

## A PEG TO HANG 1 THESSALONIANS ON? NATURE AND FUNCTION OF 1 THESS 1,9-10

“A kind of peg on which to hang the substance of Paul’s teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4–5”<sup>1</sup>. That was the definition Morna Hooker gave to 1 Thess 1,9-10 in an excellent essay. Ever since Adolph Harnack considered the same passage as containing the core of the mission or preaching to the Gentiles<sup>2</sup>, the statement in 1 Thess 1,9-10 witnessed two contrasting developments. On the one hand, there are those who consider the passage as a pre-Pauline fragment<sup>3</sup>; on the other, there are others who defend its Pauline authorship<sup>4</sup>.

Following the developments in ancient epistolography and the advent of rhetorical criticism, the same passage was understood as part of the introductory thanksgiving section in 1 Thess 1,2-10. According to epistolary form and structure, the prescript (1 Thess 1,1) is followed by the *proskynema* section (1,2-10). However, this section is not limited to thanking God, as would typically be the case with an epistolary situation; it also introduces themes that will be developed later in the letter (1 Thess 2,1 – 5,11).

With a view to maintaining epistolary form and structure, the letter ends with the conclusive epistolary exhortation (1 Thess 5,12-24) and the postscript (1 Thess 5,25-28). These latter sections are not constituent elements of a rhetorical *dispositio*, but are, rather, part of the epistolary outline. Therefore, what is the true nature and function of 1 Thess 1,9-10? Does it merely serve to inform what other believers (1 Thess 1,7-8) say about Paul and the Thessalonians or does it introduce themes to be developed as the letter progresses? What is really at stake in 1 Thessalonians? Is the purpose of the epistle to console those to whom the letter is addressed regarding

<sup>1</sup> M.D. HOOKER, “1 Thessalonians 1.9-10: A Nutshell – but what kind of Nut?”, *Geschichte – Tradition – Reflexion*, Band III, Frühes Christentum. FS Martin Hengel (eds. H. CANKIC – H. LICHTENBERGER – P. SCHÄFER) (Tübingen 1996) 435-448, here 435.

<sup>2</sup> A. HARNACK, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (New York – London 1908) I, 89.

<sup>3</sup> G. FRIEDRICH, “Ein Tauflied hellenistischer Judenchristen (1. Thess. 1,9f.)”, *TZ* 21 (1965) 502-516; C. BUSSMANN, *Themen der paulinischen Missionpredigt auf dem Hintergrund der spätjüdisch-hellenistischen Missionliteratur* (EHS.T 3; Bern – Frankfurt a.M. 1975); D. LUCKENSMAYER, *The Eschatology of First Thessalonians* (NTOA 71; Göttingen 2009) 112-123.

<sup>4</sup> J. MUNCK, “1 Thess. 1.9-10 and the Missionary Preaching of Paul. Textual Exegesis and Hermeneutic Reflexions”, *NTS* 9 (1963) 95-110; HOOKER, “1 Thessalonians 1.9-10: A Nutshell”.

the sudden death of some of them in the period between the initial evangelisation and the time the letter was being written, as most scholars believe? And why does Paul not mention this in the letter?

We intend to focus on the rhetorical nature and function of 1 Thess 1,9-10. But before we tackle the issue, we would like to draw attention to the characteristic features of a *propositio*, or thesis, in ancient rhetoric and in the Pauline letters.

### I. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE *PROPOSITIO*

Hans Dieter Betz and George A. Kennedy have pointed out, among other things, the importance of a thesis or introductory *propositio* in the rhetorical *dispositio* both in general and in the letters of Paul in particular <sup>5</sup>. We credit J.-N. Aletti for having outlined the peculiarities of a general and secondary *propositio* in the Pauline letters <sup>6</sup>. By examining treatises on ancient rhetoric and the specific features of the thesis in Paul's letters, Aletti explained well the characteristic features of a *propositio*. To be so, a thesis must be brief, complete, concise and capable of engendering the successive parts of a letter. As a consequence, a thesis does not exceed one or two verses. In his *On Invention* 1,22,32, Cicero described the elements of a *propositio* as follow:

The form of partition which contains a methodical statement of topics to be discussed ought to have the following qualities: brevity, completeness, conciseness. Brevity is secured when no word is used unless necessary. It is useful in this place because the attention of the auditor should be attracted by the facts and topics of the case, and not by extraneous embellishments of style. Completeness is the quality by which we embrace in the partition all forms of argument which apply to the case, and about which we ought to speak, taking care that no useful argument be omitted or be introduced late as an addition to the plan of the speech, for this is faulty and unseemly in the highest degree. Conciseness in the partition is secured if only *genera* of things are given and they are not confused and mixed with their *species* <sup>7</sup>.

As ancient treatises of rhetoric do not conform to our manuals, they must be relied on for a deeper understanding of the rhetorical strategy behind

<sup>5</sup> H.D. BETZ, "The Literary Composition and Function of Paul's Letter to the Galatians", *NTS* 21 (1975) 353-379; G.A. KENNEDY, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC – London 1984).

<sup>6</sup> J.-N. ALETTI, "La présence d'un modèle rhétorique en Romains. Son rôle et son importance", *Bib* 71 (1990) 1-24; IDEM, "La *dispositio* rhétorique dans les épîtres pauliniennes", *NTS* 38 (1992) 385-401.

<sup>7</sup> CICERO, *De inventione* (tr. H.M. HUBBEL) (LCL 386; Cambridge, MA – London 1974) 65.

Paul's letters. The extensive examples provided in these treatises of the most successful speeches show that they were conceived as rhetorical criticism of past speeches and not as manuals or handbooks for would-be orators. For this reason, ancient treatises — from Aristotle to Plutarch — are more useful for modern interpreters than they were for the orators of antiquity.

Just as crucial is to understand in Paul's case the difference between the matter at hand in the letter and the rhetorical strategy. Contrary to those who place the epistolary situation and rhetorical strategy on an equal footing, we believe that it is the epistolary situation alone that generates the rhetorical strategy and not the other way around<sup>8</sup>. When this distinction is unclear, it is easy to confuse a prescript with an exordium or, even worse, an epistolary exhortation and a postscript with a *peroratio*<sup>9</sup>. As for the nature and function of a *propositio* in ancient rhetoric, it is essential to point out some essential features<sup>10</sup>. Quintilian warned that a *propositio* does not occur in all places in a *dispositio*, but only when it is necessary:

These *propositiones* can be multiplied at pleasure, but it is sufficient to give an indication of my meaning. If *propositiones* are put forward singly with the proofs appended, they will form several distinct propositions: if they are combined, they fall under the head of partition (*Institutes of Oratory* 4,4,7)<sup>11</sup>.

