New trends in reading Philippians: A literature review

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ABSTRACT
This review article gives an indication of how the latest views on the interpretation of the letter to the Philippians represent aspects of the changed situation in the field of biblical hermeneutics. Three recent complete interpretations indicative of conceptual renewal of Philippians are reviewed in detail, up to a retention of terms and phraseology: Schenk (1987), Aspan (1992), and Geoffrion (1993). The end of the long hegemony of historical criticism has left the discipline without one single matrix for 'normal science'. This has brought about a multidisciplinary orientation in which historical critical research still has a part to play, but issues which have proved to be anomalous to its paradigm are now being investigated by means of more text oriented, structural, and rhetorical methodologies. The article concludes with an overview of recent literature on Philippians.

1 THE NOTION OF A PARADIGM SHIFT
The ebb and flow of methodological progress does seem to be subjected to more profound variations within a wider scope of parameters. The term applied to these more comprehensive changes in direction, 'paradigm shift', is itself subjected to controversy, yet is sufficiently established to indicate the major transformation of trends in Philippians' studies, coinciding, of course, with most of what has happened in New Testament scholarship as a whole and in other theological disciplines.

The most profound evaluation of this situation has been the 1990 Vanderbilt University, PhD dissertation of Paul F Aspan, entitled: Toward a new reading of Paul's letter to the Philippians in light of a Kuhnian analysis of New Testament criticism. Aspan attempts, inter alia, to demonstrate from an overview of New Testament scholarship that a paradigm shift can indeed be recorded; to indicate new principles that have emerged in biblical interpretation and finally to apply these new perspectives to a 'new' interpretation of Paul's letter to the Philippians.

The immense field covered by this study of Aspan is even more apparent from the headings of his five chapters, which read as follows:

(1) Thomas S Kuhn's concept of paradigm as an analytical tool for understanding the present state of New Testament scholarship.

(3) The parameters of ‘critical pluralism’: ‘New fundamentals’ in biblical interpretation.

(4) Unresolved issues in the study of Philippians.

(5) Toward a new reading of Philippians.

The year 1976 in the second chapter should be noted, since it turns out to mark the big divide in Aspan’s scheme. Again, there may be differences in pinpointing something as elusive as a ‘paradigm shift’, but looking back, it does seem to be more or less appropriate as an indication of when the new ‘text linguistic’ impulses concerned started having an impact on the interpretation of the New Testament and of Philippians in particular. Loubser (1986:1) refers to the new approach in linguistics in the 1960’s and Louw (1976:1) is aware of the newness of the modern discipline. Schenk writes his assessment of the traditional German enquiry into Philippians’ issues in 1976 and his commentary on the letter, with uncommon interest in textlinguistics and semantics, in 1984. Aspan (1992:7), with specific reference to developments beyond the historical critical scope, explicitly regards the (1976!) article of Norman Perrin: ‘The interpretation of the gospel of Mark’ as ‘a clear and decisive crossroads in the peregrination of New Testament scholarship’.

The nature of the momentous change perceived in the past two decades is signalled by Aspan right at the onset: ‘Biblical scholars have often referred to their historical critical method as “scientific criticism”.... Yet, especially within New Testament studies, the years since 1976 have seen a development of hermeneutical approaches that no longer represents a single mighty torrent whose onward rush towards its goals leaves an unmistakable path for all to follow.’ Without reference to the epithet ‘post-modern’ he typifies the present situation in terms of ‘hidden backwaters’, ‘methodological chaos’ and ‘anomaly, invention and heterodoxy of critical approaches’ (1992:1-2).

The demise of historical criticism has left New Testament scholarship without one single governing paradigm for exegesis. Neither structuralist nor sociological approaches nor contemporary models of psychotherapy have been able, on their own, to fill the void. Therefore Aspan turns to a set of Thomas Kuhn’s concepts (1970, 1977) around the notion of paradigm ‘as a heuristic tool for understanding the current state of New Testament studies’ (1992:5). According to Kuhn a paradigm functions as a lens through which non-paradigmatic data or anomaly may be recognised, thus revealing the limitations, and eventually precipitating the reconstitution of the paradigm. An example is provided by Perrin, who ‘called for a new literary criticism of the gospels precisely because the model supplied by normal science—in Perrin’s case, redaction criticism—was no longer wholly adequate to the task at hand’ (1992:7).

The choice of Philippians by Aspan is explained on the one hand by the fact that the writings of Paul have not been subjected to the same types of
literary approaches as have been the gospels, and on the other hand by the character of the letter, presenting some classical problems for reconsideration within a multi-disciplinary orientation. Ground-breaking work in Pauline studies by Patte (1983), Petersen (1985) and Theissen (1982, 1987) are nevertheless recognised (Aspan 1992:8).

2 HISTORICAL CRITICAL STOCKTAKING WITH WOLFGANG SCHENK

Before venturing on the adventurous road thus indicated by Aspan, it may serve the cause of a balanced view to take note of Wolfgang Schenk's comprehensive overview of the state of affairs in 1987 regarding introductory matters in the Letter to the Philippians.

Schenk states that the one most momentous insight in the study of the epistle, and indeed in Pauline studies, is the postulation of an Ephesian imprisonment as the place of origin of the Letter by Michaelis in 1925, following in the footsteps of Deissmann. He calls it 'der wichtigste Forschungsbeitrag zum Phil aus der ersten Jahrzehnten dieses Jahrhunderts und zugleich [quoting Jülicher-Fascher] “die einschneidendste Änderung im Lebensbild des Paulus seit dem Auftreten der Tübinger Schule”' (1987:3292).

