Speaker, audience and situations: A modified interactional model

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ABSTRACT
In his paper ‘Toward an interactional model for the analysis of Letters’ (Neotestamentica 24, 1990), Johannes Vorster develops an interpretive model based on a synthesis of aspects of communication theory, speech act theory, conversational analysis and classical status theory. This paper offers a different perspective on the concept of the particular and universal audience, and develops a different synthesis in order to contribute to rhetorical criticism of the Letters and not just analysis.

Because of its emphasis on effectiveness, rhetoric came to be concerned with discourse in a situational context, and thus with interactional appropriateness. In fact the interactionally oriented types of text and discourse linguistics, studying speech acts, face, politeness, turn-taking, and the organization of discourse in terms of openings and closings, have increased the inventory of features of situational context that students of rhetoric and style are in need of. (Enkvist 1995: 25).

In an insightful and important paper published in Neotestamentica in 1990, Johannes Vorster of the University of South Africa takes the position that methods for analysing New Testament letters that focus primarily on structural features of the letters or describe meaning based on analysis of relationships between and among linguistic elements—vocabulary, syntax and narratological features—within a given letter fail to appreciate the function of a letter as (a) bridging the spatial separation between sender and receiver and, (b) maintaining one-half of a conversation. He devotes the paper to a description of what he calls an interactional model that is built out of a synthesis of aspects of communication theory, speech act theory, conversational analysis and classical status theory. He also makes use of ‘situational’ or ‘functional’ rhetoric as described in this country by Lloyd Bitzer, and argumentation theory described by Chaim Perelman.

Vorster’s interactional model bears only occasional resemblance to those typically used by New Testament rhetorical critics, and makes reference to theories not widely known by them. Most critical models do not consider...
the conversational and pragmatic function of a letter but instead excavate the text for information. Vorster's proposal is provocative, for it insists that New Testament scholars make use of pragmatic approaches to the analysis of the meaning of a letters, that they pay more attention to the performative aspects of language and describe the interaction of language with the contexts/situations in which it is used. He emphasises the need to ‘...take cognizance of the processes of the inventio-phase of rhetorical process’ (Vorster 1990:107).

In what follows I will give an overview of Vorster’s model, offer a different perspective from Vorster’s on the meaning and utility of Perelman’s concept of the particular and universal audience, and then offer a new synthesis, demonstrating how it gives New Testament scholars a rhetorical critical tool that allows for criticism of the letters and not just analysis.

For my purposes the first important point Vorster makes is, ‘Meaning does not reside...only in the relationships of linguistic elements to one another, but also and foremostly in the interaction of speech situation and linguistic elements’ (Vorster 1990:109). The communication process includes at least eight components: physical context and subject; intention of the speaker; social context; behavioral or cultural codes appropriate to the situation; linguistic codes; rhetorical code; selected genre; and the text itself. These components interact in the process and should not be understood as linear or static (Vorster 1990: 110). It should also be kept in mind that issues like the selection of genre for carrying the message and the elements of the structure of the message will be impacted in part by the dynamic produced by the interaction of these components.

Having described the components of the communications process, Vorster turns to a description of speech act theory, particularly as explained by J R Searle. For the purposes of the model his interest is in highlighting the nature of illocutionary acts, that component of a speech act that follows constitutive rules that determine the pragmatic effect of the act. According to Vorster, there are at least three problems with Searle’s concept of an illocutionary act. Searle himself had to modify it to account for acts in which the propositional meaning was more complex and/or metaphoric. Furthermore, it could not go beyond the sentence level. And, finally, it tends to treat language as regimented, bound to the sequential implementation of rules and has difficulty accounting for the dynamic, social nature of language.

Why, then, hold on to the claim for the importance of illocutionary acts? Because speech act theory takes seriously the interaction of speech and hearers in the creation of meaning. Communication is the product of the process of a ‘locution’ becoming illocutionary, which in turn results in a perlocutionary activity. Speech does more than convey information even with a single interlocutor; it is pragmatic, resulting in someone doing something.
Vorster argues that the way to get around the limitations of speech act theory is to supplement it by conversational analysis. That move results in, among other things, the ability of the critic to look beyond the sentence level to larger blocks of discourse.

Conversational analysis operates on three principles. The first, cooperation, lays the groundwork for four related categories: quality of information, quantity of information, relevancy of information and manner of conveyance of information. The second is the politeness principle; the third, irony. Each of these is implemented through related strategies. Politeness, for example, might be manifest through a sincerity strategy (Vorster 1990:116–117). Any analysis of a communication that identifies these principles makes evident a network of social relations in which meaning is determined in part by conventions and attitudes that are distinct from the linguistic code used by the speaker.

The fourth component in Vorster's model is a synthesis of situational rhetoric and argumentation theory as developed by Lloyd Bitzer and Chaim Perelman. Vorster focuses particularly on the concepts of the rhetorical situation and the universal audience. These are fairly well known to New Testament rhetorical critics, but Vorster attempts a kind of synthesis of them that is not usually found in studies that attempt to adapt them to rhetorical criticism of the New Testament.