Furthermore, we should not single out a *propositio* when the proofs have already been rolled out or, worse, when they have been all but appended. It would be like making them useless or even counterproductive, giving the impression of having lost the thread. Finally, a thesis does not necessarily come after a *narratio*, but such a sequence occurs only in court debate where a *propositio* serves to link the *narratio* to the charges that are being brought before the court and to the subsequent presentation of evidence.

Therefore, we do not need to multiply *propositiones*. All that is required is to select the one that strengthens the persuasive function of the speech or letter. Nor should we consider the *propositio* as the turn of phrase that pleases us most. We will now investigate the principal *propositiones* provided in Thessalonians in the light of these criteria.

<sup>8</sup> Pace KENNEDY, *New Testament Interpretation*, 34-35.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., R. JEWETT, *The Thessalonian Correspondence. Pauline Rhetoric and Millenarian Piety* (Philadelphia, PA 1986) 72-76, who defines 1 Thess 5,23-28 as *peroratio*, although vv. 25-28 belong to the postscript.

<sup>10</sup> A. PITTA, "Form and Content of the *Propositio* in Pauline Letters: the case of Rom 5.1-8.39", *RB* 122 (2015) 575-591.

<sup>11</sup> QUINTILIAN, *Institutes of Oratory* (tr. H.E. BUTLER) (LCL 125-127; Cambridge, MA - London 2002) II, 135.

## II. WHICH *PROPOSITIO* FOR 1 THESSALONIANS?

It was probably George A. Kennedy who first pointed to 1 Thess 4,1 as the letter's principal thesis<sup>12</sup>. The scholar highlighted "to please God" as one of the principal *topoi* of the letter. But we will return to this point later. Kennedy confirmed the general bipartition of the letter which roughly distinguishes 1 Thess 1,1 – 3,13 from 4,1 – 5,28. However, we feel that his theory is untenable, for the *propositio* would then be pushed too far ahead, contradicting the most elementary of rhetorical rules. The deictic formula (Λοιπὸν οὖν, ἀδελφοί, ἐρωτῶμεν ὑμᾶς ... in 1 Thess 4,1) shows that Paul is moving towards the second part of the letter. Among other things, it should be observed that 1 Thess 4,1 makes no allusion to Christ's Parousia which takes center stage in 4,13 – 5,11.

By shifting the "statement" of the letter to 1 Thess 1,4-10, Thomas H. Olbright's approach was different<sup>13</sup>. Adopting the language of Aristotelian rhetoric, Olbright opted to render the term πρόθεσις with "statement" which, nevertheless, corresponds to the Latin *propositio*. Thus, after the prescript (1 Thess 1,1) and the exordium (1,2-3), the thesis (1,4-10) follows. The hypothesis has the advantage of identifying the thesis in the beginning of the letter.

Nevertheless, we remark that there is an imbalance between the exordium, which occupies only two lines, and the prothesis, which extends for six verses, when it should be the contrary. We have seen that in ancient rhetoric generally and also in Paul's letters, a thesis or prothesis occupies one or two statements only. Moreover, the prothesis in 1 Thess 1,4-10 would include the *captatio benevolentiae* (vv. 4-8) which, instead, is a characteristic feature of an exordium. To include the words of praise in the general thesis suggests that the speaker needs the consent of the listeners to prove the thesis. Nothing could be more counterproductive!

Francis W. Hughes shifted the focus to 1 Thess 3,11-13, qualifying it as the letter's *partitio*, i.e. the section where what follows in the letter ought to be outlined in detail<sup>14</sup>. Hughes highlighted two of the principal vectors of 1 Thessalonians: the mimesis paraphrase (καθάπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς ὑμᾶς, v. 12) between Paul and the Thessalonians, and Christ's Parousia. However, the objection made against Kennedy also applies to

<sup>12</sup> KENNEDY, *New Testament Interpretation*, 143.

<sup>13</sup> T.H. OLBRIGHT, "An Aristotelian Rhetorical Analysis of 1 Thessalonians", *Greeks, Romans, and Christians*. FS Abraham J. Malherbe (eds. D.L. BALCH – E. FERGUSON – W.A. MEEKS) (Minneapolis, MN 1990) 216-230, here 235.

<sup>14</sup> F.W. HUGHES, "The Rhetoric of 1 Thessalonians", *The Thessalonian Correspondence* (ed. R.F. COLLINS) (BETL 87; Leuven 1990) 94-116.

this hypothesis. If the *partitio* occurred in the middle of the discourse, what then of 1 Thess 1,2 – 3,10? In that case the apologetic arrangement would be respected: *narratio* (1 Thess 2,1 – 3,10) would be replaced by the *partitio* (3,11-13) and *probatio* (4,1 – 5,3). At a closer look, though, 1 Thess 3,11-13 features characteristics that belong more to a final prayer with regard to the previous part, rather than the section that introduces what is ahead. Therefore, 1 Thess 3,11-13 looks more like a *transitio* than a general *partitio* <sup>15</sup>.

In the same volume edited by Raymond F. Collins, Wilhelm Wuellner proposed a different arrangement for 1 Thessalonians. Applying the model of the paradoxical encomium, Wuellner considered 1 Thess 1,3 as the *partitio* and 1,9-10 as the *propositio* <sup>16</sup>. Apart from the confusion between the *partitio* and the eulogistic enumeration of the three virtues in 1 Thess 1,3, Wuellner's intuition was not demonstrated. The author did not explain the relationship between the *partitio* (1 Thess 1,3) and *propositio* (1,9-10). What distinguishes one from the other? And from the point of view of content, was Paul focusing more on the three virtues rather than on the relationship with the addressees in view of Christ's Parousia?

Abraham Smith's conjecture was more elaborate. The author earmarked 1 Thess 2,13-16 as the *partitio* for 2,17 – 3,13 and 3,9-13 as *partitio* for 4,1 – 5,22 <sup>17</sup>. The sweep of these *partitiones* were not only too broad, but they did not introduce the successive parts as should be the case with a rhetorical *partitio*, which ought to be more detailed than a general *propositio*.