His own assessment of research on Philippians in the four decades: 1945-1985, is apt comment on the 'small steps' that humanity has since been taking with regard to the usual introductory issues concerning the Letter: The literary integrity and unitary situation of the text mass of 1 624 words (according to the eight best manuscripts) is revisited, and denied (1987:3280-3284). Thus the intention of the redaction of the 'reconstructed' Letter is to be determined: it makes use of Paul's authority and it frames the polemic Letter with more positive materials, such as the 'co-workers in suffering' motif (3284-3286). Historical snippets about the history of Philippi and Paul's history in Philippi include the fact that it was the first city to be named after a person and that it issued coins depicting a pair of draught-animals which could have inspired Paul's (hapax) appellation to his 'yoke fellow' in 4:3 (3287-3289). Next an attempt is made at determining the 'situation Kontexte' of Letter A (4:10-23) and the later fragment B (1:7b,12-17,30; 2:23), accepting Ephesus as the place of imprisonment, and, as far as B is concerned, that the countering of disunity as a result of official repression is 'der zentrale Nerv dieses Briefes' (3289-3294). The opposition against which fragment C is aimed, could not possibly have been Jewish Christians, as the Tübingen school proposed. A second, libertinistic front has been disproved by Koester (1961). The gnostic epithet is doubtful. Since there is no evidence of a Christian element in the opposition, it is incorrect even to speak in terms of heretics, false teachers, schismatics, and so forth. Rather, as Holsten
(in 1875) proposes, they should simply be regarded as Jewish propagandists. More specifically, over 50 words in Letter C may reflect a 'weisheitlichen Tora-Propaganda' in the vein of the *Wisdom of Solomon*. The severity of language used by Paul would be inexplicable if used against Jews in 'normal' circumstances; not, however, if gentile Christians were to be 'rejudaised' and put under the law—that would constitute treason against the gospel (Suhl 1975). It is not conceded that Paul is merely 'holding the Jews up for consideration as a cautionary example' (Caird 1976:131f)—that would mean that Phlp 3:18, with its concrete situation was indeed regarded as opening up a new front (Schenk 1987:3294-3299).

Finally, some misconceptions regarding the ever intriguing passage: Phlp 2:6-11 are 'rectified' and some issues about its true character decided, as well as those of 3:20-21. Little is gained by merely calling these text elements 'vorpaulinisch'. The concrete composition, with the indicatives of 2:6-11 taking up those in 2:1 after the imperatives of 2:2-5, thus forming a ring composition, is best understood as originating in Philippi. Paul's redactional changes and/or additions would best have made sense if the Philippians had been familiar with this extraordinary large quotation beforehand. The current *wissenschaftsgeschichtliche* terms 'Hymn' or 'Carmen Christi' are unwarranted, running against the internal syntactic and semantic structures. The text is constructed according to the principles of ancient rhetoric and is therefore not 'poetic'. It can be identified as a 'propaganda text' forming part of the zealous gospel preaching (1:5, 27) of the Philippians. Moreover, it should not anachronistically be labelled liturgic, since the character of the early Christian gatherings were decidedly *unkultisch*. The 'carmen' of the Christians, about which Pliny wrote to Trajan (Ep 10.96.6) could mean any festive pronouncement—in the context it is identical with the Christian *sacramentum* or oath and probably referred to the baptismal confession (:3300 n 74). There is no gnostic redeemer notion underlying the text; it rather resembles examples from the hellenistic-Roman world of a descending and ascending heavenly redeemer. Moreover, Talbert (1976:435) correctly observes: 'The descent is not explicitly for a redemptive purpose.... The soteriological effects are the result of the exaltation or ascent...'. Since the text does not attest to the incarnation, it does not imply preexistence but rather *pre-temporal* existence. Phlp 3:20ff also stems from Philippi, is related to 2:6-11 and is likewise not to be regarded as hymnic. It is a confession of hope and differs from 2:6-11 in that it lays greater stress on the impending consummation according to Paul's gospel preaching (3:10ff)—situating it in the 'paulustreue Flügel um Clemens' (Schenk 1987:3299-3303)†.
2.1 Evaluation

Although it could not be expected that this encyclopaedic exposition of Philippians' scholarship by Schenk would meet with general acclamation, it does imply or represent a great deal of what had been done by that time on the Letter, especially in Germany. In a sense it can even be regarded as signalling the apex and consummation of the historical critical approach to introductory matters (presented in incredibly elaborate German O. In so many instances the available evidence is just not adequate to escape a non liquet, after pro and contra arguments have been initiated, expanded and repeated and the names of exponents listed.

At the time of Schenk's effort, there was already evidence of the more text oriented, structural approach, of which he himself had taken note and which he started employing to open up new venues in the debate. His commentary on Philippians (1984) is actually based on a structural method, of which he elucidates the theory in an introductory chapter. In a sense he may be regarded as a 'loner', not only on account of the subsequent lack of enthusiasm for the method in Germany1, but also because the structural approach he employs is of a mixed brand that does not fit into one of the main streams. His commentary is evaluated with varying enthusiasm by Combrinck (1987), Dormeyer (1989) and Koperski (1992a).

3 ASPAN'S VIEW ON PARADIGM DECLINE AND RECONSTITUTION

Paul Aspan sets out to demonstrate that the historical critical method has been overtaken by profound new approaches in methodology, although it remains valid in a somewhat restricted scope. He concurs with the way in which Kuhn makes use of the concept paradigm as 'an analytic category oriented towards the analysis of the historical evolution of disciplinary methodology' (1992:19). 'Paradigm' is described as 'the universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners' (Kuhn 1970:viii). Heeding criticism, Kuhn subsequently divides the concept into a wider and a narrower scope, respectively renamed 'disciplinary matrix', representing the global sense of paradigm, and 'exemplar', the specific use of paradigm, denoting specific examples that serve as models within a disciplinary matrix (Kuhn 1977:297, 298).

