

## ORALITY AND PAULINE 'CHRISTOLOGY':

### Some hermeneutical implications

J A Loubser  
University of Zululand

---

#### Abstract

*The main thesis of this essay is that Paul's Christological expressions have been decisively influenced by the oral culture from which they stem. The argument is defended that an awareness of Paul's orality enables the reader to understand the formal coherence between the symbolical, historical and psychological aspects of his Christology, thus providing the reader with an invaluable hermeneutical tool. The hermeneutical model which emerges can be described as follows: on a symbolic level the salvational deeds of Christ are contextualized within a concrete situation by means of language symbols. On a historical level the salvational deeds are placed within the framework of an escalating salvational history. On a psychological level a comprehensive solidarity is established between the proclaimed Christ, the speaker and the audience. For its theory of orality the paper is indebted mainly to Walter J Ong ('Orality and Literacy' 1982). The implications of this theory for Pauline Christology are explored in a sustained debate with J C Beker and D Patte.*

#### 1. Paul and orality

The freedom with which Paul adapted contemporary epistolary conventions, his use of oral forms (e.g. greeting formulae, doxologies, hymns, logia) and the fact that he consciously defended the orality of his message (cf 2 Cor 10:10-11) all bear witness to the oral nature of his work.<sup>1</sup>

---

1. Cf also Kelber 1983:140, who mentions 'Paul's fundamentally oral disposition toward language'. Paul's criticism of sophism (1 Cor 1:20) and his concession that he is a *idiotes to logo* are not to be seen as contradictory to his orality.

It is evident that Paul depended much more on the spoken word than his successors, who were operating within the paradigm of a manuscript culture.<sup>2</sup> Until the year 50-51 AD the Gospel was conveyed exclusively in the oral medium. Differing from modern letters, Paul's letters were not only intended to be read aloud, but his use of amanuenses suggests that at least some of them were written 'aloud', i.e. they were written records of oral discourses.<sup>3</sup> Another aspect of orality in Paul's word is the fact that writing conventions in the first century were much closer to the spoken word than today,<sup>4</sup> being done without any capital letters, punctuation marks or spaces between the words, sentences, paragraphs or pages.<sup>5</sup> Though Paul mentioned the use of books, his Old Testament citations most probably came from the 'aural' Septuagint he encountered in the synagogues,<sup>6</sup> in the same manner as his citations from Hellenistic sources came from the ordinary walks of life (Enslin 1957:90-106).

In the light of the above-said one can agree with Walter Ong when he says:

The orality of the mindset in the biblical text, even in its epistolary sections, is overwhelming.<sup>7</sup>

Because of its oral base Paul's theology differs fundamentally from the literary-based theology of Philo and the later rabbinic schools.<sup>8</sup> In his letters we encounter Paul the oral theologian.

The oral aspect of Paul's work has been previously regarded purely as an incidental matter. It has however been convincingly shown by various scholars

2. Cf Boomershine 1987:145.

3. Cf 2 Th 3:17; Gl 6:11; Col 4:18; Phlp 19. The letters are of course not direct transcriptions of oral communications, as is clear from their rich lexis and well-organised structures, cf Brown and Yule 1983:4-9, for the paratactical style of oral texts. Paul also did not intend his letters to be orally reproduced. This we can gather from the absence of visual episodes, cf Dewey, 1989:36, on the importance of visible episodes for the oral remembering of narratives.

4. Dewey (1989:33) states that 'in a manuscript culture with high residual orality, there is a considerable overlap between orality and textuality'. She says further: 'Writing at first was basically a transcription of oral performing, since no other compositional methods were yet known. Then writing would exaggerate oral techniques, employing even more *topoi* or creating even more extensive and elaborate structural patterns, since writing enabled a composer to do better what he or she was already doing.'

5. 'The [Pauline] letter ... is as near oral speech as possible' (cf Funk 1966:248-9).

6. Cf Folker Siegert 1985, *Argumentation bei Paulus*, as cited by Vos 1990:34. Kock (vide Stanley 1990:78) found that 56% of Paul's citations are intentionally modified, which is exceptionally high in comparison to Plutarch (6%), Heraclitus (15%), Strabo (24%), The Sublime (50%), letter to Apollonius (52%). The freedom with which the citations were made can only be understood with reference to the vestiges of orality in the first century.

7. Ong 1982: 75 referring to 1967b:176-91.

8. Cf Patte 1983:87-120, especially p 107, where he says that the Pharisees had the conviction that 'Scripture has in itself the authority to interpret Scripture without the intervention of the interpreter whose role is simply "to listen to the text of Scripture"'. This resulted in a closed hermeneutical circuit. The closest parallel to Paul's style is the Stoic diatribe, which also has an oral background, cf Stanley Kent Stowers 1981, *The diatribe and Paul's letter to the Romans*, 1981, as cited by Vos 1990:31.

that a fundamental difference exists between the manner in which information is organized and stored in oral and literate cultures.<sup>9</sup> Applying these insights to the study of biblical texts, Walter Ong (1982a) and Werner Kelber (1983) paved the way for an oral reading (or media criticism) of the New Testament.<sup>10</sup> Such an oral reading has to be differentiated from the type of orality studied in the past by form critics which mainly concentrated on the genetics of smaller oral units in the synoptic texts and their supposed *Sitz im Leben*.<sup>11</sup> More recently the 'new' rhetorical and narrative approaches promoted a renewed interest in the oral dimension of texts.<sup>12</sup> These methods will however benefit substantially by taking note of recent oral theories.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. Oral hermeneutics

The basic insight of oral theory is that spoken words have no abstract or permanent, visual connotation. They disappear as soon as they have been pronounced - *verba volant, scripta manent*.<sup>14</sup> Words are therefore perceived to be events rather than things.<sup>15</sup> For the sake of clarity sharp contrasts are drawn, whereas a variety of mnemonic patterns may be used to preserve valuable information. Therefore oral communication also employs heavy rhythmic, balanced patterns, repetitions and contrasts, extended forms of alliteration and assonance, formulaic expressions, series of standard thematic settings, proverbs and parallelisms. These phenomena occur in literate cultures as well, but in oral cultures they appear incessantly.<sup>16</sup>

A most significant observation of Ong is that writing restructures human consciousness (1982a:78ff). Oral cultures can produce highly complex thought patterns, but they cannot analyze 'elaborate concatenations of causes

9. Cf Vansina 1961, Goody and Watt 1963 and Goody 1977. Cf also Boomershine 1987.

10. Also refer to the dissertation of P J J Botha 1990.

11. For a brief discussion of the views of Bultmann, Dibelius, Gerhardsson etc, vide Boring 1982:1-14. Teeple 1970 is a good example of those who reject Riesenfeld and Gerhardsson's theories of an oral tradition, while not being able to come to terms with the phenomenon of orality in general.

12. My impression of rhetorical criticism is, however, that it needs a thorough grounding in oral theory, enabling a clear distinction between oral and literary rhetorics. Rhetorics implies orality, but Heinrich Lausberg calls his book *Elemente der literarischen Rhetorik* (1963). This calls for a study of the difference between oral and literary rhetorics.

13. To my mind narrative theory underestimates the oral nature of texts by presupposing literary forms. Ong states: 'One of the places where oral mnemonic structures and procedures manifest themselves most spectacularly is in their effect on narrative plot, which in oral culture is not quite what we take plot typically to be' (1982:141). Cf Hays 1988:324 who locates the coherence of Paul's thought in the kerugmatic story of God's action through Jesus Christ (1988:324).