We close this overview with Colin R. Nicholl's hypothesis. The author suggested the resurrection, mentioned in 1 Thess 1,10b, as the anticipation for 4,13-18, and the redemption from anger in 1,10c as the anticipation for 1 Thess 5,1-11 <sup>18</sup>. Nicholl put forward an interesting parallel between 1 Thess 1,10 and Rom 1,16-17:

We therefore propose that verse 10b and c do indeed function to anticipate 4,13-18 and 5,1-11 respectively, much as Rom. 1,16-17 anticipate the main argument of Romans (cf. Aristotle, *Rhet.* 3.14.1), and that they accord with our situational readings of those eschatological sections.

<sup>15</sup> C.A. WANAMAKER, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians. A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI 1990) 49.

<sup>16</sup> W. WUELLNER, "The Argumentative Structure of 1 Thessalonians as Paradoxical Encomium", *The Thessalonians Correspondence*, 117-136.

<sup>17</sup> A. SMITH, *Comfort one another. Reconstructing the Rhetoric and Audience of 1 Thessalonians* (Louisville, KY 1995) 67.

<sup>18</sup> C.R. NICHOLL, *From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica. Situating 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (SNTS MS 126; Cambridge 2004) 82.

While Nicholl recognized the role of 1 Thess 1,10 as a *propositio*, he limited its function to 4,13 – 5,11. Possibly 1 Thess 1,9-10 could play a decisive role for the letter as a whole and not only for part of it.

The interpretations of the principal thesis of 1 Thessalonians outlined above bring to the surface a symptomatic fact: none of the authors cited explained the criteria that led them to choose one *propositio* over another. It was for this reason that some scholars, like R. Jewett, did not suggest a theory for 1 Thessalonians<sup>19</sup>. The letter is so multifaceted that it appeared more helpful to highlight its epistolary structure without conjecturing too many *propositiones*.

### III. FROM THANKSGIVING/EXORDIUM (1 THESS 1,2-8) TO PRETERITION (1,9-10)

Let us turn our attention back to the letter once again by focusing on the function of the initial thanksgiving (1 Thess 1,2-10). A comparison with other epistolary thanksgivings highlighted traits in 1 Thess 1,2-10 that were both common and original. The Pauline thanksgiving/exordium pattern (v. 2) included the *mneia-motiv*, or the recollection of community members (v. 2b), the content of the prayer (v. 3), and the *captatio benevolentiae* (vv. 4-7), while common post protocol thanksgivings generally mention Paul's gospel (v. 5), specified as "the word of the Lord" (v. 8), and suffering (v. 6).

On the other hand, election or ἐκλογή (v. 4), as well as the mimesis between community members, Paul, his co-workers and the Lord, are original to 1 Thessalonians<sup>20</sup>. In turn, the addressees become τύπος for all believers in Macedonia and Achaia (v. 7). The relationship between election and human mimesis is not fortuitous. Indeed, mimesis does not come from ethics, nor from the authority of the model, but from election<sup>21</sup>. The relationship between election and mimesis in 1 Thess 1,4-8 is so original that it is only here that mimesis is considered as already in motion while elsewhere Paul asks his audience to imitate him in the future<sup>22</sup>. Moreover, it is only in 1 Thessalonians (2,14) that mention is made, in explicit terms, of an imitation involving churches.

<sup>19</sup> JEWETT, *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, 72-76.

<sup>20</sup> J.A.D. WEIMA, "The Function of 1 Thessalonians 2,1-12 and the Use of Rhetorical Criticism: A Response to Otto Merk", *The Thessalonians Debate* (eds. K.P. DONFRIED – J. BEUTLER) (Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge 2000) 114-131.

<sup>21</sup> A. PITTA, "The Degrees of Human Mimesis in the Letter to the Romans", *Non mi vergogno del Vangelo*, Potenza di Dio. FS J.-N. Aletti (eds. F. BIANCHINI – S. ROMANELLO) (AnBib 200; Roma 2012) 221-238.

<sup>22</sup> 1 Cor 4,16; 11,1; 2 Thess 3,7,9; Eph 5,1.

The first thanksgiving (1 Thess 1,2-7) ends with one of the most classic among rhetorical figures, namely the preterition (v. 8). Paul says he does not need to speak about the faith of the Thessalonians because other believers report (1,9) what the recipients already know (2,1). This is how Pseudo-Cicero or Cornificius explained *preteritio*, known to the Greeks as παράλειψις:

Paralipsis occurs when we say that we are passing by, or do not know, or refuse to say that which precisely now we are saying [...] This figure is useful if employed in a matter which it is not pertinent to call specifically to the attention of others, because there is advantage in making only an indirect reference to it, or because the direct reference would be tedious or undignified, or cannot be made clear, or can easily be refuted. As a result, it is of greater advantage to create a suspicion by paralipsis than to insist directly on a statement that is refutable (*Rhetorica ad C. Herennium* 4,27,37)<sup>23</sup>.

Preterition is an effective figure of diminution, since we give the impression of overriding or silencing what, on the contrary, we want to emphasise. It is significant that the deictic function of preterition in 1 Thess 1,8 reappears with the same noun *χρεία* in 4,9 and 5,1. In the second case, Paul does not need to write what he actually says on *φιλαδελφία* (1 Thess 4,9-12). On the third occasion, he claims that he does not need to write about what the addressees already know of Christ's second coming, but which he actually does (5,1-11). Similarly, preterition introduces what Paul cares about the most in 1 Thess 1,8, i.e. the content in vv. 9-10. Why then does he resort to what other believers are saying about him and the Thessalonians, without speaking in the first person? What need is there for Paul to tell the addressees about what they already know of his first visit to Thessalonica? Before addressing these questions, we would like to point out the main anticipatory function of preterition in 1 Thessalonians and not only in this letter.

#### IV. FROM PRETERITION (1 THESS 1,9-10) TO THE CROWN OF PRIDE (2,1-20)

The Sisyphean efforts dedicated to conjecturing a pre-Pauline fragment in 1 Thess 1,9b-10 have prevented the acknowledgement of the unitary nature of 1 Thess 1,9-10 and its importance throughout the letter. We have

<sup>23</sup> [CICERO], *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (tr. H. CAPLAN) (LCL; Cambridge, MA 1981) 321.

proposed elsewhere four criteria for identifying a pre-Pauline fragment: semantic anomaly, contextual difference, systemic peculiarities, and Semitic background<sup>24</sup>.