Maintaining his focus on the pragmatic purposes of communication, he suggests that the 'complex of persons' identified by Bitzer as part of the rhetorical situation should be thought of as that of speaker, particular and universal audiences described by Perelman. He goes on to argue that the exigence represented by the rhetorical situation is 'concretized' in the quaestio of the situation, which in turn determines the 'status' of the situation (Vorster 1990:118). Therefore, he asserts, there is a very real need for New Testament rhetorical critics to make use of classical status theory in analysing the rhetorical situation of a letter. However, since status has to be inferred, critics should turn to both conversational and structural analysis to help in identifying it for any given letter (Vorster 1990:120). Finally, returning to a version of Perelman's theory of τότου, which Perelman prefers to call 'loci,' Vorster describes the functional nature of topics as, '...tactical aids...used in the rhetorical situation,' which create arguments and specify premises to be used in argumentation (Vorster 1990:124). Identification and analysis of topics help the critic identify '...need' of the situation' and gives the critic '...a glimpse into the social world of the letters.' (Vorster 1990:125). By the end of his description of 'argumentation and interaction,' Vorster has shown why rhetorical critics must:
...take cognizance of the processes involved in the inventio-phase of the rhetorical process, namely the determination of the 'need' of the rhetorical situation, the corresponding status, the roles of persons within the rhetorical situation as well as the identification of the topoi and their relationship to the status of the rhetorical situation, because these are all aspects pertaining to the persuasive force of a letter... (Vorster 1990:126).

Even this superficial overview should make it clear that Vorster is proposing something quite different from what is typically understood by rhetorical analysis, arguing that the goal of analysis is not finding the meaning of a text in describing information provided by it but in the process of understanding the inventional decisions that a speaker makes and how the rhetorical artifact, the text itself, may become persuasive for its audience.

Although I find Vorster’s proposals immensely attractive, I am leery of speech act theory and conversational analysis as tools for analysing epistolary discourse. It seems clear that Paul’s letters were designed to do more than maintain friendly contact and contribute to his half of ‘conversations’ held with his congregations. The particular audiences with which he was dealing were complex, in many cases containing faction; which had to be treated inventionally differently from one another. Vorster illustrates the outcomes of his analysis by using passages from Romans, but that might be the only text that could benefit from insights from speech act theory and conversational analysis. In that instance even the particular audience is a rhetorical creation! And, although I am sympathetic to his use of status theory and have used it myself in an analysis of Galatians, it is, after all, arcane, and an argument could be made that it was designed for use primarily in legal exigences. In fact, the classical doctrine of status may well illustrate a different theory of argumentation than that advocated by modern theoreticians like Perelman (Dieter 1950:360–369; Braet 1987:81–89). Thus I believe an interactional model can be less complex and even more pragmatic than Vorster describes.

It seems to me that Vorster’s model is sufficient if limited to the functional and pragmatic perspective provided by Bitzer’s rhetorical situation, as re-worked by him in an article that responded to criticism of his first description; and Perelman’s concept of ‘universal audience,’ as it emerged from discussions of its formulation in The new rhetoric and further clarified in responses Perelman makes to his critics and interpreters.

The concept of the rhetorical situation has been widely used by New Testament rhetorical critics, bordering on becoming a topos for the discipline! However, it is often the case that those incorporating it into their analytical models ignore the modifications Bitzer himself made to it in an article published in 1980.

In this article Bitzer makes it clear that the rhetorical situation is grounded in an historical event but denies that the discourse that emerges in
an effort to resolve the exigence is determined by the situation. The rhetorical situation must be understood interactionally. When the environment in which the exigence is encountered includes an audience ‘...capable of being constrained in thought or action in order to effect positive modification of the exigence,’ and a set of constraints, and when a speaker realises that discourse can provide the remedy for the exigence, then you have a rhetorical situation (Bitzer 1980:23).

An exigence, encountered in functional interaction with the environment, must be present in order to have a rhetorical situation. It is a, ‘...necessary condition of a rhetorical situation’ (Bitzer 1980:26). However, the understanding of the exigence and its importance for the audience is developed through the perceptions of the speaker and the audience. The presence of a speaker and a perceived exigence is not enough. Speaker and audience must agree that a factual condition exists in which they share a related interest (Bitzer 1980:29). ‘Communication of an exigence is possible to the extent that apprehension of factual conditions and the experience of interests can be shared.’ (Bitzer 1980:30). There are many exigences occurring in the ordinary course of events that can’t be modified by discourse even if there were a speaker interested in trying to do so. Bitzer makes it clear that the modification occurs because the audience becomes interested and takes action on the basis of an argument addressed to it. In clarifying the role of the audience in the process of argumentation, he also strengthened its role in that process (Smith & Lybarger 1996:202).