1 I recall the comment of Ernst Käsemann in a personal interview in 1982 in which he compared structural analysis to a coin automat that only returns the Grösschen you put into it!
The disciplinary matrix (historical criticism) for modern biblical studies during the period 1678-1976 started with Isaac la Peyrère, Baruch Spinoza and Richard Simon in the 17th century. According to Aspan it was constructed mainly on two pillars. The first is Simon's declaration: 'In all my work, I have undertaken to side only with the truth' which, according to Aspan, 'represents the single most programmatic statement for biblical science in toto, where truth is understood as empirical reality and historical fact'. The other is the concern of D F Strauss for finding 'whether the ground we are standing on in the gospels is in any way historical'. This found its fruition via all the well-known names, schools and contributions to 'the two exemplars which have dominated the more specialized world of New Testament scholarship: form criticism and redaction criticism' (Aspan 1992:42, 107-108).

Two observations are made about the 'normal science' phase of this disciplinary matrix. Firstly, '[r]esearch and results reached an unprecedented height of precision and clarity', and secondly, '[a]ny elements of the New Testament writings which did not fit into the preformed box supplied by normal science were un-noticed or discounted.' Inevitably the third stage in the existence of a paradigm or disciplinary matrix, that of decline, caught up with it in the form of the exposure of anomaly. One of the contributing factors according to Aspan was that: '[b]iblical science sowed the seeds of anomaly in its consistent, thorough-going exclusion of literary and other extra-empirical criteria from its exegetical method. The “discovery” of such criteria has resulted in the ongoing revolution in New Testament scholarship.' (1992:109). Specific developments named and discussed in this regard comprise: 'tensive language, the evangelist as author rather than editor, rhetorical intent, semantic universes, cultural biases in interpreters as well as authors, etc.'

The most conspicuous, yet underdeveloped, instance of anomaly is that expounded by Perrin, using Philip Wheelwright's notion of tensive symbols over against steno-symbols—the latter referring on a one to one basis. ‘Perrin suggested that elements of the text must be seen as multivalent and ambiguous symbols, rather than only as bits of data from or clues to an ancient [S]itz im [L]eben.' The term 'kingdom of God' provides a fitting example. With reference to T S Eliot's description of a poem as a raid on the inarticulate, the character of the text of the New Testament is defined as tenseive language because it can be regarded as a raid on the ultimate. It was precisely this character of the text that was ignored by traditional New Testa-

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2 As one schooled in, and a former protagonist of the disciplinary matrix of historical criticism, Perrin is regarded as a legitimate observer of anomaly and an initiator of paradigm change (Aspan 1992:111).
ment scholarship. However, this insight now having been recovered, the profession’s view of its field and therefore its methods and goals have changed. In this regard the term *myth* has become useful again in a positive way, as an *entrée* to the (multivalent) text, rather than a husk to be discarded as in the previous use of the term in normal science, for example Strauss and Bultmann (Aspan 1992:110-113).

Since any one reading of a text replete with *tensive language* is bound to be incomplete, it invites supplementation from other, even incommensurate orientations. A multi-disciplinary matrix now governs New Testament exegesis (1992:113-115). 'The eclipse of the reign of the historical critical method by an attitude of critical pluralism necessitates the potential inclusion of other new and non-traditional approaches to biblical criticism.' Since 1976 exegetical approaches have become more synchronically oriented. These new approaches hold the promise of a new set of fundamentals from which the field of biblical criticism can be reconstructed. The presupposition remains, however, that historical criticism would always comprise a *sine qua non* for examining biblical texts. The diachronic dimension of these remains important as the scope of meaning of the ‘deep structure’ of human experience and the traditions of various literary genres is determined by the time and place of their origin (1992:168-171).

4 ‘TENSIVE LANGUAGE’ IN PHILIPPIANS

The methodological stance of Aspan himself can be described as *formalism*, informed by New Criticism, although he is aware of the latter’s sterile view on the autonomy of a text. According to Aspan, two aspects of the Letter to the Philippians reveal its attempt ‘to articulate the inexpressible’. It can be shown to contain a well-crafted piece with a christological ‘hymn’ as its fulcrum and a recognizable but not fully explicated symbol, *κοινωνία* as its rhetorical lever. In fact, the literary elements identified in Philippians justify its being analyzed through a study of its surface elements which suggest different, significant avenues for interpretation. The conscious intent of the actual author and the perceived meaning by its actual readers need not be taken into account. Rather, following Dewey and Kennedy, some aspects of rhetorical criticism are to be used to inquire with which literary or rhetorical strategies the implied author is attempting to manipulate the ideal reader—and to what purpose (Aspan 1992:171-174).

Three inter-related issues concerning the Letter have been raised, but left unanswered or only partially answered by ‘normal science’. The first regards the *unity* of the Letter, which should be approached closely together with the second issue, the *hymn*, since the angle of the debate is turned when that is done. Also connected to these is the third, the Letter’s paranetic purpose: the

The ‘new reading’ of Philippians by Aspan is initiated by the structural observation that the ‘main letter’ (C: 1:1-3:1, 4:2-9,21,23; 183) has a chiastic form. He prefers the term concentric and insists that an inversion of ideas and themes should also be taken into account. The hymn is shown to be located at the thematic and structural epicentre of the C-letter, highlighting the thrust of the whole structure. The insertion of the hymn, with the swift metamorphosis of genre from a paranetic to a poetic mode, is seen as the means to elevate the importance of the central concept. The hymn is preceded by 35 verses and followed by 30, ringed by the concentric motifs of exhortation, rejoicing and the main purposes of the Letter. Put in the form of a diagram, the scheme of Philippians is presented as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phlp</th>
<th>Concentric element</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:1-2</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>Greeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:3-11</td>
<td>A¹</td>
<td>Gospel-koinonia: the general concern of the Letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:12-26</td>
<td>B¹</td>
<td>Paul’s trials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:27-2:5</td>
<td>C¹</td>
<td>Exhortation to ‘one mind, one spirit’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:6-11</td>
<td>CENTRE</td>
<td>HYMN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:12-18</td>
<td>C²</td>
<td>Exhortation to obedience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:19-3:1</td>
<td>B²</td>
<td>Epaphroditus’ trials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:2-4:9</td>
<td>A²</td>
<td>Summons to koinonia for Euodia and Syntyche—the specific concern of Phlp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:21-23</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>Final salutation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 ASPAN’S NEW READING OF PHILIPPIANS, WITH REFERENCE TO PATTE, PETERSEN AND SCHENK