In view of Gal 2,1-10 where it is stated that Barnaba and Paul were the first to have preached to the Gentiles (v. 7), it is difficult to think of a creedal fragment coming from the earliest Christian communities and prior to the assembly in Jerusalem<sup>25</sup>. Additionally, it should be observed that the hypothetical pre-Pauline creedal fragment in 1 Thess,9b-10 is not introduced by any formula. Paul alludes to what other believers report indirectly about his first *eisodus* among the Thessalonians. The expression αὐτοῖς γὰρ περὶ ἡμῶν (1 Thess 1,9a) introduces the indirect account. We will return later to what other believers say; at this point we would like to highlight the function of the noun εἴσοδος in 1 Thess 1,9 and 2,1.

The word appears only in these two instances throughout Paul's epistolary corpus. It is most likely, therefore, that Paul selects it to distinguish his presence in Thessalonica from Jesus Christ's future παρουσία, which is one of the letters' principal narrative threads<sup>26</sup>. In fact, the noun παρουσία not only designates the eschatological presence of Christ, but also Paul's physical presence among the addressees of his letters (2 Cor 10,10; Phil 1,26). The repetition of the same noun in 1 Thess 1,9 and 2,1 had made early copyists and commentators feel uncomfortable right from the start. To distinguish the two kinds of εἴσοδος, some copyists opted for the alternative περὶ ὑμῶν instead of περὶ ἡμῶν in 1 Thess 1,9<sup>27</sup>. Thus, the first *eisodus* (1 Thess 1,9) would allude to the welcome the community members gave to Paul and his co-workers, while the second *eisodus* (1 Thess 2,1) would refer to Paul's arrival at Thessalonica. The variant περὶ ὑμῶν is easier than περὶ ἡμῶν, but the latter should be preserved because it appears more frequently.

Now, why does Paul give an account of what other people say about his "coming" to Thessalonica, if the addressees already know how it occurred? To solve the conundrum, some scholars distinguish two different meanings for the noun εἴσοδος. Paul's arrival among the Thessalonians would be the issue in 1 Thess 1,9, whereas 1 Thess 2,1 is about the reception given by the community<sup>28</sup>. We feel this is untenable because Paul's entrance

<sup>24</sup> A. PITTA, "Born from the seed of David and instrument of mercy. Nature and function of Rom 1,3b-4a and 3,25-26a", *God's power for salvation: Romans 1,1-5,11* (ed. C. BREYTENBACH) (COP 23; Leuven 2017) 207-222.

<sup>25</sup> Rightly, HOOKER, "1 Thessalonians 1.9-10: A Nutshell", 440-442.

<sup>26</sup> See παρουσία in 1 Thess 2,19; 3,13; 4,15; 5,23.

<sup>27</sup> B, 81, 323, 614, 629, 630, 945.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, J. GILLMAN, "Paul's εἴσοδος: The Proclaimed and the Proclaimer (1 Thess 2,8)", COLLINS (ed.), *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, 62.



among the Thessalonians (πρὸς ὑμᾶς) is in question in both instances. Since Paul is the principal subject of the entry into Thessalonica, the attention is focused on just what kind of entrance took place. His presence, it is said, was not without result (1 Thess 2,1b) and had occurred amidst great struggle (2,2). In reality, εἴσοδος in 1 Thess 1,9 and 2,1 creates a key link-word through which, after having introduced the content of the pre-erition (1,9-10), Paul underlines the consequences of his entry into Thessalonica. The hook-word in 1 Thess 2,1 once again takes up the theme of Paul's first visit, which he focuses on up to the prayer in 1 Thess 3,11-13 in which he asks the Lord to guide "our way (τὴν ὁδὸν ἡμῶν) to you" (3,11).

What is in question here is not just the recollection of the first visit, but the reception of the gospel as both Paul and the addressees offer praise. If Paul relies on what others say about him, it is to mitigate the impact of periautology, or self-praise, in 1 Thess 2,1 – 3,13, by taking recourse to a number of antidotes<sup>29</sup>. In his *De methodo gravitatis, sive virtutis commode dicendi* (25,441), Pseudo-Hermogenes of Tarsus (second century CE) explained how self-praise could be made acceptable by using the third person: "Although praising oneself is offensive and easily detested, there are three methods to do it without offense: generalization of language, claim of necessity, change of person"<sup>30</sup>.

Paul does this by bringing into the picture other believers to show the good that has come from his entry into Thessalonica and the conversion of the Thessalonians. Therefore, the third person plural in 1 Thess 1,9a serves not so much to speak of others but more to allow Paul and the Thessalonians to mutually praise each other. From this perspective, the praise offered to the Thessalonians becomes clear. Paul identifies the Thessalonians as his "crown of pride" and his "glory" in 1 Thess 2,19-20. Self-praise does not offend in this case because Paul does not attribute to himself the reasons of praise but to the Thessalonians. Plutarch in *De se ipsum citra invidia laudando* wrote about the involvement of listeners in the self-praise:

There is in that oration a further point that it is useful to note: by most harmoniously blending the praises of his audience with his own he removed the offensiveness and self-love in his words [...] For in this way the hearers, taken

<sup>29</sup> On self-praise in Paul's letters, see A. PITTA, *Il paradosso della croce. Saggi di teologia paolina* (Casale Monferrato 1998) 56-58; IDEM, "Il "discorso del pazzo" o periautologia immoderata? Analisi retorico-letteraria di 2 Cor 11,1 – 12,18", *Bib 87* (2006) 493-510.

<sup>30</sup> G.A. KENNEDY (tr.), *Invention and Method. Two Rhetorical Treatises from the Hermogenic Corpus* (WGRW 15; Atlanta, GA 2005) 245.

off guard, accept with pleasure the praise of the speaker, which insinuates itself along with the praise of themselves; and their delight in the rehearsal of their own successes is followed at once with admiration and approval of him who made them possible (542B) <sup>31</sup>.