Just as audience and exigence are integral to the situation, so are the constraints. Bitzer describes a constraint as, ‘...persons, events, objects, relations, rules, principles, facts, laws, images, interests, emotions, arguments, and conventions’ (Bitzer 1980:23). Although he doesn’t use the term, clearly he regards constraints to be an integral part of the inventional process. ‘The rhetor’s central creative task is to discover and make use of proper constraints in his message in order that his response, in conjunction with other constraints in the situation, will influence the audience’ (Bitzer 1980:23–24).

It is important to maintain a clear distinction between an historical situation, or event, and the rhetorical situation, which may emerge as a pragmatic response to that event. The rhetorical situation is historically grounded and its constituents are ‘real,’ that is, the components of the situation can be examined by interested persons. However, the situation becomes rhetorical, not simply historical, when audience and speaker both perceive the exigence, that the interests of the speaker and audience are related, and that discourse can be pragmatic, in other words, that the audience is capable of modifying the exigence.

In an article entitled ‘Bitzer’s model reconstructed,’ Smith and Lybarger offer, for my purposes, two important modifications to Bitzer’s 1980 elabora-
tion of his model. In the first instance they make the observation that exigences are not always publicly observable because the perceptions of the audiences and the speaker can ‘...alter reality in complex ways’ (Smith & Lybarger 1996:210). That means that it is possible for a speaker to create an exigence! Furthermore, there is no ‘controlling’ exigence as Bitzer had claimed but in fact there may be multiple exigences (Patton 1979:40-42). This modification would seem to answer those who criticise Bitzer’s concept of the rhetorical situation as ‘deterministic,’ in need of placing more emphasis on the speaker as ‘actor’ in the situation (Benoit 1994:343-438).

That observation leads to the second modification. The model needs to be open not only to multiple exigences but also multiple audiences and multiple constraints. By doing this it can, to use my way of describing the process of argumentation, assess the trajectory of the argumentative situation to see if the speaker had reached what he or she presumed was a kind of stasis in one resolution of one exigence before moving to the next stage of argumentation. Said differently, the critic could assess when and where in the discourse the ‘fit’ of the response had to be adjusted.

The combination of Bitzer’s elaboration and Smith and Lybarger’s modifications makes the concept of the rhetorical situation both more pragmatic and more interactional than implied in its original formulation.

Bitzer does not provide an elaborate definition of audience. For him an audience is any group of persons who have experienced an exigence and are capable of and interested in modifying it. Additionally they are ‘real,’ existing in time and space, and identifiable to outside observers. In *The new rhetoric*, Perelman defines ‘audience’ as all those whom the speaker seeks to persuade (Perelman 1969:19). He shares Aristotle’s view of the function of the audience, for it is the audience who processes the argument, rendering judgment on its effectiveness. The audience is basic to the inventional process (Ray 1978:361, 365), and an essential component of the process of argumentation. Having said that, however, the speaker is the one who defines the audience (Perelman 1984:191).

Audiences are basically one of two types: particular and universal. A particular audience is, ‘...those appealed to upon the basis of their value system’ (Anderson 1972:41). This value system is based on the experience and the group affiliation of the audience, and the appeal made by the speaker will based be on his understanding of their beliefs and values. Because of his interest in arguing for the essential relationship between rhetoric and philosophy, Perelman does not devote a great deal of space to describing the particular audience. He does say that he understands Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* to be concerned with ‘...the means of persuading particular audiences’ (Perelman 1984:191).
The 'universal audience' is a creation of the mind of the speaker, his conception of an audience most reasonable and most competent with respect to the issues under discussion (Perelman 1979:48, 58). It is used by him as the final arbiter for values or truths that he believes are shared by both him and the particular audience. It is 'universal' in that it shares the universe of values common to the them, not in the sense of foundational or timeless. Because it transcends the particularity of the rhetorical situation, it can serve as a group to whom an appeal can be made for agreement in adherence to values advocated by the speaker. In other words, for Perelman the premises of an enthymeme are supplied not by the particular audience, nor by some kind of elite audience 'endowed with exceptional and infallible knowledge', but by a more competent audience, which has a more inclusive world view, asked to pass judgment on the truth of what the speaker is saying (Perelman 1967:35). Importantly, the speaker must be a member of the universal audience. Because the universal audience is final judge and arbiter of what the speaker is arguing, and because the speaker is a part of that audience, the argument itself cannot be manipulative (Perelman 1984:194). Were it to be so would be, among other things, self-deceptive!

Perhaps the most intriguing claim Perelman makes is that for the speech to be effective, the locus of argumentation must move from particular audience to universal audience. If the universal audience can be shown to support, or to have been convinced by, the propositions advocated by the speaker, or to share the values and beliefs of the speaker, and if the speaker can be shown to be a member of the both particular and universal audiences, then the particular audience, who lack the competence to render a reasonable judgment because of the parochial nature of their experiences, et cetera, must accept the propositions posed by the speaker or recognise that it shares the values of the speaker and, therefore, increase their adherence to his, and therefore by definition the universal audience's, beliefs or accept his resolution of the exigence they both face. In other words, the process of persuasion consists in adjusting and transforming the particularities of an audience into a universal dimension (Golden 1986:297; see also, Ray 1978:365-366).