14. Vansina 1965:xi symbolically opens the preface to his book on oral tradition with these words.

15. Cf also Dewey 1989, who refers to Havelock 1963.

16. Ong 1982:34. Cf also Dewey 1989:35 - chiasms, ring compositions (inclusio) and verbal echoing all facilitate memory.

into the analytic kind of linear sequences' (1982:57). A sober linear or analytical thought pattern is an artificial product of a literate culture. This is one reason why the literary concept of a plot (as found in novels and detective stories) only developed after many centuries of literacy.<sup>17</sup> Oral compositions rather make use of modifying repetitions, which Havelock described as follows:

Oral compositions will avoid sheer surprise and novel invention, ... the basic method for assisting the memory to retain a series of distinct meanings is to frame the first of them in a way which will suggest or forecast a later meaning which will recall the first without being identical with it.<sup>18</sup>

Oral theory also has an explanation for the contextual nature of the spoken text. In order to retain the attention of the audience, the speaker has continuously to adapt his material to the life situation of the audience. Therefore no two repetitions are identical, although a speaker may insist that they are.<sup>19</sup> Due to the direct relationship between speaker and audience, oral texts are 'speech acts' in the true sense of the word.<sup>20</sup> Their illocutionary and perlocutionary functions are obvious. This is usually not the case with written texts.<sup>21</sup>

The aim of this paper is to explore some of the insights gained when Pauline theology/Christology is studied as an artifact of first century oral culture. When conducting such an analysis a distinction should be drawn between the Christ narrative (as also found in the Gospels) and Paul's Christology. The former is presupposed by Paul, though in his letters we find no record of himself narrating the Jesus-story.<sup>22</sup> His letters are rather an oral-based inter-

17. Why had no one written a tidy detective story before Edgar Allen Poe's *The murders in the Rue Morgue* in 1841? (Ong 1982:144-5.

18. Havelock 1984:183, as quoted by Dewey 1989:39. Cf also Boomershine's description of orality in the first century, 1987:145f.

19. This is true for Paul, but may be a simplification regarding oral texts in general. Vansina 1965:40ff is of the opinion that the amount of distortion due to oral transmissions depend on (i) the method of the transmission, (ii) the control over the recital. and (iii) the frequency of the repetition.

20. Patte (1983:17-8) presupposes that 'any idea or argument ultimately aims at causing us to do something, which might only be a very remote goal ...' With Paul these goals seem most of the time quite obvious (e.g. 2 Cor 8:9 where economic Christological metaphors are used in order to encourage financial contributions to the poor.) In other cases it may, however, be much more difficult to determine the exact speech act: 'If one looks even cursorily at a transcribed record of a conversation, it immediately becomes clear that we do not know how to assign speech acts in a non-arbitrary way' (Levinson 1980:20).

21. Lyons 1977, 1981:183-8; Ricoeur 1976:27.

22. An *argumentum ex silentio* therefore cannot be taken seriously, for example when Beker says 'empty-tomb traditions do not play any role in Paul's thoughts' (1980:153). Furnish (1989:427) takes more or less the same view when he distinguishes between Paul's kerugmatic affirmations and his theological statements. Dewey (1989:43) takes the same view regarding Mark by suggesting that he is building on an oral storytelling tradition (cf also Barrett 1989:25).

pretation of and a reflection on the presupposed Christ narrative (cf Lategan 1967:262).

### 3. An oral reading of Paul

Until recently the oral aspect of Paul's theology remained unexplored (except for Kelber 1983). Before drawing some hermeneutical conclusions in the next section I shall now first discuss some aspects of orality pertaining to his Christology. This will be done with reference to the hermeneutic theories of two of the most important scholars of Pauline theology in recent times, viz. J C Beker and D Patte. Paul's Christological formulations are examined on three levels of meaning, viz. the symbolic, historical and psychological levels.

#### 3.1 Symbolic level: contextuality and duality

By 'symbolic level'<sup>23</sup> that level of meaning is meant on which the Christ event is interpreted by means of different symbols or metaphors. Two of the most salient features of these metaphors are their contextual and the antithetical tendencies.

##### 3.1.1 Contextuality and conflicting statements

In describing the salvational deeds of Christ, the various metaphors which are being used, relate to the immediate rhetorical situation, (e. g. using wisdom metaphors when refuting a false doctrine of wisdom in 1 Cor 1:24; or using forensic metaphors when explaining justification through faith in Rm 3:24-5). This applies to most metaphors except for those in Jesus' titles which have a more general bearing ('Lord', 'Christ' etc). But even expressions as the latter can, *in contextu*, be recognized as 'speech acts' with illocutionary and perlocutionary force.

While all recent scholars refer to the contextual (or contingent) nature of Pauline theology, they differ in their evaluation of Paul's contextuality. Their evaluation is complicated by some apparent contradicting statements in different or even in the same texts (e.g. the conflicting statements on the imminence of the parousia, the position of women in the church and the law). This is aggravated by the absence of a clearly expressed coherent basis of Paul's Christology/theology. In the light of this Hübner remarks that the theme of contradictions in Paul requires an urgent solution (1987:150-75)

The various explanations offered to clarify the perceived anomalies fall into two main categories, viz. those presupposing that Paul is incoherent and those who accept a coherence on a deeper level. The first viewpoint is represented

---

23. The term 'symbolic' is used differently from the way in which it is used by Patte (1978:16ff or Beker (the latter's 'symbolic universe' refers to the coherence). It is also not used in the sense of Jungian master symbols.

by some scholars (e.g. Räisänen: 1986) who suggest that Paul adapted his theology in an opportunistic manner to fit the situation. This possibility is, however, generally excluded in the light of his explicit intention of adhering to his tradition (cf Plevnik 1989:464-5). Other scholars (A Schweitzer, W Knox, H Hübner) accept that Paul made major (illogical) shifts in his thinking. The uncertain chronology of the Pauline letters and the fact that Paul's Damascus experience is his only self-attested shift, hampers theorizing in this regard (cf Lowe 1941).

Among those scholars who accept a coherence there are also various theories. Sanders suggests that Paul is on the whole coherent, though not systematic.<sup>24</sup> Theissen (1987) locates the coherent centre in Paul's psyche. Plevnik locates it

... not in any *single* aspect of ... God's action through Christ, but rather the whole and undivided richness and mystery of Christ and of the Father's saving purpose through his Son (1989:478).

Beker locates the coherence in the apocalyptic substratum of Paul's thought, while Patte explains the incongruencies in terms of a universal semiotic theory. It is especially Patte's proposition which will require our attention.

Beker explains Paul's contextuality by means of the concepts of 'coherence and contingency' which have found wide acceptance in the academic world. According to him, the coherence, or coherent centre, of Paul's theology cannot be expressed by any single formula found in the text.<sup>25</sup> This coherence controls Paul's specific contextual formulations. His description of the coherence went through different stages. Initially he described it as a 'deep' level which expresses the convictional base of the apostle's proclamation. Of his later descriptions we can mention the following: 'a field of meaning' (Beker 1986:597), 'an apocalyptic substratum' (1988:369) and 'master symbolism' (1986:598), 'an apocalyptic symbolic universe' (1988:369), as something which constitutes 'the linguistic world of the apostle' (1986:598), as 'an indispensable filter, context and grammar' (1986:598) and as 'a network of symbolic relations' (1986:598). In his latest publication it is called a 'subtext' (1989:352).

He further says that 'Paul's apocalyptic gospel is constituted by certain apocalyptic components which he derives from his Jewish apocalyptic world' (1982:30). These basic components are the motifs of vindication, universalism, dualism and imminence. These motifs 'however modified by the event of Christ, form the coherent center of Paul's gospel' (1982:14-5).

---

24. Cf 1977 and 1983 as cited by Beker 1989:354.

25. Beker concedes to Martyn (1982) that he could have given a misleading impression to speak of an 'apocalyptic theme'. He also says that 'coherence cannot be restricted to one "contingent" symbol, for instance the eschatological triumph of God, because it (viz. the coherence) implies a network of symbolic relations and does not refer to one specific idea or, Mitte' (1988:598f).

The coherence of the gospel controls the contingency, i.e. the specific contextual formulations. Beker explains contingency as

... the variable element, i.e. the variety and particularity of sociological, economic and psychological situations which Paul faces in his churches on the mission field. Thus the interaction between coherence and contingency focuses on the question how the abiding Word of the gospel becomes a word on target, i.e. fulfill its function as gospel (1986:596).

Beker presupposes an oral process in finding a 'word on target', arguing as follows:

... the locus of the interaction between coherence and contingency is the Holy Spirit ..., and because the body of Christ is in turn the locus of the Spirit, the body of Christ constitutes the place where the hermeneutical activity takes place (1986:600).

Thus the hermeneutic of coherence and contingency is not an abstract-individualistic activity of the apostle - nor an activity of learned rabbis in a rabbinic school - but a pragmatic consensus-building activity in the body of Christ where relevant and authentic 'gospel' strategies are devised for particular problems (1988:369f).