4.1 Reading from a chiastic perspective

A first reading is done from the centre of the hymn outwards, the centre serving as a ‘lens’ through which the rings are studied. The structure of the Letter is mirrored in the structure of the hymn. The hymn does not necessarily reflect programmatic or normative early Christian theology (cf also Schenk 1984:210, Beare 1959:30-34 and Patte 1983:137). It is divided into five stanzas of which the third (or middle one) carries the most fundamental message of the Letter. Significantly, the virtue obedience is placed in a juxtaposition with the peculiar Christian symbol: death on a cross at the full stop, right in the middle of the hymn. The message is conveyed that Jesus died for the sake of obedience. ‘The implied author...is using perhaps the weightiest symbol at his disposal, the crucifixion, to persuade his audience to the telos of
hypekoos. The rhetoric here suggests that the symbol and the virtue are quintessentially connected’.

In the same way the exultation of Christ as Lord as a result of his obedience is used as a symbol. ‘The arrangement of the elements suggests that the exultation of the obedient Jesus implies the exultation of obedience’. In the last stanza of the hymn the main concern of the Letter, kouwvia, is also evident, closely connected to the notion of obedience. It paints a picture of the cosmic kouwvia, the perfect unity and obedience in the worship of Christ. The image of obedience is transferred from Jesus to the ideal readers, via the ‘every knee’ and ‘every tongue’. In Phlp 2:5 the hymn is introduced as an example for the readers to emulate. If they are obedient to the summons of the Letter, they will practice the kouwvia in the Gospel, according to Phlp 1:5. Significantly, ‘the rhetorical logic of the hymn does not say that the death of Jesus gives glory to the [F]ather, but rather the obedient subservience of the koinonoi renders praise to the name of Jesus (to the glory of the Father).’ This reading is supported by the connection which Patte (1983: 183) has seen between the important phrase μορφή δουλου and the ‘true subject of the hymn’ υπήκοος. ‘To be “in Christ,” as exemplified by stanza five, means to be obedient just as the one who took the form as a slave was obedient’ (Aspan 1992:230-246).

Again, to normal science this presents an anomaly, since ‘any attempt to understand the redaction of the hymn, or its Pre-Pauline life setting, misses the mark, for the true subject of the hymn is obedience, and the object of the hymn is to provide the Philippians with an extended metaphor regarding the unqualified embrace of the virtue. Christology is not the point of the hymn: γενόμενος υπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου ἦν’. The obedience characterised by this phrase, as well as by μορφή δουλου and εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρός, is what gives the Philippians their sense of identity (1992:246, 247).

Working outward from the hymn, several observations are made about the C-ring, dealing with aspects of the imperatives of community. From the ‘blameless’ epithet in both 1:10 and 2:14 it is clear that the author is creating ‘ideal readers’ while the rhetoric only subtly refers to the actual readers, whose situation seems desperate to a point of losing salvation, which is intimately connected to obedience and community (kouwvia). Schenk argues that ‘fear and trembling’ forms an hendiadys with obedience in 2:12b. It is matched in C1 (1:28) by the call not to be intimidated by opponents: ‘the audience must choose between “holy fear,” which will lead to both persecution and salvation or intimidation which, if countenanced, will lead to “destruction”’. The theme of rejoicing comprises only the circumference of ring C (against Patte 1983:176, 177, who sees the command to joy in a gloomy situation as the main goal of the dialogical level of this Letter).
Sampley (1980) has proposed that *κοινωνία* be understood as a concrete contract or ‘societas’ between Paul and the Philippians which could only stay intact if the participants remained ‘single-minded’ as is advocated in 2:1-5 and especially in the verb ἰδρέω.

The B-ring, whilst informing of Paul’s imprisonment, regards it as a lesser evil, having already been overcome by his successful preaching. What really concerns him is the evil of ἐρίθεια. *Eritheia* would seem to form the utter antithesis to *koinonia*. Whereas the latter connotes a commonly shared objective, the former describes the worst sort of self-interest. The other use of the term, in 2:3, combines it with *κενοδοξία*, boasting, vainglory, perhaps with a play on *ἐκέρωσεν* and *δόξα* in the hymn. The tension over whether Paul will live or die, functions as an element on the circumference of ring B and accomplishes two things: It provides the community with a clear example, echoing the hymn, of how to cope with persecution. Secondly it indicates that persecution and death are not nearly as threatening to faith as *ἐρίθεια* is, since the latter may result in the loss of salvation. The mention of Timothy and Epaphroditus in this ring means more than personal information: it is a concretization of the attitude which is expected among the Philippians. That is especially true of the rhetorical use made of the saga of Epaphroditus, who contrasts distinctly with Euodia and Syntyche and the perceived situation among the church members. He is made ‘the epitome of “the mind” which should be characteristic of the church at Philippi’. In his illness Epaphroditus has become an example of one who has no concern for his own interests, even to the point of death (1992:248-264).