One of the places where I take issue with Vorster's understanding of the universal audience is in his reference to them as, 'a group of rational people' (Vorster 1990:121). Perelman does not attribute 'rationality' to this audience. The universal audience is 'competent' or 'reasonable' (Perelman 1979:14-15). It is seen by both the speaker and the particular audience as capable of rendering judgment as to the effectiveness of the arguments that the speaker is making. To make them 'rational", however, implies the existence of an objective, propositional knowledge not characteristic of the situation of argumentation, not changed by the force of persuasion. In the face of objec-
tive knowledge, there is no need for a universal audience (Perelman 1979:119-121). Furthermore, Perelman is clear that, 'what is 'reasonable' varies in time and in space...' (Perelman 1984:193). Perelman may be classified as a neo-Aristotelean precisely because he recognises that speaker and audience don't reason together but interact in the creation of meaning, with the audience providing premises to complete the speaker's enthymeme. That the universal audience is competent to do that is Perelman's point!

There is one other point where I take minor exception to Vorster's use of Perelman's concept of audiences. He claims that the distinction between particular and universal audience in Perelman is '...of little relevance for the analysis of New Testament letters' (Vorster 1990:122). I find that claim curious given Vorster's interest in using the rhetorical situation as part of his model. It is the particular audience that experiences the exigence. It is the situation and the experience of the particular audience that defines the constraints faced by the speaker. In fact, it is the particular audience that is in many instances the object of persuasion. It may well be that a speaker can deal with issues that are specialised or need appeal to values and opinions relevant to a single occasion (Perelman 1979:47). In such a circumstance the speaker is involved in persuasion. However, it is also true that the speaker can conceive of the particular audience as embodying the universal audience and can move from persuasion to appeal to universal values that may then produce conviction (Perelman 1969:28-35). The distinction between the two audiences and the potential embodied in the particular audience are important in understanding the process of argumentation in Paul's letters.

There is an element in Perelman's understanding of the new rhetoric that Vorster does not make use of in his model. Given that Perelman understands argumentation to include adaptation to the audience, to induce a meeting of minds aimed at inducing action (Perelman 1982:9-13), then it is incumbent on the speaker carefully to select the order in which the arguments are presented. One of the conditions that influence that choice is the 'argumentative situation,' which Perelman defines as '...the influence of earlier stages of the discussion on argumentative possibilities open to the speaker' (Perelman 1969:491). Since Perelman understands argumentation to be a dynamic process consisting of interaction and adaptation, he also believes that in the process of argumentation an audience will increase their adherence to the values being appealed to by the speaker. As that adherence increases, the argumentative situation changes, and here is where Bitzer's functional perspective and Perelman's new rhetoric touch. Bitzer's notion of a 'fitting response' is grounded in the currency of the exigence and the interest of the audience. If the argumentative situation is modified by discourse, then to some degree the speaker has created a new exigence, which now has to be
addressed by a response that 'fits.' The audience, which would not have been competent to judge the claims of the speaker earlier, is now ready to consider them. These shifts in what I call the trajectory of the argumentative situation can be observed and analysed by the critic as a pragmatic outcome of the process of adaptation and interaction in the argument itself.

Therefore, I propose that an interactional model make use of the concepts of the rhetorical situation, the particular and universal audience, and the argumentative situation. It should analyse the invention strategy used by the speaker, including his or her awareness of the situation of the audience and the constraints—objective or subjective, social or linguistic—associated with that audience and how the speaker attempted to anticipate and then address shifts in the argumentative situation.

The question now comes, what would the product of such a model look like? Obviously a thorough-going analysis of any text is beyond the scope of this paper, but I can offer a kind of brief macro-analysis of 1 Thessalonians to illustrate a few possible outcomes.

I have argued elsewhere that there are multiple exigences implied in 1 Thessalonians (Hester 1996:266-270). These include not just Timothy's return from the church with a report of some kind, but also at least one created by Paul based on replies made by Timothy to questions Paul had about, among other things, the ability of the church to withstand persecution. Even though persecution and the death of one or more church members may have produced an exigence or sorts, those conditions in and of themselves are not exigences *per se*. How the church responded to them and whether or not Paul believed he could affect their response through discourse makes them an exigence.

Furthermore, Paul had to persuade them that their interests and his were related and that they should take action to deal with the exigences they faced. In order to do that effectively, however, he had to universalise their particular situation by appealing to values that may have been new to them or about which they had insufficient knowledge.

Finally, Paul had to change the perception of the exigences of persecution and, if it had occurred, the death of one or more of their number. The fact of persecution, the experience of affliction is one of the identifying marks of being a Christian. Death is an interim period in salvation history. Both are already resolved in the power of the Holy Spirit and the promise of the resurrection. The real exigences have to do with pragmatic expressions of Christian life. It is these that relate to the condition of holiness. The resolution of these exigences is found in the universal values rooted in Christian paideia.