Between the coherence and contingency there is a fluid reciprocal relation, a dialectical movement between the truth of the gospel and its relevance for people in concrete situations (1986:602). In this manner the contingency of the situation compels an interpretation of the coherence of the gospel, which must guarantee both its authenticity and its relevance (1988:370).

The method of D Patte exhibits some similarity to that of Beker, both being deeply indebted to structuralist insights.<sup>26</sup> Both maintain that the variety of Christological terms can be ascribed to the peculiar manner in which a deep structure is expressed in differing situations. Beker vigorously advocated the idea of the coherence in various publications (1980, 1982, 1986, 1988, 1989) but one cannot avoid the impression that he is vague in his description of the coherence. Patte on the other hand goes to great length to find a scientific basis for describing Paul's convictional pattern, drawing heavily on the complex semiotic theories of Levi-Strauss and Greimas (Patte 1978, 1983).

Although the theoretical basis of Patte's method was developed through work on oral texts (by Levi-Strauss) and although Beker is aware of the oral nature of Paul's work, neither one makes conscious use of oral theory. The question remains therefore as to what contribution an oral reading of Paul would make to their understanding of his contextual formulations and apparent contradictions.

---

26. On Beker's structuralism *vide* Vos 1989:36f.

### 3.1.2 Originality, repetition and contextuality in oral culture

Both Beker and Patte address the problem of the apparent anomalies in Paul's theological expressions. From an oral point of view it may be argued that repetitive modifications are naturally due to the contextual character of oral texts.

Oral communication invariably necessitates a direct contextual involvement of the speaker. It requires that every narrative must be introduced uniquely into a unique situation (Ong 1982a:41). Pre-literate people think situationally rather than categorically (Ong 1982a:52).

The oral mind is uninterested in definitions (Ong 1982a:47).

The meaning of every word is thus controlled by the real-life situations in which the word is used here and now (Ong 1982a:47). An example of this is that Paul does not link the *logos* with its content, but with its effect on the hearer (e.g. the 'word of reconciliation' in 2 Cor 5:19 refers primarily to the reconciliation effected by the gospel) (Kelber 1983:145).

Because a speaker cannot backtrack to edit his text, incongruencies which arise cannot be ironed out by means of an editing process. They are rather circumscribed by subsequent renditions. In the process unnecessary information is continuously being deleted from memory.

Milman Parry's study of Yugoslavian bards showed that their songs, though keeping the same metrum, were never sung exactly the same way twice. The same themes and formulae occurred, but they were

... stitched together or 'rhapsodized' differently in each rendition even by the same poet, depending on audience reaction, the mood of the poet or of the occasion, and other social and psychological factors (Ong 1982a:59-60).

Despite the difference, a singer would insist that his versions were identical (Ong 1982a:60). Even when vigorous leaders invent new conceptual universes 'they are seldom if ever explicitly touted for their novelty but are presented as fitting the traditions of the ancestors' (Ong 1982a:42,48).<sup>27</sup> The idea of originality and repetition in oral cultures is therefore totally different from that in modern literate cultures. Originality does not manifest in the invention of new stories or myths, but in developments due to the live interaction between speaker and audience during narration (Ong 1982a:41f). Traditionalism and contextuality are not experienced as opposites.

What conclusion can be drawn from the above evidence? Because of varying degrees of exactness required in differing kinds of oral repetitions, the preciseness with which material is handed over varies considerably depending on

---

27. Cf Beker 1989:353, who recognizes that Paul's interpreting activity is delimited by the tradition in which he stands.



the oral genre and subject in question. <sup>28</sup> Therefore only general applications can be made regarding Paul. If we accept that he was operating within the parameters of oral communication, it explains on the one hand why he insisted that he was maintaining the tradition he received, <sup>29</sup> and on the other hand why he took so much freedom to formulate contextually. <sup>30</sup> While never criticizing the tradition he received, he never repeats the same Christological expression mechanically. <sup>31</sup> This insight from oral theory shows that both Beker and Patte are on the right track in presupposing a coherence and that their theories are to be preferred to the theories of opportunism or radical conceptual shifts in Paul. It is also clear that a simplistic harmonization would be inadequate.

Because oral texts work incessantly with repetitive contextual modifications it would be anachronistic to expect a homogenized system in Paul's thought. It would be normal for modifications to occur within the same discourse as well as in successive discourses. This leads to the conclusion that the anomalies in the Pauline text could have appeared quite 'normal' to Paul and his audience. It is only in manuscript form, after the primary context was left behind, that they began to pose theological problems.

One also has to ask the more fundamental question as to why the whole enterprise of formulating a core or a deeper structural coherence (convictional pattern) was undertaken? Would it have been necessary for the first audiences who shared Paul's oral matrix? Is it not our chirographic bias which compels us to project some kind of deep structure? As it will become clear, some aspects of what Beker perceives to be the 'apocalyptic substratum' of Paul's theology, coincide with the oral matrix.

---

28. Vide Vansina 1965:33-4. An oral tradition may be accompanied by a system of sanctions and rewards which are meted out to those whose duty it is to know the tradition, according to whether they do or do not succeed in reciting it without making mistakes. In New Zealand a single mistake in recital was enough to bring about the immediate death of the teacher who had made it.

29. For a description of Paul's perception of tradition, vide Plevnik 1989:464-5.

30. Although the same oral process may be observed in the tradition of the gospel narrative, we can accept that in the case of the gospels the historical nature of the material restricted the process of contextualisation. As already explained, Paul's formulations have to be seen as secondary reflections, presupposing the gospel narrative.

31. Cf Stuhlmacker 1981:211,223. Vansina (1965:26-7) remarks: 'When an informant retells a tale he has told before, one must always ask oneself whether he has meanwhile learnt some further traditions. What has to be established is whether the two tales are merely variants of the same testimony, or whether they are two different testimonies.' He further remarks that no attempt should be made to reconstruct an 'original' text. Variants are valuable for the opportunity they provide for judging the informant's confidence in the reliability of his statements and his psychological attitude towards his testimony, and sometimes also for detecting errors and lies.

### 3.1.3 Antithetical metaphors

Another feature of Paul's metaphors is that they occur in antithetical structures within the same text. In the longer expressions we normally <sup>32</sup> find a series of contrasting pairs of metaphors (e.g. cross-resurrection, affliction-joy, suffering-exaltation, death-life, flesh-Spirit, poor-rich, condemnation-justification). These contrasting pairs are chosen to suit the situation but they also exhibit a high degree of semantic complementarity - e.g. 'cross' will not be paired with 'Spirit' etc.

As in the case of the contextuality of the metaphors, scholars also differ in evaluating these antitheses - e.g. are they indicative of an ontological dialectic? <sup>33</sup> Or, are they purely rhetorical devices? Why do they occur on so many confusing levels? This antithetical tendency is often related to antitheses on an altogether different levels, viz. the opposition between Paul and his opponents or the antithesis between true and false ideas. Both Beker and Patte work with the latter kind of argument, taking the antithetical tendency to be related to the deep structure of Paul's thought.

It seems that Beker sees the apocalyptic opposition of time-expressions as the basic opposition from which all other oppositions in the text are derived. He identifies 'dualism' as one of the four basic components of Jewish apocalyptic constituting the coherent center of Paul's gospel (1982:14-5). The antithesis between this world and the world to come in Jewish apocalyptic is tempered and intensified by Paul.

... God's plan for the world engages the Christian in a battle against the present structures of the world (1982:44).

According to Beker, this motif involves martyrdom and eventual vindication.

Patte's description of oppositions in terms of mythical and narrative structures provides enough evidence to demonstrate that Paul's dualism cannot be limited to apocalyptic influence. His analysis of mythical (or symbolical) structures rests on the observation of universal systems of oppositions. Patte employs the semiotic square proposed by Greimas to represent the relation between the symbolic values of two oppositions. He distinguishes two forms of opposition, viz. relations of contrariety and relations of contradiction. The latter are basic oppositions (life vs. non-life; death vs. non-death) while the former are relative to these basic oppositions. Basic oppositions cannot be assimilated in any other oppositions (1978:18). This insight is applied in his study of Paul's faith, where he substitutes the terms 'basic oppositions' for

---

32. Even synthetical expressions like 'Jesus Christ' often are in one way or another imbedded in a broader antithetical framework (cf Rm 1:1,4).