The recollection in positive terms of Paul's first entry into Thessalonica should therefore encourage the addressees to continue imitating Paul and the Lord (1 Thess 1,6). In this way, the two main antidotes of eulogy in the third person and in praise of the Thessalonians make the periautology in 1 Thess 2,1 – 3,13 acceptable.

#### V. THE GENERATIVE FUNCTION OF 1 THESS 1,9-10

As Aletti has poignantly shown, a thesis serves to generate the subsequent parts of the discourse:

What distinguishes the *propositio* from the Apostle's other important theses is that it generates a development aimed at explaining, clarifying and justifying it. In short, a *propositio* not only announces a theme, not only expresses an idea that lies close to the heart of the writer or orator, but triggers, generates an argument, which forms a literary micro or macro-unit <sup>32</sup>.

We will now try to verify if this generative function corresponds to the nature of 1 Thess 1,9-10, or not. We can distinguish four basic sections in the micro-unit: (a) Paul's first entry into Thessalonica; (b) the conversion of the addressees to serve the living and true God; (c) the waiting for the Son whom God has raised from the dead; and (d) Jesus as rescuer from the coming wrath.

##### 1. *What kind of entry? (1 Thess 1,9a; 2,1 – 3,13)*

As we observed earlier when dealing with preterition, the key issue in 1 Thess 1:8 is not just the recollection of Paul's first entry among the Thessalonians, but how that visit occurred and what it generated. The modal adverbs *ὁποῖάν* and *πῶς* link Paul's entry into Thessalonica with the response of the community members in 1 Thess 1,9 <sup>33</sup>. As the letter progresses, Paul goes back to that first visit of his four times (1,5.8-9; 2,1-2.13).

<sup>31</sup> PLUTARCH, *Moralia* (eds. P.H. DE LACY – B. EINARSON) (LCL 405; Cambridge, MA – London 1968) 133.

<sup>32</sup> J.-N. ALETTI, *La lettera ai Romani e la giustizia di Dio* (Roma 1997) 30.

<sup>33</sup> LUCKENSMEYER, *The Eschatology of First Thessalonians*, 81.

We should not include 1 Thess 3,6 in this count because it concerns Timothy's intermediate visit to the city and not Paul's first evangelization<sup>34</sup>.

The common denominator of the four instances is the relationship with the gospel. "Our gospel" (1 Thess 1,5) corresponds to "the word of the Lord" (1,8), the "gospel of God" (2,2) and "the word of God" (2;13). Paul's reasoning is rigorous. His gospel came to Thessalonica with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction (1 Thess 1,5). Facing great difficulties, he brought to the Thessalonians the gospel entrusted to him by God (1 Thess 2,2). Consequently, the Thessalonians welcomed the gospel not as the word of men, but as "the word of the Lord" (1 Thess 1,8) or "of God" (2,13). It should additionally be pointed out that the segment τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ has a subjective value in 1 Thess 2,2.8.9, because it alludes to the gospel that God entrusted to Paul (2,4) and shapes his preaching. In fact, to emphasize his apostolic authority, Paul recalls that on his first visit to Thessalonica he worked day and night to "preach" (ἐκηρύξαμεν) the gospel of God without burdening anyone in the community (1 Thess 2,9). Instead, the objective meaning of the gospel stands out with τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ (1 Thess 3,2), intended as *nomen actionis*, because it refers to "evangelizing (or preaching) Christ" (see also 2 Cor 2,12; Gal 1,7). In fact, the context recalls Timothy's cooperation in evangelizing or preaching Christ (1 Thess 3,2).

The use of preterition in 1 Thess 1,9 should by now be clear. Paul's first entry into Thessalonica hinged on the gospel God entrusted to him, notwithstanding the hardships. Considering that he proclaimed this gospel with *παρρησία*<sup>35</sup>, i.e. without concealing anything about the tribulations it entailed, community members need to be strengthened in their commitment to the gospel to make up what is lacking in their faith (1 Thess 3,10)<sup>36</sup>.

The rare terms *παρρησιάζομαι* (1 Thess 2,2) and *κολακεία* (2,5) are related by contrast to frankness and flattery. They refer to two of the most widespread topics in the Greco-Roman world. Philodemus of Gadara wrote a short treatise on frankness in the first century BCE, while Plutarch composed the important treatise on *Quomodo ab adulatore discernatur amicus* (first-second century CE)<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> Pace S. KIM, "Paul's Entry (εἴσοδος) and the Thessalonians' Faith (1 Thessalonians 1-3)", *NTS* 51 (2005) 519-542, here 519. To hypothesise faith as the main thread of the letter, Kim comprises 1 Thess 3,6.

<sup>35</sup> A.J. MALHERBE, "'Gentile as a Nurse': The Cynic Background to I Thess II", in *NovT* 12 (1970) 203-217.

<sup>36</sup> J.R. HARRISON, "Paul and the Imperial Gospel at Thessaloniki", *JSNT* 25 (2002) 71-96.

<sup>37</sup> C.E. GLAD, *Paul and Philodemus*. Adaptability in Epicurean and Early Christian Psychagogy (NT.S 81; Leiden) 1995; J.T. FIZGERALD – D.OBBINK – G.H. HOLLAND (eds.), *Philodemus and the New Testament World* (Leiden – Boston, MA 2004).

Thus, in 1 Thess 1,9 Paul attributes to other believers the spreading of the news of how his own gospel had been received in Thessalonica (1,9) despite the outrageous reception at Philippi (1 Thess 2,1). The choice of the rare verb ἀπαγγέλλω, chosen for the testimony of other believers, is not fortuitous: it is cognate with εὐαγγέλιον and emphasises the positive welcome of the gospel<sup>38</sup>. It is significant that in the only occurrence of the verb εὐαγγελίζομαι in 1 Thessalonians, Paul does not appear as the subject, but as the person who receives from Timothy the news about the faith and love of the Thessalonians (1 Thess 3,6).

The gospel is placed in a paradoxical relationship with θλιῖν (1 Thess 1,6; 3,3.7) and the verb θλίβω (3,4). The verbs προπαθόντες (1 Thess 2,2), ἐπάθετε (2,14), ὑβρισθέντες (2,2) and the noun ἀγών (2,2) belong to the same semantic field. In both occurrences, the verb προπάσχω assumes the negative value of “to suffer before” and not the positive one of “to experience before”. The references to Paul’s first entry into Thessalonica allow us to reconstruct the following syllogism. Since hardship (a’) differentiates the gospel of God from that of men (b, in 1 Thess 1,5) and Paul evangelised the Thessalonians (b’) amid great hostility (c, in 2,1-2), the hardship faced by the community (c’) confirms the divine and not human origin of the gospel (a’) (2,14).