I have described the epistolary framework of this letter (Hester 1996:275-276). A quick glance at the outlines of Thessalonians provided by Jewett
demonstrates that my description is, frankly, conventional (Jewett 1986:216-221)

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<th>Category</th>
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<tr>
<td>Opening greetings</td>
<td>1:1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thanksgiving</td>
<td>1:2-10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letter body</td>
<td>2:1-3:13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paraliturgical instructions</td>
<td>4:1-5:25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concluding remarks</td>
<td>5:26-28</td>
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I disagree with arguments made by Smith and Johanson to the effect that studies of epistolary forms have failed to make their case (e.g., Smith 1995:61-74; Johanson 1987:61-65). To accept their conclusions leaves the interpreter with the job of identifying the scope of the opening and closing greetings, with the remainder to be treated as 'speech.' That in turn leads to several consequences. In the first place it undervalues the importance of the letter genre itself and, therefore, underestimates the potential rhetorical effect of epistolary forms and topics. As Violi has pointed out, letters are not only components in an 'interactional exchange,' but they also contain deictic elements that are unique to the genre and create, among other things, 'an effect of immediacy' and 'simulated interaction' (Violi 1985:156, 161). Furthermore, it places the entire rhetorical process within the confines of the rhetorical artifact, the text of the letter, and draws attention away from the function of the letter as an act of persuasion, and the selection of the letter genre itself as one of the inventional choices that the 'speaker' made when deciding how to address an exigence (or exigences!). Finally, it can result, as it does in the case of Smith's analysis of 1 Thessalonians, in allowing the identification of the speech genre to lead to description of the exigence and speech topics. Again, a speaker's selection of genre depends on things like his or her understanding of audience and exigence. It is part of the inventional strategy and functions argumentatively. Looked at from the point of view of Bitzer's functionalist perspective, the conventions of Pauline epistolography reflect one of the constraints with which he had to deal (cf. Reed 1993:230-232).

Having said that, I reassert my contention that the opening greeting is complete in 1:1, and the thanksgiving period, which also represents the first argumentative unit, runs from 1:2 through 1:10. I do not think that use of

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1 I have deliberately chosen to use the designation 'argumentative unit' rather than 'rhetorical unit' because the latter has been given a specific definition by George Kennedy and is an integral part of his analytical method. I want to focus attention on the larger elements of the argument and their place in the trajectory of argumentation.

2 In the analysis of the letter that follows I will not comment on the variety of conclusions offered by scholars looking at issues like the purported length of the thanksgiving period, or the possibility of the insertion of 2:14-16 into the narrative, or the unusual nature of terms like 'brotherly love' or 'God-taught' found in 4:9, or any of the other exegetical difficulties encountered in the letter. My concern is with the
‘thanksgiving’ terminology later in the letter means that the period must therefore include all of chapters 2 and 3.) It is conventional to see the topics of faith, love and hope (1:3) as those that will be elaborated in the body of the letter. On the other hand, it should be noted that the act of giving thanks (1:2) is amplified by three participles: ‘making remembrance’ or ‘mentioning’ (1:2), ‘remembering’ (1:3) and ‘knowing’ (1:4). These can be seen as three separate activities, each of which is also elaborated upon in the letter.

The reference to Paul’s prayers in 1:2, is repeated 3:10, and exhortation to prayer in 5:18 and 5:25. The trajectory of object of prayer runs from Paul mentioning the Thessalonians to their need to pray for Paul and his companions.

There is no obvious reason to assume that the activity of ‘praying’ and that of ‘remembering’ are the same. In fact, the topics of memory—love, faith, and hope—are elaborated later as pragmatic expressions of the values associated with being among the elect of God. Prayer is an activity in its own right.

The topos of knowing informs verses 4 through 10. Some translators choose to begin a new sentence at verse 4, but the word beginning the verse is a participle, εἰδότες, refers to Paul and his companions, and is clearly related to the activity of thanksgiving that they describe (Bruce 1986:13). The ground of this knowing is Paul’s belief that God has chosen the Thessalonians. The proof of that conviction was their manner of receiving the word and their imitation of Paul, his companions and the Lord. These behaviours in turn illustrate the ‘work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope’ attributed to the Thessalonian Christians in verse 3. By the end of this rhetorical unit the particular work and faith of that church has been described and the topics that will be discussed in units two through four highlighted.

It is interesting to note that the topics of persecution, affliction, and/or opposition to the Gospel do not appear in the thanksgiving period. In other words, Paul doesn’t give thanks that the Thessalonians have toughed it out while he has been gone. He gives thanks for the fact that they have successfully imitated Paul, his companions, and even the Lord! Furthermore, as trite as it might sound, we must remember that he was writing these words of thanksgiving having heard Timothy’s report. It suggests that he was convinced that they were attempting to do what they believed should be done as Christians. The fact that he wrote implies that he also believed that they didn’t have enough information to handle the vagaries of daily living, a point trajectory of the argumentation and what analysis of it may offer.
re-enforced by his expressed desire to return in order to continue his teaching among them (3:10).