33. The dialectical theology made this deduction (Beker 1986:602). Cf also J Moltmann for whom the theology of the cross and the theology of hope stand in a dialectical relationship. Hegelian, Marxist and existentialist dialectics are all in some way or another indebted to Pauline dialectics.

'convictions' and 'relative oppositions' for 'ideas'. He explains the difference between ideas and convictions as follows:

Ideas determine the specific kinds of actions that the subjects need to perform in order to reach what their convictions have established as a meaningful purpose (1983:13).

Convictions (and their related ideas) are always expressed antithetically:

Whatever might be their subject matter ... convictions are opposed in pairs.... (1983:26).

Patte thus provides us with a sophisticated method of defining conceptual oppositions in the text, relating them to the apparent anomalies in the text:

Since they [convictions] are not ideas which fit neatly into a logical argument, the convictions are to be sought in the cracks, in what is odd in the argument, in what does not contribute to the unfolding of the argument or even hindering it (1983:39-40).<sup>34</sup>

Whilst Patte opens our eyes for the semiotic oppositions underlying human speech in general, it is significant to note that he draws on theories developed with reference to oral texts. The question can now be asked whether the identification of Paul's text as an oral text will in any way facilitate an explanation of this phenomenon.

### 3.1.4 Antitheses in an oral culture

In oral culture dialectical or paradoxical expressions are used as sharp abbreviations in the absence of acronyms, standardized abbreviations and definitions. The wholeness of a matter is expressed by juxtaposing two extremes, e.g. heaven and earth, life and death, cross and resurrection. Because religion is concerned with the experience of reality as a whole, it is only logical that religious discourse in an oral culture would abound with such antitheses.<sup>35</sup> When the wide range of semantic domains is considered from which Paul draws his oppositional Christological metaphors, it becomes clear that he is seeking to employ 'all viable concepts' in his *Umwelt* for this purpose. While interpreting the Christ event for specific situations, he is at the same time interpreting the event as an absolute, unique and decisive reality. Due to the contextual nature of oral theology (as well as the inefficiency of language to express absoluteness) every new formulation already calls for another one. It

---

34. Beker points to such a 'crack' by observing that in 1 Cor 15 Paul 'seems ... to impose his ... coherent center on the ... world-view of the Corinthians' (1989:358-9).

35. Kelber has pointed out that the (profoundly oral) bifocal articulation of Paul's message differs from the threefold formula he received (according to 1 Cor 15:3b-5) - 'The very core of Paul's gospel, the rhythmic thematization of death and resurrection, can thus be considered a product of mnemonic, oral dynamics: it is eminently memorable, repeatable, and orally usable' (1983:148).

is therefore useless to look for an 'original' formula - as deconstruction theory rightly maintains.

Although there is no direct relation between Paul's oppositional metaphors and the polemical context of his letters, they coincide to some extent. Ong explains that oral texts are agonistically toned - 'orality situates knowledge within the context of struggle' (1982:43-4). Proverbs and riddles are used to encourage intellectual combat. Both flyting (reciprocal name-calling) and praise take on dimensions which may seem exaggerated to people from a high-literacy culture (1982:45). This may account for the tendency to overstate a case, which then have to be redressed. Many traces of this are obvious in the Pauline corpus.

One cannot avoid the conclusion that Beker underestimates the importance of oppositions in the text, oversimplifying the issue by declaring the oppositions to be derived from the eschatological oppositions in the 'apocalyptic' substratum. Until now it has not been convincingly demonstrated that the dialectic formulation of Jesus's salvational deeds (e.g. cross-resurrection) is the product of an apocalyptic form.<sup>36</sup> Patte, by his scientific analysis of different types of oppositions in the deep structure of the text, is more helpful here. Oral theory shows us that he is probably more correct in relating the basic oppositions to the believer's faith experience than to a cultural-historical (apocalyptic) form.

Oral theory further shows us that the dialectical medium should not be confused with the message (as dialectical theology had done). Antitheses are natural in oral discourses especially when there is a degree of conscious reflection as with Paul (and most of the other authors of the New Testament). The use of binary oppositions does not rule out an acknowledgment of the complexity of the subject under discussion.

### 3.2 Historical level: escalating eschatology

It is generally acknowledged that the time expressions by means of which Paul interprets the Christ event are extremely difficult to systematize. His temporal expressions are sparse and tend to vary from one passage to another and cannot be fitted neatly into a linear or circular pattern. In the passages where he reflects on the time-aspect he usually formulates in terms of two antithetical temporal co-ordinates which coincide with the motif for writing the letter.<sup>37</sup>

---

36. Cf Fuller, 1989:139, who mentions that Beker offers no evidence that Paul as a former Pharisee retained a completely apocalyptic framework of thought.

37. Cf the following examples: in Rm 3:21-26 there is a sharp contrast between the present and the past. In Rm 5:12-21 the time of Adam is contrasted to the time of Christ. Whereas the past is signified by sin, the present is signified by the abundance of grace. In Phlp 2:6-11 Christ's past humiliation is contrasted to his present and future exaltation. The apostle is encouraging a grateful congregation to even more gratitude and joy. These antitheses are directly related to the context as has already been pointed out in the previous section.

How do Beker and Patte assess the time-expressions? Beker's view on the time-aspect of Paul's thought is best expressed by the title of his popular book: *Paul's apocalyptic gospel, the coming triumph of God*. At least two of the four motifs he believes to be basic to the 'apocalyptic' substratum of Paul's thought have temporal connotations, viz. the apocalyptic motifs of vindication and imminence.

Under the motif of vindication it is understood that by the death and resurrection of Christ, the God of Israel has confirmed and renewed his promises of salvation to Israel and the nations. The idea that God will be vindicated is expressed by a salvational-historical motif. The motif of imminence intensifies the other motifs (vindication, dualism and universalism) and 'thus heightens the hope for the actualization of God's vindication and universal reign....' (1982:44). The theme of imminence has three aspects - its necessity, its incalculability and the dialectic of patience and impatience. The imminence motif in Paul's letters is even more intense than in Jewish apocalyptic: it is intensified by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, because that event marks the incursion of the future into the present (1982:47). Paul lives in the time of the end (1982:49). No philosophy of history or predictive eschatology is possible. Eschatology and missionary strategy do not contradict one another, according to Beker (1982:52).

Whereas for Beker the basic form in which the Christ event is conceived is apocalyptic (for him even the formula 'cross and resurrection' bears an apocalyptic stamp<sup>38</sup>), it seems that Patte views Paul's eschatology as a function of his Christology. Patte observes that when Paul speaks of 'Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come' in 1 Thessalonians 1:10, he is saying that Christ delivers us 'in the present' (1983:138). As the believer's present experience is determined by Christ, so Christ will also determine the future. This is so because:

... Jesus Christ is a special kind of type. He might be viewed as the central type, since any new act of God can be viewed as Christ-like and even as manifestation of the resurrected Christ. ... But it remains that Jesus Christ is a type, a promise (and not a complete and final revelation) (1983:139).

When discussing the parousia Patte says:

... Paul included in his proclamation of the Gospel extensive teaching about the Parousia experience. But he primarily emphasized the relation between the believers' present experience [of Christ] and the Parousia (1983:147).

---

38. Cf Beker, 1980:153, - 'Because resurrection is an apocalyptic category, the resurrection of Christ can only be understood apocalyptically as the preliminary manifestation of the general resurrection in the age to come'; and Beker, 1980:190 - 'The death of Christ now marks the defeat of the apocalyptical power alliance and signals the imminent defeat of death ...'

In Thessalonica e.g., Patte sees the major problem not to be the resurrection of the dead, but the way in which believers will participate in the events of the Parousia (1983:148).

Once the correspondence between this element of the believers' experience [experience of death] and Jesus' experiences is established, the correspondence between the other elements of their respective experiences [e.g. life, hope] is also established (1983:149).