Therefore, what Paul does not need to say in the first person but allows others to relate it instead, is, in our opinion, the hardship that comes with proclaiming and welcoming God’s gospel in view of Christ future coming.

## 2. *Serving and pleasing God*

1 Thess 1,9-10 generates a second narrative development concerning the conversion of the community members. They turned away from idols and converted to God, serving the living and true God. The two statements mirror one another because to serve God is to give up the idols. The religious origin of the Thessalonians is debated among scholars. Were they Gentiles or God-fearers and, therefore, already related to the Jewish Diaspora before the destruction of the second temple<sup>39</sup>? The verb ἐπιστρέφω and the reference to idols in 1 Thess 1,9 lead us to favour the

<sup>38</sup> A.J. MALHERBE, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (AB 32B; New York 2000) 118, rightly argues: “... so the terms used to describe reports about the Thessalonians and Paul are all evangelical in quality”.

<sup>39</sup> C. BLUMENTHAL, “Was sagt 1 Thess 1,9b-10 über die Adressaten des 1 Thess? Literarische und historische Erwägungen”, *NTS* 51 (2005) 96-105; N.K. GUPTA, “Thessalonians Believers, Formerly ‘Pagans’ or ‘God-Fearers’?: Challenging a Stubborn Consensus”, in *Neot* 52 (2018) 91-113.

first hypothesis. The verb ἐπιστρέφω in Gal 4,9 for the Gentiles of Galatia, who risk reverting back from the knowledge of God to serving the elements of the world confirms the gentile origin of most Thessalonians. Although ἐπιστρέφω still falls short of full conversion, considering its use for the children of Israel (2 Cor 3,16), in 1 Thess 1,9 and Gal 4,9 it signals the passage from idolatry to the living and true God, or vice versa.

While remaining overly focused on highlighting the unusual language in 1 Thess 1,9-10, numerous scholars have failed to tackle the question that underpins these words. What does serving God really mean? Many commentators interpret “serving God” in an ethical sense by metaphorically relating it, for example, to the humble condition of slaves<sup>40</sup>. Indeed, this is tantamount to grasping at straws!

Rather, we feel Paul answers the question with ἀρέσκειν θεῷ (1 Thess 4,1). The verb ἀρέσκω appears three times in 1 Thessalonians (2,4.15; 4,1): it is one of the principal threads of 1 Thess 2,1 – 4,12. It is not by chance that in 1 Thessalonians the sequence of a verb with the dative θεῷ relates only to thanking God (1,2; 2,13; 3,9) and to serving/pleasing him (1,9; 2,4.15; 4,1). Right from the outset of the periautology, Paul develops the motif of pleasing God by recalling his entry into Thessalonica. Alongside his co-workers, he did not evangelise out of flattery or greed, but rather for the purpose of serving and pleasing God (1 Thess 2,4-5). In practice, to please God means to evangelise with παρρησία, without holding back anything about the hardship that comes from the acceptance of God’s gospel. The contrast is glaring with those who, among the Jews, “do not please God” (1 Thess 2,15) when they killed Jesus. They persecute the prophets and keep Paul from evangelising the Gentiles (1 Thess 2,16). While Paul evangelises people to please or serve God, those who obstruct him in preaching to the Gentiles cannot please God nor serve Him.

Serving/pleasing God through the gospel that has been entrusted to Paul corresponds to the pleasing of God by the Thessalonians. The latter have already been instructed by Paul as to how they should live to please God (1 Thess 4,1). They need to commit themselves further in the sanctification of life and fraternal love (1 Thess 4,2-12). Thus, the relationship between serving God, introduced in 1 Thess 1,9-10, and pleasing God connects Paul with the community members, thereby marking a distance from those who hinder his preaching among the Gentiles and so do not please God.

<sup>40</sup> J.R.E. PILLAR, *Resurrection as Anti-Imperial Gospel*. 1 Thessalonians 1:9b-10 in Context (Minneapolis, MN 2013) 143.

Serving and pleasing God reflects two key facts that link 1 Thess 1,9 and 4,1. On Paul's first visit, the Thessalonians began to serve the living and true God (1 Thess 1,9), learning from Paul how to conduct themselves to please God (4,1). Moreover, by pleasing God and not men, they became imitators of Paul and the Lord (1 Thess 1,6). It is not by chance that 1 Thess 4,1 is also the last reference to the mimesis between Paul and the Thessalonians. From Paul they received (*παρελάβετε*) instructions on how to please God especially in hardship <sup>41</sup>.

The exordium in Gal 1,6-10 confirms the correspondence between serving the living and true God and being in God's pleasure. With two rhetorical questions, Paul asks the Galatians whether he is trying to persuade men or God. The preemptory answer is that if he sought to please men he would not be a slave to Christ (Gal 1,10). In Paul's case, being a slave to Christ corresponds to serving or pleasing God because his gospel, centred on Christ, was revealed to him by God and not by men (Gal 1,11-12).

Therefore, the mimesis between Paul and the Lord (1 Thess 1,6) is continued in the imitation of the churches in Judea and in the exhortation to the Thessalonians to keep pursuing what they have learned from Paul (4,1). The Thessalonians thus begin to serve/please God; they need to please God more and more, facing the same hardship confronted by the churches of Judea. Thus, the setting for mimesis and God's pleasure until the end of time paves the way to the interrogatives relating to the second coming of the Lord (1 Thess 4,13 – 5,11).

### 3. *Waiting for the Son in view of the encounter (1 Thess 1,10a; 4,13-18)*

The wait for the Saviour from heaven and the rescue from the coming wrath introduced in 1 Thess 1,10 are dealt with in the second part of the letter (1 Thess 4,13 – 5,10). In truth, the so-called "eschatological climax" has already been mentioned in the epilogues of the previous paragraphs (1 Thess 2,19-20; 3,13). In negative terms, the *ὀργή* on those who, among the Jews, do not please God, reaches a climax (1 Thess 2,16). In positive terms, the *παρουσία* of Jesus Christ is elicited to emphasise that the Thessalonians are Paul's crown of pride (1 Thess 2,18-19). The first part closes with a prayer for the holiness of the Thessalonians in view of Christ's Parousia (1 Thess 3,11-13). The wait for Christ's return and the coming wrath are two themes that will be tackled, especially in the second part (1 Thess 4,13 – 5,11).