What does this suggest as to the exigence for writing the letter? Again, it is common to point out that it would appear from comments Paul makes that the Thessalonians has suffered persecution at the hands of their countrymen and that that persecution might well have resulted in the death of one or more of their number. It would seem that Paul’s teaching on the Resurrection had not been comprehensive. In any case, even if the affliction visited on them wasn’t so severe as to cause death, it could still be argued that one or more members of the congregation had died and that, combined with the effects of persecution on their daily lives, had left some of them with a feeling of hopelessness. The implied exigences of persecution and its effects lead for some to the proposal that 1 Thessalonians is a letter of consolation.

The idea that a rhetorical situation can have more than one exigence opens up the possibility that the judgment that a single ‘controlling’ genre must be used to resolve that exigence is problematic. Furthermore, the concept of a dynamic argumentative situation also contributes to the difficulty of establishing such a genre. Add to that, in the case of 1 Thessalonians, the clear identification of two particular audiences, the initial recipients and those to whom those recipients are to read the letter, and we are faced with the fact that the question of genre has to be left open. The letter probably functioned as exhortatory to some and consolatory to others. Olbricht is correct, appeals to classic speech genre, and for that matter to letter types as in the case of Smith’s analysis, need to be re-thought! (Olbricht 1990:224-225).

Can one make the case that there is a ‘controlling’ exigence that shapes the argument in 1 Thessalonians? While I am not sure I would call it a ‘controlling’ exigence, I would argue that Paul’s concern for enhancing the content of mimetic behavior is the argumentative goal of the letter. The reason for these enhancements has to do with his eschatological vision of the fate of this congregation. They are in the period of waiting for the Son, Jesus, whose role in the economy of salvation is to rescue ‘us’ from the ‘wrath’ to come. That theme is re-iterated in 2:12b, 2:19, 3:13, 4:13, and 5:9 directly, and underlies virtually all the argument of the letter.

The argument in the first argumentative unit prefigures elements of the arguments in the following units.

Unit two: Chapter 2:1-3:13
Unit three: Chapter 4:1-5:10
Unit four: Chapter 5:11-5:25

These are fairly standard divisions, but I am not suggesting that they occur as a result of the presence of a disclosure formula in 2:1, or a shift from the ‘body’ of the letter, signaled by the ‘apostolic parousia’ in 3:11-13, to the
'paranetic' instructions in 4:1-5:22. In fact I see the use of a so-called 'body opening' formula at 2:1, αὐτοὶ γὰρ οἴδατε, and the terms, λοιπὸν and διό, at 4:1 and 5:11, as shifts in the argumentative trajectory occasioned by Paul's sense that his audience was ready for a new development in the argument he was making. The presence of διό at 3:1, also signals a development in the argument, but not in the overall argumentative situation as is true at 4:1 and 5:11.

Unit two has as its purpose, on the one hand, the review of the character of Paul and his companion's ministry while in Thessalonica and of the character of the Thessalonian Christians themselves as they interacted with the missionaries and dealt with the exigence of separation. It is an amplification of the topics of 'work of faith' and 'labor of love.' The unit also provides new information about Paul's character by reviewing his behavior after he was separated from them and found it impossible to visit them. This information enhances their understanding of the values of works of faith and labors of love by illustrating the fact that these values operate wherever Christians are and whatever their circumstance.

It is not necessary to posit for this unit an exigence of opposition to Paul coming from within the church or from a group of opponents. He is addressing the nature and content of Christian mimetic behavior. His earlier references to the Lord has established the universal audience in whom Christian values are found. Paul is reminding the Thessalonians that he has enacted those values in their midst and that in fact, in so far as they have known them, so have they. The Thessalonians need to overcome any impediments occasioned by their recent particular experience by remembering that they are a 'type' of what it means to be Christian.

Note the predominance of the pronominal 'you' throughout the first part of this unit. Even Paul's ministry is confirmed by what the Thessalonians 'know' of his work and how they responded to it.

In 2:13 and 14, the reference to thanksgiving has the rhetorical force of confirming the election of the Thessalonians. It also gives Paul the opportunity to inform them of the fact that they were imitators of the communities of faith in Judea. This information extends the model of imitation from those whom the Thessalonians knew to those they might only have heard about. Argumentatively it contributes to the shift from persuasion to conviction because it moves awareness of the audience from their particular experience and localised values to a more universal plane. Persecution with its attendant consequences is one of the universal constraints Christians face. The Thessalonians are not alone in their experience!