Further:

Paul's faith is eschatological because the present already belongs to the eschatological period which will culminate in the parousia. Similarly, the conviction that the present interventions of God are promises, pre-figurations, or even preliminary manifestations of what will be fully manifested at the Parousia is explained theologically by emphasizing the imminence of the Parousia (1983:238).

The above citations are sufficient to demonstrate that Patte regards the eschatology as a function of the believers' experiential participation in Christ.<sup>39</sup> This is a definite deviation from the linear concept of time which evolved in literate culture and which is often naively projected on to the biblical experience of time.<sup>40</sup> Even current views on apocalypticism are not free of this fallacy and an expression as Beker's 'coming triumph of God' may easily be misunderstood in terms of a linear time concept. On the other hand Patte's typological explanation may lead to a suppression of the dynamic element in Paul's eschatology, presenting it in too abstract a manner.

An oral analysis of Paul's temporal expressions will show that the insights of both Beker and Patte are valuable and complementary to one another. In oral cultures words are regarded as extremely powerful or even magical. Their effects are to be experienced in the present. The spoken word possesses an imminence and immediacy which it has lost in literate cultures.<sup>41</sup> The 'power of the gospel' is linked with the power of the spoken word.<sup>42</sup> In the light of this, we can also better understand 2 Cor 3:15-18. Here Paul contrasts the reading of Moses (the law, *gramma*) with the turning to the Lord, the Spirit (i.e. mediated through the oral gospel). Kelber explains:

What is impermissible for Paul is the objectification of the invisible ... (1983:142-3).

---

39. The question can be asked whether Patte excludes the possibility of an apocalyptic substratum. As I understand him, he does not exclude it, but implies that it cannot be the centre of Paul's theology either.

40. The schools which taught consequent eschatology, postponed parousia and salvation history are all subject to the linear fallacy.

41. This feature has to be differentiated from the kerugma-concept of Bultmann and the dialectical school as well as from the modern kairos-concept of liberation theology. The latter is fully dependent on literate culture.

42. Cf Rm 1:16, 1 Th 1:5, 1 Cor 2:4-5, 2 Cor 6:7.

The time conception in an oral culture is closely related to the presence of the word. Time expressions are indicative of the actuality of the subject. They express the value which the speaker and the audience attach to what is being said. This is the reason why the future can sometimes be expressed in the past tense. To explain eschatology in an oral culture it is therefore not necessary to uphold a grand theory of intersecting aeons.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to this, temporal expressions have the pragmatic function of compelling the audience to decisive action in the immediate future. The present and not the past, is the locus where God acts decisively. This causes a strong link between eschatology and proclamation, both representing different sides of the same coin. So, e.g., the cross and the resurrection are not seen only as past events. By their proclamation they are experienced as present events controlling the present and the future. Between events like the crucifixion itself and the 'word of the cross' there is much less distance than would be the case in literate culture.<sup>44</sup> This is also why the proclamation as well as the person of the evangelist have soteriological significance. Every time the Gospel is proclaimed, God is calling 'things that are not as though they were' (Rm 4:17).

Because of this we find in the Christological expressions a pro-active, performative tendency, a *hic et nunc* audacity, which evades all rationalizing. God's active presence is experienced in the proclamation of the gospel. If the dictum of the *Confessio Helvetica* does not hold true for modern evangelists (*praedicatio verbum dei est verbum dei*), it at least holds true for Paul.

This conception of time in an oral culture also explains the way in which Paul treats his tradition, constantly reappropriating it in service of the present. It corresponds with the hermeneutic behind his use of the Old Testament as well as his use of secular material.<sup>45</sup>

This emphasis on the present correlates with the *ad hoc*-character of the contextual Christological metaphors discussed in the previous section. The contrastive style of temporal expressions also reflects an inclusive, global, way of looking at reality, accentuating the all-embracing relevance of the Christ event. The *hic et nunc* contextuality of the Christological expressions does not in the least mean that they have been randomly or arbitrarily formulated. On the contrary, they are authoritative and binding on the consciences. In this way the tradition is constantly being actualized while in the process the proclamation becomes part of the living tradition.

Is it possible to identify some general eschatological trends in Paul? Does his oral eschatology reveal any regular features? I am aware that my proposal is

43. This feature of Paul's eschatology should not be ascribed to apocalypticism in the first instance, though apocalypticism also shares in a common oral heritage.

44. Cf Ricoeur for his theory of distanciation (1976-43ff).

45. It was found by Koch that 56% of all citations in Paul have been modified to suit the new context, cf Stanley 1990:78.

unconventional and will have to undergo further scrutiny. Nevertheless, one could argue that the wide range of contrastive temporal expressions prevent us from describing Paul's eschatology as progressive, realized or futurist. This would amount to an oversimplification. It is only through the bias of a highly-literate culture that such perceptions can be formed. The multiple contrasts between remote past/recent past, past/present, present/future etcetera, reveal only one common feature, viz. that the latter component always surpasses the former.<sup>46</sup> From this we may deduce an escalating tendency: God's deeds in the present surpass his glorious deeds in the past; his deeds in the future will be the consummation of those in the present.

This escalation has to be conceived in a non-linear manner. A linear time concept misleads us by compelling us to identify one or more foci (e.g. at the beginning, middle or end) as integrative view points. Paul's eschatology has no such constant time foci. I believe Patte is correct when he suggests that the focus falls on God's deeds, or rather on the typological correspondence of the believers' experience of God's deeds in the past, present and future. Beker's motif of imminence also helps to clarify the escalating tendency of Paul's eschatology.

### 3.3 Psychological level typological solidarity

This third level of meaning of Paul's Christology has to do with the subjective involvement of the different parties implied in the text with one another, e.g. the author, Christ, God, congregation and mankind in general. Between these parties Paul presupposed a solidarity which is unfamiliar to the modern mind. This phenomenon is generally described by the concept of the 'corporate personality', introduced by W Robinson. Kelber describes the unity between speaker, message and audience as an 'oral synthesis' (1983:19,147).

Related to the believer's participation in Christ we find a number of theological issues, e.g. the problem of the indicative and the imperative in Paul and the problem of a distinction between the exemplary and vicarious suffering of Christ.<sup>47</sup>

When describing the believer's participation in Christ, Beker's primary concern is to show that Paul rejects a realized eschatology and that the participation in Christ has an apocalyptic dynamic.

When Paul speaks about becoming 'conformed to the death of Christ' and about 'sharing Christ's sufferings'...., he grounds his conformity to the death of Christ in the hope of the final resurrection of the dead.... Thus the dialectic 'life amid death' never overshadows the apocalyptic

46. Cf Rm 8:18,32; 1 Cor 15:19-20; 2 Cor 3:11.

47. Vide Ridderbos, 1971:58, 224ff, and also Beker 1980:275-8, where he discusses the indicative and imperative after having dealt with the expression 'with Christ'.



sequence of 'life after God's final victory over death,' for the dialectic operates only within the sphere of apocalyptic hope in the coming glory of God (1980:232).

Beker intuitively perceives a conflict between the idea of participation in Christ and apocalypticism in Paul. When discussing the phrases 'in Christ' and 'with Christ' he remarks that 'the ontological association of participation 'in Christ' and 'in the Spirit' does not easily link itself with Paul's eschatological reservation (1980:274). According to him the phrases 'in Christ' and 'with Christ' both express the ground for our new life in and through the death and resurrection of Christ and our continued participation in his lordship (1980:275). Beker tries to substantiate this by pointing out that in Galatians 2:20-21 Paul re-interprets sacramental realism ('I have been crucified with Christ') in terms of the language of justification by faith. Thus Paul integrates a 'judicial' hermeneutic with a 'participation' hermeneutic to protect ontology from disintegrating into a realized eschatology, thus preserving the apocalyptic perspective of the Lordship of Christ (1980:275).

One could, however, ask whether Beker is not projecting a linear sense of history into Paul's thought. Why would one even think that Paul was acquainted with the concepts of a realized or futurist eschatology as we understand it? In Galatians 2:20-21 we find a contrast between a past determined by the law and the present determined by faith in Christ. Surely, there is no trace of a reinterpreted realized eschatology.

Beker also interprets the indicative-imperative scheme in terms of the coming triumph of God.

