and modern rhetorics.

4. Modern rhetorics

What had happened to the positive and highly esteemed view of rhetoric which was for centuries (alongside philosophy) the subject of the highest education for which a person could strive?

To answer this question in all its complexity one would need a thorough historical investigation and description of the development of rhetorics since classical Greece. Wuellner (1988a) did this in part in a recent study in which he investigated the relationship between rhetorics and hermeneutics. It is not possible to repeat all of it

here. From this historical survey it is clear that there were ups and downs in the perception of the nature of rhetorics through the centuries. One of the 'high points' in this development was the role of rhetorics in the 16th century religious reforms (Wuellner 1988a:9-13). Rhetorics and hermeneutics were in close association in the work of the early Reformers (unlike the humanists who kept the two arts apart). Among the reasons for this close association are (1) the linguistic and public character of the Bible, (2) the situational context and purpose highlighted by rhetorics; (3) various parts of discourse were always viewed in rhetorics as integral to a systemic whole, (4) rhetorics facilitated the move from exposition to application as an integral part in the unitive process of hermeneutics (Hausammann 1970:175, Wuellner 1988a:10).

This integration of rhetorics and hermeneutics, however, was short-lived and even in the very lifetime of the early reformers it faded from view. According to Wuellner the rise and rapid spread of the educational theories of the French philosopher, Peter Ramus, may have had something to do with it (1988a:11), even though Ramism has merely completed the incipient fragmentation of rhetorics by affirming the offices as discrete specialities (Sloane 1975:806). *Inventio* and *dispositio* were assigned to dialectics, which was by now a largely silent art of disputation. Memory was considered to be a matter of effective disposition, so that separate attention to memory disappeared. *Elocutio* and *pronunciatio* were considered the only two offices proper to rhetoric. This separation of what was seen as a unity in classical times, is one of the major explanations for the present 'captivity' of rhetorics.

Rhetorical structure in the *old* and familiar meaning in biblical exegesis since the middle of the sixteenth century, with the rise and spectacular influence of the Ramist educational reform, became reduced to textual formal features. These formal features became almost overnight marginalized to the point of being more or less irrelevant for a text's semantic or theological structure.

With the triumph of hermeneutical theory, as the theory of extracting 'the meaning' (usually restricted to *theological*, occasionally also *ethical*, but rarely any other meanings), the theory which inspired, and inspires, *rhetorics*, was lost sight of. Rhetorical criticism has lost its power and its reason for being, if it is reduced to, or equated with literary criticism, hermeneutical criticism, or structuralist criticism, regardless what vintage or variety (Wuellner 1988b:43).

In order to understand the revival of rhetorical criticism in our century, it is important to highlight certain important differences between classical and modern rhetorics. From the discussion of the nature of rhetoric in classical Greece and Rome above, it became clear that the emphasis was mainly upon creation, upon instructing those wishing to initiate communication with others. In contrast to this, the mark of modern rhetorics is its shift of focus to the auditor or reader, without losing sight of the speaker or writer. The various theorists associated with the New Rhetoric share a rejection of the speaker orientation of the traditional perspective. They draw attention to the social context of human communication, thereby placing the insights and tools of classical rhetoric within a larger framework accessible to modern social sciences (Jewett 1986:64). Thus, Sloane can maintain that a concern

for audience, for intention and for structure, or, both analysis (the process of interpretation) and genesis (the process of creation) is the mark of modern rhetorics (1975:803). Yet, not only the intent, audience and structure of a discursive act, but also the shaping effects of the medium itself on both the communicator and communicant are studied. Modern rhetorics is far more than a collection of rhetorical terms borrowed from classical rhetoricians (cf the work of Sloane (1975), Perelman (1969), Toulmin (1974, 1984), Van Eemeren et al (1986), and White (1980) to name but a few examples of the remarkable activity in modern rhetorics and the closely related theories of argumentation).