<sup>41</sup> On the aorist *παρελάβετε* and the first evangelization, see 1 Thess 4,1; cf. 1 Cor 15,1; Gal 1,9; Phil 4,9; Col 2,6.

First of all, the verb ἀναμένειν (NT *hapax legomenon*), introduced in 1 Thess 1,10, is taken up again in 1 Thess 4,13-18 but with different words. The OT background illustrates its meaning because people are looking ahead for salvation (Jdt 8,17; Isa 59,11; Job 2,9). The parallel with Job 2,9 allows us to grasp the eschatological waiting for deliverance that Paul usually expresses with the verb ἀπεκδέχομαι<sup>42</sup>. Similarly, according to Phil 3,20 believers are awaiting a “saviour” who is the Lord Jesus Christ who comes from the heavens. Against those who consider 1 Thess 1,10 a pre-Pauline fragment, also Phil 3,20 speaks of “heavens” in the plural and not in the singular.

Believers are awaiting the Son of God, raised from the dead. In the combination of the wait for the Son and his resurrection, 1 Thessalonians presents contents that are even more original than those of Jewish eschatology. Faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus (1 Thess 4,14) is the condition for the waiting for the Son of God from the heavens, so as to encounter him and be with him forever. While believers are waiting for the Son of God, the Lord will come to the encounter. Therefore, the verb ἀναμένειν anticipates the Lord’s ἀπάντησις (1 Thess 4,17)<sup>43</sup>. The two terms are part of the vocabulary relating to imperial visits to Roman provincial towns<sup>44</sup>. Flavius Josephus recalled Vespasian’s triumphal entry to Rome as follows:

The people, too, exhausted by civil disorders, were still more eager for his coming, expecting now at last to obtain permanent release from their miseries, and confident that security and prosperity would again be theirs. But above all the army had their eyes on him; for they knew best the magnitude of the wars that he had won, and, having had proof of the inexperience and cowardice of the other emperors, longed to be rid of such deep disgrace and prayed that they might be granted him who alone could both bring them salvation and add lustre to their arms. Amidst such feelings of universal goodwill, those of higher rank, impatient of awaiting (ἀναμένειν) him, hastened to a great distance from Rome to be the first to greet him” (*Jewish War* 7:66-68)<sup>45</sup>.

The paragraph from the *Jewish War* shows that the verb ἀναμένειν emphasises the excitement of those who are eagerly awaiting a decisive visit,

<sup>42</sup> See ἀπεκδέχομαι in 1 Cor 1,7; Gal 5,5; Rom 8,19.23.25; Phil 3,20. On the similarity between the verbs, see MALHERBE, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 121.

<sup>43</sup> Some manuscripts contain ὑπάντησιν instead of ἀπάντησιν (cf. D\*, F, G). The meaning does not change because the two nouns are synonyms. However, because of the better attestation, the reading with ἀπάντησιν is preferable.

<sup>44</sup> On ἀπάντησις and its imperial background, see J.R. HARRISON, *Paul and the Imperial Authorities at Thessalonica and Rome. A Study in the Conflict of Ideology* (WUNT 273; Tübingen 2011) 59-60.

<sup>45</sup> FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS, *The Jewish War* (tr. J. THACKERAY) (LCL 525; London – New York 1928) III, 525.

such as that of an Emperor. From this perspective, ἀναμένειν is closer to ἀποκαραδοκία (Rom 8,19; Phil 1,20) than to ἀπεκδέχομαι because it characterises the impatient wait for someone. However, the pattern of the imperial or civil visit does not altogether take out of the picture the Jewish background, in particular, the theophany in Exod 19,10-18. The voice of the archangel, the trumpet of God, the heavens and clouds recall more God's theophany in the OT than the imperial visits to the provinces<sup>46</sup>. In reality, the two backgrounds are not mutually exclusive as it might seem at first sight but coexist in the symbolic universe of both Paul and the Thessalonians. It is difficult to establish if through such a paradigm transfer, Paul intends to emphasise an alternative and polemical cult with respect to the imperial one<sup>47</sup>, especially because the early Christian movement belonged to Judaism prior to the destruction of the second temple<sup>48</sup>.

While 1 Thess 1,9-10 mentions the Parousia of the Son of God from the point of view of the wait, the first paragraph, which deals with the subject in greater detail, develops it by clarifying the way in which those who have fallen asleep and those who are still alive will be forever one and together in the encounter with the Lord (1 Thess 4,17). In 1 Thess 1,9-10, the passage is from the fervent expectation of the Son to his resurrection from the dead, while in 1 Thess 4,13-18 the participation in the encounter for those who have fallen asleep and those who are still alive is tied to the death and resurrection of Jesus<sup>49</sup>.

#### 4. *Appointed not for wrath, but for salvation (1 Thess 1,10b; 5,1-11)*

The final narrative thread is introduced in 1 Thess 1,9-10 and concerns the redemption from the coming wrath. We have already recalled the wrath against those who obstruct Paul's evangelisation: they displease God and men (1 Thess 2,15). What is in question here is not just the future wrath that will come to those who do evil, but also the wrath against those who thwart the salvation of Gentiles in the present.

It is not by chance that the verbs relating to redemption from anger are in the present and not in the future tense: ῥυόμενον and ἐρχομένης. The awaited Son who comes from the heavens started the redemption with

<sup>46</sup> C.R. MOSS – J.S. BADEN, "1 Thessalonians 3.13-18 in Rabbinic Perspective", *NTS* 58 (2012) 199-212.

<sup>47</sup> HARRISON, "Paul and the Imperial Gospel at Thessaloniki", 71-96.

<sup>48</sup> P. OAKES, "Re-mapping the Universe: Paul and the Emperor in 1 Thessalonians and Philippians", *JSNT* 27 (2005) 301-322, here 316-317.