A simple indicative-imperative scheme must be dismantled in favor of a scheme that moves from the indicative of the Christ-event to the imperative of Christian obedience in order to reach its goal in the final indicative of the glory of God. ... The formulation of the indicative-imperative scheme in dialectical-anthropological terms is too static (1980:277-8).

One gets the impression that Beker has difficulty in correlating the death and resurrection of Christ with the experience of the believer. According to him the relationship is primarily constituted through faith as opposed to the Spirit:

Because the realms of faith and the Spirit speak a different 'language' of salvation, Paul's hermeneutic attempts to integrate the different associations of the two languages by interpreting 'Spirit' language in terms of 'faith' language (1980:284).

One could question the premise of this view. Is faith language really conceived by Paul as opposed to 'Spirit' language? Or is the concept of faith implied here perhaps a product of a high literacy culture with its rational and objective consciousness?

The present interventions of God and the revelations they involve are true and valid only insofar as they can be viewed as fulfillments of the types which are the experiences of former believers, of Christ and of biblical personages, and/or as fulfillments of former promises ... The believers' faith is 'null and void' if it does not bring them to see their experience as fulfillment of Christ's death and resurrection...' (1983:238-9).

With reference to his analysis of Romans, Patte says:

For Paul Christ is the normative type.

Further:

... any manifestation of God is Christ-like. Similarly, God's intervention or the manifestation of God's Spirit after Christ's resurrection can also be said to be intervention of the resurrected Christ by following the logic of the sacred historical development. ... These observations help us understand why Paul so easily attributes the same role to God, to his Spirit, and to Christ the Lord (1983:240).

If I understand Patte correctly, he sees this typological solidarity as a basic conviction which structures Paul's logic. Beyond this conviction no logical enquiry is feasible. The fundamental question is, what historical conditions make such a conception of solidarity possible? If we understand how convictions operate it still does not explain their origin or the forms in which they are expressed. It is in this regard that new light may come from oral theory.

An oral culture deals differently with concepts as solidarity and individuality than modern cultures. Expressions in an oral culture are empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced (Ong 1982a:45, Kelber 1983:150). So, e.g., is Homer's objectivity enforced by formulaic expressions -

... the individual's reaction is not expressed as simply individual or 'subjective' but rather as encased in the communal reaction, the communal 'soul' (Ong 1982a:46 with reference to Havelock).

Plato excludes poets from his Republic, because the studying of poems was essentially learning to react with 'soul', i.e. to feel oneself identified with Achilles or Odysseus (Havelock 1963:197-233). In the performance of the (West African) Mwindo Epic, the narrator slips into the first person when describing the actions of the hero. So bound together are narrator, audience, and character that in one instance the narrator assimilated into his oral performance even the transcribers who were de-oralizing it into text (Ong 1982a:46).

This general observation regarding the empathetic nature of oral communication explains at least why Paul's typology was understood in his day. It follows from the above that in an oral culture, the presence of Christ or the Spirit in the church and in the individual believer would be much more com-

prehensible than in a highly literate culture. <sup>48</sup> Within this frame of mind the presence of the Spirit and faith in Christ and in the future vindication of the believer can only be seen as complementary.

The empathetic-typological feature of the Pauline text sheds light on a number of other issues. It may provide us with an explanation of the naturalness with which Paul attached soteriological significance to his own presence. His own parousia in the congregations was of course differentiated from the parousia of Christ, but this does not rule out some striking similarities (cf 2 Cor 13:1-4, 10, Gl 6:17). <sup>49</sup>

Oral theory also assists us in understanding Paul's concept of authority which to modern minds seems to border on paternalism. Kelber explains that Paul's gospel '... echoes the voiceprints of an oral authority' (1983:144,147). In oral culture knowledge is difficult to attain and therefore precious. Oral cultures are therefore conservative by nature. The wise men (elders), who are in a position to preserve knowledge are held in high esteem. It is inevitable that this concept of authority stands in some relation to the authority of the apostles. <sup>50</sup> Therefore Paul could link his proclamation of the Gospel with his authority. Romans 1:1 and 10:8, 2 Corinthians 10:8-10 presuppose that authority vests in the oral proclamation of the word.

Seen from the typological perspective the apparent anomaly between the exemplary and vicarious suffering of Christ can also be solved by understanding both as one event. The believer is part of the Christ event; Christ manifests Himself in the present time of the believer

(2 Cor 4:10 - 'We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body').

In a secondary sense the suffering of the believer is also exemplary/vicarious. <sup>51</sup> Although the Christ event is normative for the description of the believer's situation, a circular hermeneutic is active: the identification of one element in one actor's experience leads to the discovery of the same experience in the other.

Thus insight into the typological hermeneutic which reconstructs a believer's psychological participation with Christ can lead to better descriptions of such phenomena as sacramental and sacrificial language, the mimesis of Christ,

---

48. Cf Kelber 1983:145.

49. The apostolic parousia was mediated by the apostle's letters, emissaries and personal presence. In this process the travelogue had the function of promising an oral word in addition to the written word, suggesting that Paul regarded the spoken word to be more effective than the written one, and the personal presence as of primary importance (cf Kelber 1983:141 with reference to Funk 1966, 1967; Ricoeur 1976:35).

50. Pobee 1989:90 mentions that it was because Paul was bearer of the Jesus tradition that he was put on a level with the other apostles.

51. This is clearly the bearing of Col 1:24. Though some see this as a deutero-Pauline text, it is in unison with Paul's teaching.

expressions as 'in' and 'with' Christ, and expressions as we find in 2 Corinthians 5:15 -

... he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again .

It also follows that the 'indicative' does not refer to a salvational deed completed in the past which only has to be applied to the present. The 'imperative' is not a rational or speculative application of abstract principles, but the action of Christ in the presence of the believer. <sup>52</sup>

Lastly we can observe that the pragmatics of oral communication - in conjunction with the corporate, communal thought frame of oral culture - necessitates a direct linking of leading concepts and this may be an explanation for the typological correspondence between anthropology, theology, soteriology, Christology and ecclesiology. <sup>53</sup>

#### 4. Some hermeneutic implications

4.1 I have demonstrated that Paul was a theologian in his own right. <sup>54</sup> When his work is considered against the background of first century oral culture, <sup>55</sup> it becomes evident that he was consciously reflecting on the revelation he had received. In this he of course did not follow the logic of modern 'common sense'. <sup>56</sup> Theology in the modern sense of the word is a by-product of literate culture and only became possible since the Middle Ages. <sup>57</sup> In the oral medium available to Paul there was no other possible way in which one could

---

52. Cf Rm 6:9-11 '... since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.'

53. E.g. 2 Cor 1:3-11 where comfort/hope in sufferings, salvation in tribulations, deliverance from death are the binary typological features ascribed to Christ, Paul and the congregation. The latter element signifies the victory over the former thanks to the Father's compassion and comfort (v 3), which was demonstrated decisively in the Christ event (v 5). This is a decisive influence in the present, and will continue in future (vs 10-11).

54. This is often negated by scholars depicting him first and foremost as a missionary, practical theologian or interpreter of the gospel (Beker 1986:595). Raeisaenen 1983:266-7 is right when he says: 'It is a fundamental mistake of much Pauline exegesis in this century to have portrayed Paul as "the prince of thinkers"'. In a modern sense Paul could never have been that. However, it is as incorrect to deduce from Paul's style that his theologizing was a secondary activity.

55. Cf Folker Siegert. 'Argumentation bei Paulus', 1985, as cited by Vos 1990:34.

56. Cf Bassler 1989:414: 'Paul was not a systematic theologian'; Vos 1989:34 refers affirmatively to Raeisaenen's self-critical question whether it would not be anachronistic to analyse a Jew from antiquity from the viewpoint of modern 'common sense'?