The important point is to realize that the 'communicant' includes every reader of a text (and not only the first reader) and that every act of reading is a new, unique, interactive process. That is why Wuellner can talk about the 'wider social relations between writers and readers' as part of the rhetoric of texts.

The moment we realise this interaction between reader and text (namely that we as modern readers are also actively involved in the reading process), it becomes clear that we have to deal with two levels of discourse. First the level of the rhetoric in Scripture (that is, how the text actually 'works' or 'functions') and secondly, the level of the rhetoric of the interpretation of Scripture (that is, how and why we as modern scholars of the New Testament argue our case about the interpretation and methods of interpretation of these texts). In the last decade or so, there has been a revival or rebirth of rhetorics in the study of the New Testament (cf e g Robbins (1984), Mack & Robbins (1988) on the gospels and Betz (1974, 1978), Hester (1984, 1986, 1988), Jewett (1986), Johanson (1987), Kraftchick (1985), Lyons (1985), Siegert (1985), Schussler-Fiorenza (1987), Thurén (1988), Watson (1988) and Wuellner (1977) - to name but a few of the growing number of studies - on the epistles). As Wuellner (1988a:56) puts it: 'Compared with twenty years ago, when rhetoric was barely mentioned in either narrative or epistolary exegetical, let alone theological study, there has been a veritable revolution in both Jewish and Christian biblical exegesis: - suddenly, rhetorics is everywhere!'

Most of this work, however, is done on the first level of discourse. A person like Betz is especially to be credited for the 'reinvention' of rhetorics on this level. He has lead the way towards the rediscovery of the 'rhetores maiores' (Aristotle, Cicero, Quintillian etc.) in New Testament studies (Jewett 1986:64). This is surely a significant contribution to our discipline and we are only at the beginning of the real impact of this rediscovery of rhetorics. But Wuellner wants to go further than this. He claims:

* Rhetorical criticism of literature takes the exegete of biblical literature beyond the study of meanings to something more inclusive than semantics and hermeneutics (Wuellner 1987:448).

* Rhetorical criticism is taking us beyond hermeneutics and structuralism to poststructuralism and posthermeneutics (Wuellner 1987:449).

Now where or what is this 'beyond'? Wuellner's (1988a:57) own answer is:

It made a revolutionary difference to take the familiar notion, that human beings in general, and religious persons in particular, are *hermeneutically* constituted, and replace it with the ancient notion familiar to Jews and Greeks alike, that we are *rhetorically* constituted. We have not only the capacity to understand the content or propositions of humans signs and symbols (=hermeneutics); *we also have the capacity to respond and interact with them* (= *rhetorics*) [my italics - JB]. As rhetorical critics (rhetorics as part of literary theory) we face the obligation of critically examining the fateful interrelationship between (1) a text's rhetorical strategies, (2) the premises upon which these strategies operate (gender in patriarchy or matriarchy; race in social, political power structures), and (3) the *efficacy* of both, text *and* its interpretation (=truth claim, or validity); of both, exegetical practice *and* theory (= method).

To see the nature of rhetoric in this light is a far cry from the familiar view of rhetoric as it was defined earlier in this article. And it is also more than the identification of rhetorical genres or descriptions of rhetorical disposition or reconstructions of rhetorical situations in the New Testament texts. Seen in this light, one can become excited about the possibilities of this approach for producing new impetus and relevance to biblical studies and theology.

5. Rhetorics and New Testament scholarship in South Africa

In the last couple of years we have seen many methods for the analysis or interpretation of the New Testament come (and go!). It has also become almost fashionable in literary theory to speak about 'new paradigms' which will change our interpretive work for ever. The idea is not to be cynical about these developments. Somehow, it all fits into the ongoing academic debate. Against this background, however, it is important to emphasize that rhetorical criticism is not just (and once again!) a new method. There is no such a thing as the method of rhetorical criticism (Wuellner 1988b:283).