The vituperation which follows in 2:14-16, not only compares the behavior of their countrymen to the 'Jews,' thus also contributing to the move
from particularization to universalization, but, by referring to 'wrath,' strengthens the boundaries between 'outsiders' who rejected the model they were to imitate and those who received it with joy. Imitation has a pragmatic outcome evident both in their experience and in Paul's eschatological vision, already mentioned in 1:10. Outsiders kill the Lord and the prophets and those who imitate them. Insiders nurture one another. Outsiders are subject to God's wrath; insiders are the very stuff of glory and joy (cf deSilva 1996:66-67, 71-73).

In the second part of the unit the predominant pronominal reference changes. At 3:1, the focus shifts to Paul and his companions, 'we'! The Thessalonians could not have known of Paul's distress and of his worry that he hadn't been able both to teach and model behavior that would sustain them in his absence. They needed to know that those they were imitating not only remembered them but also were so concerned about potential trouble that their leader dispatched one of their number to ascertain how they were doing. This action was taken because Paul himself was repeatedly prevented from coming to them by the ultimate outsider, Satan. Even with the shift in focus, however, the Thessalonians are credited with being the source of Paul's joy. 'We' becomes defined by 'you.' This remains true even when Paul tells them that he hopes to return to them in order to 'address the things that are lacking in your faith' (3:10, my translation).

Rhetorically there may be something else going on here. Paul's situation of separation and potential return function mimetically as a reminder of Jesus absence and imminent return. In the course of salvation history Paul's ministry imitates that of Jesus' even in this regard. This has the pragmatic effect of keeping attention focused on Paul as the source of Christian paideia. It also identifies Paul as the bridge between them as a particular audience and Paul, God, the Lord as the universal audience. This relationship is highlighted in the 'benedictory' prayer, which also functions as a kind of 'travelogue,' in 3:11-13. Paul's abundant love for the Thessalonians is the type of the kind of love they should have for one another, the universal love given by the Lord. Practicing it prepares them for the parousia. Elaboration of how it is to be further practiced comes in unit three.

Throughout unit two the objective constraints of facts, events, persons and relations have had to be taken into account within the argumentative strategy. They guide the elaboration of the topos of 'remembering'.

It is typical to translate λοιπῶν in 4:1 as 'finally' or something like 'For the rest...' (Bruce 1982:77). I want to take the sense of 'addition' suggested by its semantic domain (Louw & Nida 1988(1):777) to argue that Paul is building on the argument laid down in the first two chapters, adding in the third argumentative unit not just what they need to know to make up his percep-
tion of deficiencies in their faith but also helping them more fully to understand the pragmatic expectations of their election. He had demonstrated that he provided instruction and example while he was with them, and then more fully informed them of his commitment to them. He has assured them that they have once more proven to be a source of joy and comfort to him. Now there are additional things they need to know if their imitation of the ‘universal audience’ is to be fully realised. The ground has been laid to shift the trajectory of the argumentative situation.

In unit three there seem to be three points: you know what to do, but you need to do more of the same (4:1–12); you don’t have the information you need, so here it is (4:13–18); and, you have the information, but it needs elaboration (5:1–10). In the first two the source of authority for the teaching is God, the Holy Spirit and the Lord. In the third the source is the paideia that Paul has already provided. Throughout all of them, however, the pragmatic goal is preparedness. Sanctification and holiness are the will of God (4:3); failure to enact holiness in everyday life identifies you with the outsiders and results in being the object of God’s wrath (4:6). Practical expression of love for all members of the faithful community contributes to independence from outsiders (4:12). Those outsiders are without hope and will not participate in the resurrection. Although the time of the resurrection cannot be known, Christians must be prepared for it. Finally, the pragmatic activities of love, faith and hope become the armor of God that protects Christians from the coming wrath (5:8).

Throughout unit three the objective and subjective constraints of conventions, rules, principles, images and emotions are evident. They guide the elaboration of the topos of ‘learning.’

The identification of the next point in the shift of the argumentative situation is where I break with convention. I take the διο in 5:11 to introduce the final unit, 5:11–25. Said differently, διο doesn’t conclude the previous unit but introduces a list of exhortations based on the arguments made to this point and designed to give practical force to them. Note that, again, the dominant pronominal word is ‘you.’ However, by this point in the argument ‘encouragement’ and ‘education’ are derived from and convey values associated with the fact that the children of light are with the risen Lord. The Thessalonians are now competent to judge their own situation. Working with their leaders, they can act pragmatically out of the value system found in their Christian education. And, if they will do this, they will be ἀδικαληρον and ἀμέμπτωτος at the parousia. The particularity of their situation has been universalised. The exigences of persecution and its attendant consequences, of separation from their founding leader, of uncertainty as to the scope, or even the nature of mimetic behavior are resolved in the conviction that the insiders will triumph in the end.
The exhortation to 'encourage' and 'educate' one another should be understood within the context of the appeal to respect the leadership of the church. In other words, the Thessalonians should relate to their leaders in the same way they did to Paul when he was among them. He gave them encouragement and education and guided them in how to relate to one another. Again at the end of this section we find a reference to the parousia. As in 1:10 and 3:13, it follows reference to pragmatic activity associated with universal values, or at least values held by the universal audience of insiders who imitate Paul, the saints, and the Lord.