Ring A performs its rhetorical task in an inverted order, announcing the solution first, by referring to an existing *κοινωνία*, notably with Paul and the gospel (1:5) before addressing the problems caused by *ἐρίθεια* amongst themselves. In fact the ‘real issue’—the discord of Euodia and Syntyche is only mentioned at the close of the ring (A2). The thanksgiving period is formally contained in A1, which therefore contains no imperatives, but a ‘high sense of eschatological expectation’ (1:6,10). The apparent emphasis on Paul’s personal relationship with the Philippians should be regarded as establishing his authority and as preparation for his forthcoming heavy use of the imperative mood. Schenk (1984:91-93) ‘text pragmatically’ discards the notion of a thanksgiving passage and regards it rather as the author’s self-justification, which aims at restoring his waning influence with his readers. Petersen argues in the same vein, suggesting that Paul’s self-appellations in the various Letters are only so many masks he dons to achieve his rhetoric goal (1985:105, 115-119). In the thanksgiving the T-form is used fourteen times—preparing for the call to obedience. The A-ring significantly concludes with an imperative in 4:9b: *τράφωσέτε, do (these things)*. A1 first introduces the concept of *κοινωνία* and A2 gives ‘the most specific and crucial
exhortation to that ideal' (1992:264-270).

4.2 A progressive, rhetorical reading

The second linear or progressive kind of reading is done to demonstrate how the different parts of the text work together to some unified purpose in meeting the rhetorical situation. The purpose towards which the argument aims, is the softening of the division which arose between Euodia and Syntyche. The different elements (retaining the designations A¹ etc. that they had in the ring analysis) are screened a second time to see how they combine to effect the obedient response of these women to Paul's call to kouvowia. The overall findings are confirmed in this way and a couple of new perspectives are added (:270ff).

Special emphasis is placed on Paul's drive to establish his authority in A¹ and B¹ and the evaluation of Paul's rhetoric by Aspan becomes increasingly critical and negative. Although Paul requires the prayers of the Philippians for his σωτηρία in difficult circumstances in 1:19, in 1:24 he 'shifts into a directly authoritative mode for the ensuing discourse. The congregation is told bluntly that they have need of Paul, that they may glory en Christou Jesou because of Paul's example, and that Paul plans to come to them again. Philippians 1:26 seems to make a direct analogy: en Christou Jesou en emoi, which unmistakenly juxtaposes and thereby equates Paul's authority over the Philippians with that of Christ's' (:275, 276). Further, the fact that Paul's death is mentioned before and after the hymn, which has death at its centre, leads Aspan to conclude that as Jesus becomes a 'type' in the hymn, Paul likewise becomes a 'type' for the believers, even the 'type' kurios. 'In short, Paul is their Lord.' This is one instance where Paul's example is not valid: the Philippians may not partake in or exercise his authority nor that of Timothy. Thus, while it may seem that Timothy is paying them a courtesy visit, 'the rhetorical logic posits him as an authority to be emulated and obeyed, even as a proleptic manifestation of the hoped for visit of their Lord (Paul, not Jesus: 2:24)' (:279-281).

It is conceded that the problems at Philippi which are actually mentioned are rather trivial in comparison with the 'elaborate lengths to which Paul has gone first to establish and then to exercise his authority'. The explanation given is that it refers to a situation which the readers would recognise. Also, in the semantic universe on which the Letter is based, ἐριθεία represents the foremost negative value, thus it is actually regarded as illusionary or unreal and not given undue expression. The readers are rather exhorted to embrace the positive and the real. The ideal reader is defined further and from the ramifications of rhetorical logic 'it is hard to see how anything other than the
dispute between Euodia and Syntyche represented the occasion for the Letter'. Their choice is either to heed the imperatives and models of koinonia presented before them or they could 'drag the congregation into the apoleias of eritheia' (:283-287).

4.3 Evaluation

Aspan (1992:291-292) acknowledges the limitations of his approach, that while it is 'well-suited to understanding the text as a totality' it does not highlight the text as a product of a specific cultural context as would be possible from (say) Iser's reader oriented theory. Nor does it investigate parameters for interpretation such as might be proposed by a liberationist perspective. In its limitations as but one inventive approach, in the absence of a governing disciplinary matrix, it represents the necessity of multi-disciplinary readings of texts.

A variation of another kind is presented by the alternative chiastic structure of Luter and Lee (1995:92), in which the integrity of the Letter is preserved but the 'midpoint' of the chiasmus is found in the passage comprising the 'caring models' of Epaphroditus and Timothy!.

5 GEOFFRION'S READING: A CALL TO STEADFASTNESS AND POLITICAL/MILITARY RHETORIC

5.1 Appraisal of recent attempts at understanding.

In his publication of the results of his doctoral dissertation, Geoffrion (1993) arrives at quite different conclusions regarding the main purpose and theme of the Letter. Although he himself does not attempt a complete rhetorical analysis, he draws upon earlier attempts to analyse the Letter in terms of epistolography and ancient rhetoric in general. In his helpful survey of the various views on the purpose(s) of the Letter(s), the main division is actually discerned between those scholars who make use of rhetorical criticism and those who do not (1993:2-22). In the latter group he further distinguishes between those who focus on literary conventions associated with epistolography (a sub-category under rhetoric) and those who regard Philippians as part of a formal rhetorical argument. This method again has only been applied to Paul's Letters since Betz's commentary on Galatians in 1979.

Regarding Philippians either as a formal or informal Letter, the results of the past decade are summarised:

Russell argues that Paul wrote to obtain obedience; Swift identifies the "Philippians' partnership in the Gospel" as the central theme which explains the various parts of the Letter; Alexander concludes Paul primarily sought to streng-
then “family” ties; and Stowers, with L White, classifies the epistle as a “Letter of friendship,” written to honor and strengthen (or reconcile) the Philippians’ friendship with Paul and with one another (Geoffrion 1993:14-17).

In spite of the different conclusions, a great deal of coherence between the various parts of the Letter is now recognised.