57. Furnish 1989:246-7 defines theology as 'critical reflection on the meaning and truth of the gospel'. He also remarks that it was only among the twelfth century scholastics that theology came to be regarded as a comprehensive, systematic presentation of the gospel. Cf also the criticism against Raeisaenen as cited by Vos 1989:34.

theologize.<sup>58</sup> His oral proclamation of the Christ event were 'speech acts' in the true sense of the word, though their enscripturation obscures their illocutionary force to some extent.<sup>59</sup>

Paul also definitely did not regard himself as the creative genius which he is sometimes made out to be.<sup>60</sup> In the light of an oral hermeneutic some of the features which previously were seen as unique contributions (e.g. the concept 'in Adam') may now be re-evaluated against its oral background.<sup>61</sup>

4.2 It must also be clear that we shall have to take hermeneutics of orality much more seriously in interpreting Paul's theology.<sup>62</sup> This insight is bound to lead to a revision of present research models - as became clear in the discussion of Patte and Beker's theories.

Patte, at the beginning of his book on structural exegesis, remarked that there ... was no fully satisfactory theory (or model) explaining the relationship between the system of values presupposed by a text and the surface textual manifestation ... (1978:viii).

For this reason he involved himself in theoretical structuralist and semiotic research. For a somewhat different reason Beker studied the apocalyptic substratum of the text. Although both made a substantial contribution in the quest for a 'unified field theory' of Paul's theology/Christology, much remains to be done.

4.3 It was further shown that formulations on the symbolical, historical and psychological levels were profoundly influenced by the oral matrix of the medium in which it was formulated and that the latter will have to be kept in mind when a comprehensive theory is formulated. The importance of a study in terms of the three levels should not be underestimated. It seems that none of these levels can be reduced to any of the other two.<sup>63</sup> Between the formu-

---

58. Not even the theology of Philo and the rabbinic schools, though comprising of a literary activity, can be seen as 'theology' in the modern sense of the word.

59. Paul's theology is now widely construed as an activity, cf Bassler 1989:418-9.

60. Cf H J Holtzmann and E Lohse as cited by Vos 1989:31,33.

61. The concept of being 'in Adam' may have had an unique formulation in Paul, but is completely in line with the empathetic nature of oral culture. The same applies to 'in' and 'with Christ'.

62. People in an oral culture would today also find it difficult to understand Paul, because the texts we have function removed from its primary context. Normally a writer compensates for this by establishing some frame of reference, e.g. Paul's travelogues had this function (Kelber 1983:141, with reference to Funk). Because of the oral nature of his text, we can assume that Paul's techniques for introducing his readers/audience to the context were still not as developed as that of later writers. Ricoeur explains this by pointing out that the illocutionary force is less inscribable than the propositional meaning and that the perlocutionary act of discourse is the least inscribable (1976:27).

63. E.g. Segers (1977) who works with a concept 'participationist eschatology', which accommodates the historical and psychological aspects, but not the symbolic.

lations on these three levels there is at least a formal oral correlation.<sup>64</sup> This observation of course does not abandon the study of any other levels of meaning. Scholars starting with a comprehensive study of one or two aspects, will eventually end up studying the other(s) as well.<sup>65</sup> Oral theory may also open up new avenues for studying the correlation between Paul and the Gospels.<sup>66</sup>

4.4 In the search for a 'unified field theory' of Paul's theology it is not only necessary to identify the oral matrix, but to assess its importance and function. To achieve this there has to be a methodological differentiation between (i) the *proprium*, (ii) the core/coherence,<sup>67</sup> (iii) the argument, (iv) convictional pattern and (v) the oral matrix - though these aspects may overlap.

The question will also have to be addressed whether the research model is a model intended by the author or whether it is purely a construct of the (literate) researcher (cf Vos 1989:40).

4.5 Another hermeneutical implication of our study is that ontological statements and rhetorical devices should be distinguished from one another. When the reason for the antithetical mode of expression is properly understood (as e.g. a means of abbreviation) it will prevent a scholar from jumping to premature theological and philosophical conclusions.<sup>68</sup>

A more intricate question is whether the oral matrix is indispensable to the Gospel as such. In other words: do we need to develop a post-literate orality (Boomershine 1987:152) or return to a pre-literate understanding of the text (Lindbeck in Ford 1989:267)? Or does the Gospel need to be de-oralized (de-mythologized!) so that people in a modern paradigm may understand it better?<sup>69</sup> Ricoeur's positive assessment of the written word and the distanciation it entails, points in the latter direction.<sup>70</sup>

---

64. It seems as if some theologians are apt to think in terms of triptychs. Lategan 1988:69-70, sees the 'three basic features of the text' as its historical, structural and theological or contextual aspects and remarks: 'A convincing exegetical paradigm has to account adequately for all these dimensions ... but an all-encompassing paradigm seems to elude exegetes'.

65. Beker has an intuition for this when he mentions the interrelation of the elements of vindication and universalism in the apocalyptic substratum of Paul's theology (1982:38).

66. It is significant that Stengers 1988:258 finds that early Jewish narrative Christology employed a typological exegesis. Jesus was seen as the fulfillment of the history of Israel while they believed they were living in the time of salvation. This corresponds with the structure of the historical and psychological levels of Paul's Christology.

67. Cf Plevnik 1989:476, who objects to Reuman's method for isolating a 'center' and accuses him of confusing what is specifically Pauline with what is central.

68. Watson e.g. ascribes the antithesis faith-works to the need of an emerging sect to legitimate its formation ideologically (in 'Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles', 1986, as cited by Vos 1989:27).

69. Perhaps the orality of the gospel is a reason why in modern societies illiterates, children and women have a closer affinity for religion than the rest of society. These groups are naturally closer to oral culture.

70. 1970:37ff 'A plea for writing'.

4.6 Oral theory shows that irregularities and breaks in the text can often - or to a considerable extent at least - be ascribed to the medium of communication. Once a reasonable possibility has been established that certain texts are of Pauline origin, there is less need to project major breaks in convictional patterns, or even to presuppose composite letters. 2 Cor. is here a case in point, being the best illustration we have of a Pauline letter with major breaks in the text while at the same time certain themes can be perceived to run through the work as a whole. An oral point of view would suggest that each succeeding section may be a corrective restatement of an earlier statement - 6:14-18 would restate the polemical and antithetical traces we already find in 2:11,16 and 6:4-10,12; chapters 10-13 would then restate this polemical theme once again, with Paul now vehemently coming out in defense of his apostleship. This may not be conclusive evidence for the unity of the letter, but it at least explains why the early church could accept it as a unity.

4.7 The last hermeneutical implication of Paul's orality we focus on is that the Christ event functions as an absolute point of reference/value. Within an oral matrix the Christ event is interpreted by means of the widest range of available (contextual) metaphorical categories. The Christ event is further decisive for the (escalating) time-experience of the believer and functions as normative type, defining the solidarity between God, the apostle and the congregation.

The absoluteness of the Christ event does not impede, but actually requires Paul's Christology to be an applied Christology, forming part of a coherent textual network in which all the different aspects (e.g. ecclesiology, theology, anthropology etc) are tied closely together. This observation suggests the impossibility of a 'non-theological' study of Paul. In future an interactional model would be indispensable to the study of his theology.<sup>71</sup>

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bassler, Jouette M 1989. Paul's Theology: Whence and whither? A synthesis (of sorts) of the theology of Philemon, 1 Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, and 1 Corinthians. *SBL Seminar Papers*. Atlanta GA: Scholars Press, 412-423.

Barrett, Charles Kingsley 1989. Paulus als Missionar und Theologe. *Zeitschrift fuer Theologie und Kirche* 86, 18-32.

---

71. Cf the unpublished paper 'Toward an interactional model for the analysis of letters' prepared by J N Vorster for the Pauline group of the New Testament Society of Southern Africa 1989, in which he argues for complementing Speech Act Theory with Conversational Theory as suggested by G Leech.