Throughout this unit the subjective constraints of interests, emotions and arguments are evident. They guide the elaboration of the topos of 'becoming.'

Chapter 5:27 contains an instruction that raises the question to just who the initial particular audience was. The address is clear enough; the letter was sent to the 'church' in Thessalonica. The injunction may well be simply to make sure that all members of the church hear the letter. I find it difficult to try to create a set of categories by which to classify sub-groups in the church based on a close reading of 5:14, thus understanding the command to mean that the recipients were to make sure the 'idlers', etc., heard the letter (contra Bruce 1982:135). On the other hand, given the fact that topics in the list of exhortations mirror those found in the first and second units, it could be that Paul has in mind the reading of this letter to the 'brothers' in the surrounding territory of Macedonia. The rhetorical force of this instruction then becomes an injunction to strengthen their mimetic behavior and their function as role model based on their new understanding of what it means to live like a Christian. If they do that, it would become clear that the particularities of their situation are largely irrelevant and that they can face the world armed with a more nuanced and important value system, one that results in their holiness and protection against the coming wrath. They become the universal audience for those who hear the letter in their particular situation.

In a forthcoming essay Vernon Robbins makes the very important observation that:

In 1 Thessalonians, the new vehicle for Christian hermeneutical rhetoric appears in 1:2-3 where Paul gives thanks to God for the Thessalonians' "work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." The subject matter here is not anything Jesus said or did but what members of a community with whom Paul associates himself are doing.

He goes on to say that Paul maintains the 'centrality of the Thessalonians as the vehicle for his hermeneutical rhetoric' because that rhetoric 'places all who associate with Paul in a primary, direct position of authority.'
I have tried to suggest above that Paul’s overall argumentative goal is to accomplish the same effect by relating the experience of the Thessalonians not to the words and works of Jesus (Robbins’s point), but to Christian paideia which moves the attention of the believer from personal experience to pragmatic future. As Robbins points out, whatever divine action was taken in the past serves as background. Mimetic behaviour based on those actions has now to be shaped by new models, which, because of their inclusion in the ‘universal audience’, can include the Thessalonians. The new communities of faith, directed by the new eschatological paideia, have the authority to preach, teach and enact the Gospel in the hope that they will stand blameless before God at the end of time. Past is clearly just prologue.

Golden, in assessing the impact of the concept of the universal audience on rhetorical criticism, formulates a series of claims. One of them he puts this way:

The notion of the universal audience encourages the development of a rhetorical criticism model that features the significance of an artistic standard of evaluation which gives priority to universal values rather than to the criterion of effectiveness (Golden 1986:292).

Another way of understanding Golden’s point is to agree with Vorster that it is time to move beyond the examination of early Christian texts for the information they provide or for the meaning of what he calls a ‘linguistic entity’ (Vorster 1990:108). Questions which focus critical examination on identifying the historical background of rhetorical forms and structures, or social, political and culture concepts within early Christian texts have to be re-formulated to help the critic describe the appropriateness, relevance, or responsibleness of an argument (Golden 1986:294).

I have tried to show that the process of re-formulation can be aided by heeding Vorster’s call to be aware of the inventio-phase of the construction of Paul’s epistolary discourse, but in my view by trying to determine the complexity of the rhetorical situation, the potential for multiple exigences and the variety of constraints that the ‘speaker’ had to keep in mind while formulating a persuasive and, ultimately, a convincing argument. The rhetorical critic must also try to maintain the distinction between the universal audience and the particular audience and how the ‘speaker’ structures appeal to the one in order to convince the other. Although markers in the structure of those appeals may be found in the use of epistolary forms and formulae, understanding of the trajectory of the argumentative situation throughout the whole of the discourse is an important element in the analysis of how the speaker sought to lead the particular audience from local to universal values. Finally, genre criticism can be useful in understanding one set of constraints within which the speaker elected to work, but it is important to understand
that selection of genre is itself an inventional choice and has to be set into the context of the interaction between and among speaker, audience and situation.

APPENDIX

Universal audience chart

Nature and goals
- Topical and functional
- Generation of knowledge

Leading advocates
- Aristotle
- Thomas Aquinas
- Immanuel Kant
- Chaim Perelman

The end of discourse it promotes
- To convince

Subject matter that is emphasised
- Universals

Level of reliability
- Probability
- Informed Opinions

Types of proofs that are to be utilised
- Logical, common sense appeals that are universally accepted
- Emotional appeals that are consistent with and that reinforce logical appeals

Nature and qualifications of audience members
- Lover of universals
- Knowledgeable of subject matter under discussion
- Ability and willingness to engage in reflective thinking

Historical context in which the arguments are to be evaluated
- Present situation or cultural milieu

Criteria for evaluating the worth of the arguments
- Appropriateness
- Generalisability
- Relevance
- Responsibleness

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(Taken from Golden 1986:294).
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