Geoffrion indicates a turning point when scholars began to analyse the Letter in terms of Paul’s rhetorical purpose and the devices he employed to strengthen the appeal. Stagg (1980:337) identifies as a key sentence ‘the mind in Christ’ (Phlp 2:5) which probably indicates the intent of the writing. Culpepper (1980:252-253) elaborates on this view, indicating how Paul used this theme against both outward and inward threats to the Philippians, whilst Mengel, attempting to fathom the rhetorical situation of the Letter, finds in 1:27 its basic idea and focal point and an exhortation to harmony (1982:36). Garland (1985:141-173) is first to apply the principles of ancient rhetoric to the whole of Philippians. He argues for the Letter’s integrity, chapter 3 containing deictic discourse as a ‘deliberate rhetorical device...to affect his audience prior to the direct, emotional appeal in 4:2.’ Writing on the Christ-hymn and its rhetorical function in the Letter, Robuck (1987:155) finds one theme, illustrated by the action of Jesus in the hymn, which would be applicable to the whole rhetorical purpose, that of a correct mental attitude. Common observations in these attempts at a rhetorical analysis are: that the rhetorical purpose shaped the language and structures, that ‘mental attitude’ plays a crucial role and that the personal references to Timothy and Epaphroditus function as illustrations in the argument.

Watson (1988) launched an attempt at a ‘comprehensive, formal analysis of Philippians based on rhetorical methods from antiquity’. He finds that the Letter may be understood as a coherent whole, that it corresponds to the form found in deliberative rhetoric—its argument intending to convince or persuade—and that the main point in the Letter is to be found in the exhortation in 1:27-30, which answers the only question behind Paul’s rhetoric: ‘What is a manner of life worthy of the gospel?’ (Geoffrion 1993:17-21).

5.2 The proposition of Geoffrion

Geoffrion concurs generally with the rhetorical scheme of Watson, his own thesis being that the Letter was written as an exhortation to the community ‘to remain steadfast in their commitment to God, Christ, and the Gospel ministry and...to show them how to do so.’ To promote their Christian identity in terms of ‘heavenly citizenship’, Paul made use of political topos, terminology and concepts, drawing on their self consciousness as residents of a Roman colony. He also makes wide use of exemplification, ‘providing posi-
tive and negative, explicit and implicit, human examples of steadfastness'.

The proposition that Paul wishes to substantiate in the Letter, is stated in 1:27a: Μόνον ἀξίως τοῦ ευαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ πολιτεύεσθε. This is given specific content in the following phrases. 'Exercising their citizenship worthily of the Gospel is thus portrayed in steadfastness...' Στήκατε 'specifies the sense in which πολιτεύεσθε...is meant; συναθόντες and πτυρόμενοι are participles amplifying what is meant by στήκατε'. Instead of the regular three part syllogism or rhetorical epicheireme, a two part inverted enthymeme is used, stating first the conclusion (ἀξίως...πολιτεύομαι...στήκατε) and then the reason or premise 'because it has been given to you...to suffer...': Within the rhetorical scheme πολιτεύομαι (3:20: 'heavenly citizenship'; only in this Letter) is the hermeneutical key, whilst a political/military metaphor is evident in 1:27-30, 2:25 and 4:1-3. This metaphor depicts the nature of the Philippians' duty as Christian citizens in political terms familiar to them. Thus describing the Christian identity and defining its performance as 'worthy of the Gospel', Paul addresses 'all his various concerns about the Philippian community.' The concept of steadfastness is complex, meaning in different ways either not to retreat or to advance. Together with the accompanying political/military framework for the argument it should be understood 'as a broad, inclusive concept of citizens working together, working for each other, working for the advancement of the πολιτεύομαι (3:20), remaining true to their Lord, resisting aggression, and avoiding all those influences which would ultimately undermine any of these other values and priorities'.

Two important points are stressed by Geoffrion. The metaphor of citizenship is used in a spiritual way. 'Their government (πολιτεύομαι) and their Lord and Savior are in heaven (3:20; cf. 2:9), rather than in Rome; i.e., in a spiritual sense, their citizenship derives from heaven, just as their earthly citizenship, deriving from Philippi's status as a Roman colony, is tied to Rome.' Secondly, the metaphor primarily stresses co-citizenship: 'rather than describing the Philippians' existence in terms of a colony of heaven, Paul emphasizes their identity in terms of their relationship to their fellow citizens of heaven'. This concurs with the idea of κοινωνία in and on behalf of the gospel and provides the scope of the call to exercise their citizenship (πολιτεύομαι) worthily of the gospel (Geoffrion 1993:23-28).

5.3 Antecedents of the political/military images in Philippians

Geoffrion brings considerable classical evidence to bear on his interpretation. According to Aristotle (Rhet 1.4.1359b.19-23) two of the five most important topics in deliberative rhetoric are: 'war and peace' and 'defence of the country'. Since Pythagoras in the sixth century BCE, Greek and later Roman philosophers employed the common understanding of the faithful, patriotic
soldier to depict the religious and later the ethical life of the individual. Paul need not have taken over this *topos* of a *militia spiritualis* directly from these sources—he could simply have drawn on a commonly known metaphor, which meaningfully describes man’s relation to God and to his obligations in life. The *propositio* of Phlp 1:27-30 consists of an enthymeme which employs the *topos*: ‘derived from definition’, mentioned by Aristotle (*Rhet 2.23.1398a*). Paul thus assumed that the Philippians knew the ‘definition’ of exercising one’s citizenship in a worthy manner and he built his argument upon it. Several aspects of the Pauline images have their antecedents in classical literature. His call: Στήκετε! is reminiscent of Socrates’ commitment to God in terms of his duty as a soldier, not to desert his post: [μὴ] λύσουμεν τὴν τάξιν (Plato: *Ap 28D-E*). The works of Seneca, especially, are pervaded with military words and images and offer many parallels to Philippians. He wrote: ‘to live is to engage in military combat’ (*Ep 96.5*) and similarly Paul expected the Philippians to face opposition and suffering on behalf of Christ like soldiers who remain steadfast at their posts. ‘Further, as Epictetus espoused, Paul called the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord while they did so (3:1; 4:4), even as he did himself (1:18)’ (Geoffrion 1993:36-42).