- Beker, J C 1980. *Paul the apostle, the triumph of God in life and thought*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- Beker, J C 1982. *Paul's apocalyptic Gospel, the coming triumph of God*. Philadelphia: Fortress.
- Beker, J C 1986. The method of recasting Pauline theology: the coherence-contingency scheme as interpretive model. *SBL Seminar Papers*. Atlanta: Scholars Press. 596-602.
- Beker, J C 1988. Paul's theology: consistent or inconsistent? *New Testament Studies* 34, 364-77.
- Beker, J C 1989. Paul the theologian, major motifs in Pauline theology. *Interpretation* 43, 352-65.
- Boers, H 1986. The foundations of Paul's thought: a methodological investigation. Paper read at *SBL Meeting*, Atlanta.
- Boomershine, Thomas E 1987. Biblical megatrends: towards a paradigm for the interpretation of the Bible in electronic media. *SBL Seminar Papers*, 144-157.
- Boring, M E 1982. *Sayings of the Risen Jesus: Christian prophecy in the synoptic tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bosch, David 1989. Paul on human hopes. *Journal of theology for Southern Africa* 67, 3-16.
- Brown, Gillian & Yule, George 1983. *Discourse analysis, Cambridge textbooks in linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Bultmann, R 1963. *The history of the synoptic tradition*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Combrink, H J B 1988. 'Readings, readers and authors: an orientation.' *Neotestamentica* 22, 189-203.
- Conzelmann, H & Lindemann, A 1987. *Grundriss der Theologie des Neuen Testaments*. Tübingen. 176-7.
- Dahl, N A 1962. The particularity of the Pauline epistles as a problem in the ancient church. *Neotestamentica et patristica*. Leiden. 261-71.
- Davies, W D 1948. *Paul and rabbinic Judaism*. London: SPCK.
- Dewey, Joanna 1989. Oral methods of structuring narrative in Mark. *Interpretation* 43, 32-44.
- Dibelius, M 1953. *Botschaft und Geschichte: Gesammelte Aufsätze von Martin Dibelius*. vol 1, *Zur Evangelienforschung*. Tübingen: Mohr.
- Dibelius, M 1956. *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*, 3rd. ed. Tübingen: Mohr.
- Dodd, C H 1934. The mind of Paul: Change and development. *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 18, [1934]. 3-44. Now in *NTS* (1953), 83-128



Enslin, Morton Scott 1957. *The ethics of Paul*. New York & Nashville.

Ford, David F (ed) 1989. *The modern theologians: an introduction to Christian theology in the twentieth century*, 2 vols. Oxford: Blackwell.

Funk, Robert W 1966. *Language, hermeneutics and Word of God*. New York: Harper and Row.

Funk, Robert W 1966. Saying and seeing: Phenomenology of language and the New Testament. *Journal of Bible and Religion* 34, 197-213.

Funk, Robert W 1967. The apostolic parousia: Form and significance, in W R Farmer *et al* (ed), *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1967. 249-68.

Fuller, Reginald H 1989. Jesus, Paul and apocalyptic. *Anglican Theological Review* 71(2), 134-42.

Furnish, V P 1970. Development in Paul's thought. *JAAR* 38, 289-303.

Furnish, V P 1989. Theology in 1 Corinthians: Initial Soundings. *SBL Seminar Papers*. Atlanta GA: Scholars Press. 246-264.

Gerhardsson, B 1961. *Memory and Manuscript: oral tradition and written transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity*. Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells.

Gerhardsson, B 1964. *Tradition and transmission in early Christianity*. Lund: Gleerup.

Goody, J 1977. *The domestication of the savage mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Goody, J & Watt, I P 1963. The consequences of literacy. *Comparative studies in History and Society* 5, 304-45.

Hays, R B 1980. *The faith of Jesus Christ*, SBLDS 56. Chico: Scholars Press.

Hays, R B 1988. Crucified with Christ: a synthesis of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philemon, Philippians and Galatians. *SBL Seminar Papers*.

Dunn, J 1980. *Christology in the Making*. London: SCM.

Havelock, Eric A 1963. *Preface to Plato*. Cambridge: Belknap of Harvard University.

Havelock, Eric A 1984. Oral composition in the 'Oedipus Tyrannus' of Sophocles. *NLH* 16, 175-97.

Havelock, Eric A 1978. *The Greek concept of justice: from its shadow in Homer to its subsistence in Plato*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Hübner, H 1987. Methodologie und Theologie. Zu neuen methodischen Ansätzen in der Paulusforschung. *KuD* 33, 150-75.

- Kelber, Werner H 1983. *The oral and the written Gospel, the hermeneutics of speaking and writing in the synoptic tradition, Mark Paul and Q*. Philadelphia: Fortress.
- Kinneavy, James L 1987. *Greek rhetorical origins of Christian faith*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lategan, B C 1967. *Die aardse Jesus in die prediking van Paulus volgens sy briewe*. Rotterdam: Bronder-offset.
- Lategan, B C 1988. Why so few converts to new paradigms in theology? in Mouton, J *et al* (ed), *Paradigms and progress in theology*. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 65-78.
- Lausberg, H 1963. *Elemente der literarischen Rhetorik*. München: Max Hueber.
- Longenecker, R H 1985. The nature of Paul's early eschatology. *NTS* 31(1), 85-95.
- Lowe, John 1941. An examination of attempts to detect developments in St. Paul's theology. *Journal of Theological Studies* 42, 129-42.
- Lyons, John 1977. *Semantics 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lyons, John 1981. *Language, meaning and context*. Fontana paperbacks.
- Martyn, J Louis 1982. *Word and World 2*. 194-198.
- Moule, C F D 1941. An examination of attempts to detect developments in St. Paul's theology. *JTS* XLII, 129ff.
- Moule, C F D 1959. The influences of circumstances on the use of Christological terms. *JTS* X, 247ff.
- Moule, C F D 1964. The influence of circumstances on the use of eschatological terms. *JTS* XV, 1-15.
- Ong, Walter J 1967b. *The presence of the Word*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967b.
- Ong, Walter J 1977. *Interfaces of the word: studies in the evolution of consciousness and culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University.
- Ong, Walter J 1982a. *Orality and Literacy, the technologizing of the word*. London: Methuen.
- Ong, Walter J 1982b. The oral and the written word: a reappraisal, in *The literate revolution in Greece and its cultural consequences*. Princeton: Princeton. 3-38.
- Patte, Daniel & Patte, Aline 1978. *Structural Exegesis: from theory to practice, Exegesis of Mark 15 and 16, Hermeneutical implications*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Patte, Daniel 1982. *Preaching Paul*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Patte, Daniel 1983. *Paul's Faith and the Power of the Gospel, a structural introduction to the Pauline letters*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Patte, Daniel 1989. *The religious dimensions of biblical text*. Atlanta: Scholars Press.

Plevnik, J 1989. The center of Pauline theology. *CBQ* Vol 51 (3), 461-78.

Pobee, John S 1989. Oral theology and Christian oral tradition: challenge to our traditional archival concept. *Mission Studies*, Journal of the IAMS, 6(1), 87-98.

Räsänen, H 1986. *Paul and the Law*. Philadelphia: Fortress.

Reumann, J. Fitzmyer, J & Quinn, J 1982. *Righteousness in the New Testament: 'justification' in the United States Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue*. Philadelphia: Fortress. 105-32.

Ricoeur, P 1976. *Interpretation theory: Discourse and the surplus of meaning*. Fort Worth, Texas: Texas Christian University Press.

Ridderbos, H 1971. *Paulus, ontwerp van zijn theologie*. Kampen: Kok.

Sanders, E P 1977. *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: a Comparison of Patterns of Religion*. Philadelphia: Fortress.

Sanders, E P 1983. *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*. Fortress: Philadelphia.

Schnackenburg, R. Christologie des Neuen Testaments. *Mysterium Salutis* 3/1, 227-338.

Stanley, Christopher D 1990. Paul and Homer: Greco-Roman citation practice in the first century CE. *Novum Testamentum* 32 (1), 48-78.

Stühlmacher, P 1981. *Zur paulinischen Christologie. Versöhnung, Gesetz und Gerechtigkeit, Aufsätze zur biblischen Theologie*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht. 209-23.

Tannehill, R C 1967. *Dying and rising with Christ: A study in Pauline theology*. Berlin: Töpelmann.

Teeple, Howard M 1970. The oral tradition that never existed. *JBL* 89(1), 56-68.

Theissen, Gerd 1987. *Psychological aspects of Paul's theology*. Philadelphia: Fortress.

Vansina, Jan 1965. *Oral tradition, a study in historical methodology*, translated from French by H M Wright. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Vos, J S 1989. Nieuw licht op de apostel Paulus, tendenties in het huidige onderzoek. *GTT* 89(1), 23-40.

Vos, J S 1990. Nieuw licht op de apostel Paulus, tendenties in het huidige onderzoek II. *GTT* 90(1), 30-44.