The call for the 'reinvention' of rhetoric is also not a call for the cancellation of existing methods of interpretation. As Thurén (1988:2) puts it: 'Rhetorical criticism is neither alternative nor complementary to the historical methods (*contra* Kennedy 1984). It is rather a matter of prioritizing: the focus has shifted from historical questions to textual strategies.' In addition to this, it should be emphasized that rhetorical criticism is not averse to recognizing propositional content. Everything we say or write or think has propositional content. There is christology and soteriology and eschatology, etc, in short, theology, in the New Testament and there are of course historical connections between the New Testament and its *Umwelt*. Thus the structuralist and literary critical methods (and/or old-fashioned philological or 'theological' methods) and their results are indeed indispensable to define the 'content' of the New Testament texts. Rhetorical criticism does not rule out historical criticism (cf Schussler-Fiorenza 1987). But we can not stop there. We can not say: hold it there, let us first define this general propositional content before we 'apply' it to a situation. The rhetorician says, no, I can not stop there. I can not define

this general 'content' independent and loose from its speech-act or interactive context - the context in which I myself also participate. Therefore the rhetorician calls for a recognition of the second level of discourse: the rhetoric of our interpretation of these texts within our social and historical situation.

This means that we should recognize the institutionalizing of New Testament interpretation in our seminaries, faculties of theology and in the NTSSA and we should realize the power of these institutions. In New Testament scholarship in South Africa we can not only be busy with how one studies rhetorics properly (the rhetoric of or in the texts), but also with how our institutions are handling/perverting/truncating /aborting/restricting/strangling, otherwise, guiding the interpretation of the New Testament by virtue of their institutional power. What gets published? Which books do we use as text-books? Who are the people and the validating agencies which confirm and approve/disapprove and en/discourage this or that kind of interpretation? On this level we are also busy with a dialogical interaction. The practice of rhetoric is one thing. The interpretation of the practice is another. The theory of interpreting is itself part of the social dynamics of the people participating in this interpretational endeavour. It is illusion to believe (as positivism does) that methods are simply applied by 'neutral brains.'

In South Africa we live in a society in which different forms of oppression are evident. The premises of racism in political structures and gender-prejudice in societal structures at large (which Wuellner mentions as general examples) are both abundantly present in our society. I have met American New Testament scholars who say they have the impression that South African New Testament scholars are 'hiding behind' literary or theological approaches to the New Testament. Whether or not that is the case is up to everyone for him or herself to decide. It is certainly not difficult to prove the involvement of many South African New Testament scholars in the struggles for freedom and justice in our country. But it is also not difficult to show the influence of New Testament scholars in creating and sustaining oppressive practices in our societies (cf Kinghorn 1986:100-111, 128-135, Loubser 1987, and especially Breytenbach 1988 and Nicol 1988). What needs to be emphasized here, however, is that rhetorical criticism is not one more way of hiding from reality. There is no sense in practicing rhetorical criticism as just one more way of structural or discourse analysis or whatever. Rhetorical analysis has to effect something. Rhetorical criticism can get us once again into contact with texts as power and not just with texts as embodiments of content. It must effect how we do our exegesis, but also how we organize our exegetical societies and institutions. Scholarly societies and faculties of theology or seminaries are also rhetorical structures saying something. They are persuading or forbidding people.

In a certain respect the call for the 'reinvention' of rhetoric is a call to rid ourselves from the devastating grip of positivism in our discipline. This positivism is evident in an application of historical critical methods where the purpose is solely to identify and isolate the 'objective historical facts.' It is also evident in an application of 'traditional theological' methods where the purpose is to identify and isolate the 'eternal, unchangeable, theological (or "revelational" as some prefer to call it) truths'

in the New Testament and to 'apply' it afterwards only or primarily to the ivory tower of the individual's 'spiritual life'. The identification of the 'content' of the New Testament is itself an act of reading inseparable from our wider social and political relationships.

We have to ask ourselves whether our New Testament scholarship makes any contribution towards solving the burning issues in our society. That is what responsible hermeneutics and the reinvention of rhetorics in our situation are all about.

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