Even the *Christ-hymn* can be viewed from this vantage point. According to Geoffrion: ‘Paul portrays Christ as the perfect model of one who humbled himself, accepted his destiny, so to speak, and carried out his duty in obedience (2:7-8).’ When the apostle resumes his exhortation after the hymn, he urges the Philippians to ‘bring about your own salvation with fear and trembling’ (2:12) and to ‘do everything without grumbling and disputing’ (2:14). Seneca also wrote: ‘it is a bad soldier who grumbles when following his commander’ (*Ep 107.9-10*). Later in the Letter, Paul offers himself as a model of these same values and virtues. In 4:11-12 he also emulates the Stoic value of self-sufficiency (*αὐτάρκης*), with the difference that he acknowledges God as the source of his mental resilience (4:13,19; Geoffrion 1993:41).

Whereas the elements of the primary theme of the Letter in 1:27: ἄξιος, πολιτεύεσθαι and εὐγέλιον are shown to have parallels in the political sphere (42-53), it is followed by ‘a vivid image of soldiers on the battlefield, which Paul employs to portray what he concretely expects of the Philippians as heavenly citizens’. ‘They have a duty arising from their political loyalties to Christ, which he summarizes as “stand firm” in spite of opposition and suffering’ (Geoffrion 1993:53-82).

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3 This is also relevant with regard to Paul’s deliberations about life and death. Socrates also preferred death, but, honouring the duty of steadfastness, regarded life and death as God’s decisions (Plato *Phaedr 62B*).
5.4 Subsidiary themes in the Letter

The need is recognised to demonstrate whether 'steadfastness' is indeed the dominant, unifying purpose to the rhetorical argument which satisfactorily integrates the other major components in the Letter, for example the call for unity, the Christ hymn, the concern over opponents and the 'thankless thanks' in chapter 4. Indeed it can be shown that these key themes are 'complementary to Paul’s primary goal of promoting steadfastness by virtue of their political character and focus on corporate identity and relationships...' (Geoffrion 1993:84).

5.4.1 As far as the notion of *koinōnia* is concerned, weaknesses are found in both its interpretation as a contractual relationship or *societas* (Sampley 1980) and as an expression of friendship (White 1990; Stowers 1991). Rather, based on the political reference to allies or partners, Paul uses the concept firstly to indicate their mutual relationship to God through Christ and the Gospel (1:5, 2:1) and secondly for their relationship to one another through their common mission to further the cause of Christ and the gospel (1:7, 4:14, 15). The rhetorical purpose of Paul with the *koinōnia*-group of expressions is modelled on the political motif of seeking the well-being of the state by strengthening the bonds between its citizens—with the addition of elements like the progress of the gospel and the glory of Christ. The many imperatives and the direct call to obedience in 2:12 are indicative of Paul’s status as ‘field commander’ and as intermediary of the supreme commander and Lord of the heavenly *τοιχίσμα* (Geoffrion 1993:92-104).

5.4.2 Geoffrion agrees that unity ranks as one of the two or three primary messages of the Letter but disputes the claim by, amongst others, Reicke (1962:xxix), Stagg (1980), Mengel (1982), Bruce (1983), Stanley (1984:137) and Garland (1985) that it should be regarded as the central concern (Geoffrion 1993:105 n 74). The unity theme should be regarded as subordinate to the political identity of the Philippians as Christian citizens, whilst it has been made inseparable from the appeal to steadfastness (:105f). It is pointed out that Paul indeed bypasses traits of disunity exhibited by rival preachers, regarding the preaching of the gospel in whatever way as more significant. Unity could be an *aid* to steadfastness, enabling the community better to 'defend and confirm the Gospel.' The appeal to unity is ultimately a matter of 'urging the Philippians to be steadfast together in their commitment to Christ and the Gospel' (:106-115). Even the appeal to Euodia and Syntyche to be of the same mind is framed by the general call to steadfastness 'in the Lord' (4:1) and the reference to their cooperation previously 'in the Gospel'
(4:3b). Paul thus presents unity 'as a very important aspect of standing firm in the faith, not as an end in itself' (Geoffrion 1993:115-117).

5.4.3 The recurring reference to joy likewise does not render it the chief message of Philippians. Rather, it is utilized as a motivation and means to steadfastness in the common identity as citizens of a heavenly πολιτεία, according to Geoffrion. He concurs with Mitchell's view (1991:162) that 'co-suffering' and 'co-rejoicing' are topoi within the political sphere which provide 'standard ancient definitions of political unity and solidarity', illustrated for example by Plato (Resp 5.462B). Joy is one of the characteristics of steadfastness in Paul's use of the concept of the militia spiritualis. However, he does not link it to a submission to fate, but grounds it in his Christian identity. His personal reasons for joy are always linked to either the acceptance of the Gospel or its advance, 'and thus to Christ as the source and purpose of his life'. Thus the triangle-type relationship between God and/or Christ, Paul and the Philippians is especially evident in the particular area of joy. The apostle even makes the completeness of his own joy dependent on the unity and steadfastness of the community (Phlp 2:2; Geoffrion 1993:120-121).

5.5 The rhetorical use of examples

In his third chapter Geoffrion examines the use made of the example of Paul, of Christ (notably in the hymn), of the co-workers Epaphroditus and Timothy and of other persons in the Letter, as well as negative examples. He concludes that the apostle addresses the threat from theological rivals by indicating the great contrast existing between those who believe in Christ and those who put their trust in something else. This polarization of the 'insiders' and the 'outsiders' with their respective fates works powerfully, rhetorically, to create a sense of reassurance for those who are remaining steadfast; simultaneously, it creates a sense of danger for those who might be wavering' (Geoffrion 1993:158).

5.6 Philippians, the letter form and ancient rhetoric

In his final chapter Geoffrion attempts a compositional analysis of the Letter with the insights gained from ancient epistolography and formal rhetoric by various authors, notably Watson (1988). The objective is an overview of the flow of the argument within its full content, to see more clearly how Paul has constructed his Letter to the Philippians 'to urge steadfastness to their corporate (political) identity as citizens of a heavenly πολιτεία bound to-
gether by and for Christ and the Gospel.' The structure he adopts for the Letter is as follows (Geoffrion 1993:160-161):

I Epistolary prescript (1:1&2)
II Exordium (1:3-26)
III Narratio (1:27-30)
IV Probatio (2:1—to 3:21)
  First development (2:1-11)
  Second development (2:12-18)
  Digressio (2:19-30)
  Third development (3:1-21)
V Peroratio (4:1-23)
  Repetitio, with pathos, (4:1-20)
  Epistolary closing (4:21-23).

The results of Geoffrion’s enquiry are cast into a threefold statement. In Philippians Paul firstly states the proposition in political and military terms focussing on steadfastness. He secondly emphasises corporate identity, relationships and examples to promote steadfastness. Thirdly, the structure of the Letter and argument confirm the coherence of the Letter and the priority of promoting steadfastness (1993:219-227).

5.7 Evaluation
Starting with the last passage, we note that, apart from the epistolary prescript (1:1-2) and closing (4:21-23), finer distinctions concerning the letter form is hardly a factor in the exposition, whilst ‘new rhetoric’ functions only very superficially. The identification of the various speech elements according to classical rhetoric serves mainly as demarcation of passages in the Letter, in which the theme is found recurrent in some form or the other.

Nevertheless, in a previous chapter Geoffrion has brought to bear a wealth of relevant illustrative material, contemporary to the Letter, indicating that comparative historical research is not to be discarded or neglected in spite of the ascendency of more refined text linguistic approaches. As a working hypothesis, the theme of steadfastness indeed illuminates many details of the Letter from a new angle. One may argue that the formal character of the propagated (military and political) type of resistance is overemphasised, with the neglect of the only occasionally mentioned christian content and context of the apostle’s exhortation. This is largely countered by the argument that the large body of Christian teaching is taken for granted and that only a specific contingency is addressed by this Letter. ‘Apparently, the community did not need to be (re-)taught about these things, but the members needed above all to be encouraged to stand firm in them and continue on submitting
to the work God began in them when they accepted the Gospel message’ (Geoffrion 1993:233-4).

6 CONCLUSION

The proliferation of hermeneutical tools has been accelerated in the last decade. The notion of a paradigm shift has proved to be helpful in discerning a pattern in the manifold approaches to the Letter to the Philippians. Of equal importance is the realization that ample scope exists for the co-existence and co-operation of different and even opposing methods. Schenk, for example, having made a significant contribution to the ‘structural’ type of exposition (1984), proves to be a competent participant in the historical critical debate on the Letter (1987). By the same token, Geoffrion (1993) still operates very much along comparative historical lines, since the rhetoric he ardently supports mostly reflects the ancient classical model. Aspan (1992) ventures furthest with a really new textlinguistic approach, but he realistically acknowledges that historical critical data and methodology remain a sine qua non in any hermeneutic enterprise.

This accommodating aspect of the postmodern stance can be fully subscribed to. The risk of subjectivity may be greater but need not lead to relativism. To contribute appreciably to the common understanding of the text, justice should be seen to be done to both the own point of departure and to the textual data, as is shown above with regard to all three comprehensive expositions by Schenk, Aspan and Geoffrion. In favour of the sophisticated linguistic and rhetorical tools, such as implemented by Aspan and Robuck (1987) is the fact that they are on the forefront of the ‘new paradigm’ in approaching the multivalent text pragmatics and holistic view of the Epistle.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

In 1988 I pursued the ambitious mission of collecting and describing as much as possible of the scholarly literature that had up till then been published on Paul’s ‘letter of joy’ (Pretorius 1989). The present endeavour has been considerably less pretentious, limiting the time span covered broadly to the past decade and the category of literature assessed to those of a monographic nature. Some of the new approaches are a little earlier and may already have been included in the previous review, but have subsequently proved to be vital witnesses of the changed direction in the quest for the scope of Philippians. The accompanying bibliography nevertheless aims at providing a representative overview of noteworthy contributions since our listing in 1989. The authors’ stance according to the ‘disciplinary matrix’ can be deduced more or less accurately from the wording of the titles.
Commentaries

Articles
Significant articles and essays on aspects of the Letter, more or less covering this period, can be rubricated in the following manner, merely as a guide to relevant aspects:

*Letter form*

*Literary aspects*

*Rhetoric*

*Integrity*

*Sociological aspects*

*Exposition of passages*
Ch 1-4: Löser 1992.
3:12: Greenlee 1990.
4:4-7: Mulholland 1990.
Although this thematic listing does not give the full picture of the respective methodological emphases, it can be gathered that, along with contributions of a rather 'traditional' nature, there is an increasing number of articles utilising insights gained through recent methodological developments. The impact of some of these contributions in the 'post historical critical' vein is already evident (e.g., Geoffrion 1993:160 n 1), such as those of Russell (1982), Swift (1984), Garland, (1985), Watson (1988), Alexander (1989), White (1990), Koperski (1992a) and Capper (1993), whilst that of Luter and Lee (1995) will no doubt also arouse some interest with its holistic linguistic approach.

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