<sup>49</sup> F.F. BRUCE, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (WBC 45; Waco, TX 1982) 102.



his resurrection, and now furthers it in the present in view of the future<sup>50</sup>. After 1 Thess 2,15, the ὀργή introduced in 1,10 is taken up again in 5,10, i.e. in the context of Christ's second coming (5,1-11). The relationship between 1 Thess 1,10 and 5,10 is illuminating because it is specular.

First, we refer to the function of Jesus as τὸν ῥυόμενον and to the περιποίησιν σωτηρίας. Paul rarely speaks of the function of the redeemer because for most Jewish literature in the second temple period, God himself is the redeemer of his people. Now both dimensions are related to Jesus Christ. Since Jesus is rescuing believers from wrath (1 Thess 1,10), God has appointed them "for the possession of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (5,10). The parallel that best clarifies the relationship between the Redeemer and salvation appears in Rom 7,24 – 8,2. Faced with the despair of the ἐγώ that seeks those who can redeem it (ῥύσεται) from the mortal body, Paul thanks God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, redemption has already started for "you", the believer, freed from the law of sin and death (Rom 8,2). Once again, God's redemptive action through Christ does not only belong to the future, but started with the sending of His Own Son in the assimilation of sinful flesh. If this redemption had not been underway yet, God would not have defeated sin in the flesh (Rom 8,3).

The aorist ἔθετο, with God as implied subject in 1 Thess 5,9, evokes the ἐκλογή, which is another theme of the letter. Introduced in the first thanksgiving/exordium (1 Thess 1,4), the calling creates a natural inclusion with ὁ καλῶν (5,24). In the body of the letter, the leitmotif is taken up again with the verb καλοῦντος (1 Thess 2,12) and ἐκάλεσεν (4,7). The explicit and the implied subject of these segments is always God. It is therefore part of God's plan, or πρόθεσις (Rom 8,28), that believers are not predestined to wrath, but to the attainment of salvation<sup>51</sup>. The noun περιποίησις rarely appears in Paul's letters (1 Thess 5,9; 2 Thess 2,14; Eph 1,14). In our opinion, the genitive in περιποίησιν σωτηρίας (1 Thess 5,9) has an objective meaning: salvation is the content of the possession to which God destined believers. Wrath and reception of salvation are in stark contrast: since believers have been justified by the blood of Christ, they will be saved from wrath by him (Rom 5,9).

Compared to 1 Thess 1,10, Paul focuses on Christ's death and resurrection in 1 Thess 5,9-10, but in reverse order. While at the beginning he mentions the action of God who resurrected Jesus in 1 Thess 1,10, at the end the centre of gravity shifts to the attainment of salvation through Jesus Christ "who died for us" in 1 Thess 5,10. In our opinion, the silence on

<sup>50</sup> Pace MALHERBE, *1 Thessalonians*, 122, and those who interpret the participles in 1 Thess 1,10 as future only.

<sup>51</sup> LUCKENSMAYER, *The Eschatology of First Thessalonians*, 305.

the death of Christ in 1 Thess 1,10 is not due to the pre-Pauline origin of 1 Thess 1,9b-10, but rather to the generative function of the passage. As the announcement of the death of Christ belongs to Paul's initial evangelisation (1 Cor 15,3-5) in his communities, including that of Thessalonica, he does not need to explain it in the letter<sup>52</sup>. Rather, what emerges here are the consequences of Christ's resurrection on the future participation of believers.

Therefore, the wrath, introduced in 1 Thess 1,10, serves to emphasise the calling in view of the attainment of future salvation. Since God elected the believers, Christ has redeemed them: they are not "appointed" or chosen for wrath but for the ultimate fulfilment of salvation.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The generative function of 1 Thess 1,9-10 compared to the body of the letter (2,1 – 5,11) has shown that the former is a "peg" on which to hang not only the second part (4,13 – 5,11) but also the entire letter. The spreading of the gospel in Thessalonica amidst great suffering does not prevent (Rom 8,18)<sup>53</sup> but rather anticipates the participation of believers — dead or living — in the Parousia of Christ. The *preteritio* in 1 Thess 1,8 introduces the letter's key theme. Apart from the epistolary introduction (1 Thess 1,1-8, with the prescript in v. 1 and the thanksgiving/exordium in vv. 2-8) and conclusion (5,12-28, with the final exhortation in 5,12-24, and the postscript in 5,25-28), we can outline the relationship between 1,9-10 and 2,1 – 5,11 as follows:

Paul's entry into Thessalonica (1,9a) and God's gospel	Self-praise and eulogy of the Thessalonians for their reception of the gospel amidst great suffering (2,1 – 3,13)
To serve the true and living God (1,9b)	To please God (4,1-12)
Waiting for the risen One (1,10)	Christ's Parousia and the final encounter with him (4,13–18)
The redeemer from the coming wrath (1,10b)	Appointed not to wrath, but to salvation (5,1-11)

In the light of the *preteritio* in 1 Thess 1,8 and as confirmed in the following paragraphs, we can identify 1 Thess 1,9-10 as the thesis or the

<sup>52</sup> See, however, the mention of Christ's death in 1 Thess 2,15; 4,4, and 5,10.

<sup>53</sup> Unfortunately, several translations continue to render the expression οὐκ ἄξιτα in Rom 8,18 with "are not worth", while it should be rendered with "do not thwart", as well demonstrated by A. GIENIUSZ, *Romans 8:18-30 "Suffering Does not Thwart the Future Glory"* (Atlanta, GA 1999).

general *propositio* of the letter. Moreover, the order in which the contents in 1 Thess 1,9-10 are reiterated successively allows us to specify the *propositio* as the *partitio* with respect to 2,1 – 5,11. The mutual praise between Paul and the Thessalonians runs through the first part of 1 Thess 2,1 – 4,12, because the gospel of God has been announced and welcomed amidst great suffering and by the service/pleasing of God. The second part of 1 Thess 4,13 – 5,11 addresses the points at issue relating to the fervent expectation of the Risen One (1,10a; 4,13-18) and the Parousia of Christ (1,10b; 5,1-11). The two principal parts of the letter intertwine: the so-called “eschatological climax” in 1 Thess 2,1 – 3,13 prepares the second part of the letter; and the questions about the Parousia of Christ (1 Thess 4,13 – 5,11) concern those who seek not to serve or please human beings, but God.

1 Thess 1,9-10 both introduces the theme of the gospel received in suffering in view of the waiting for the Son of God, and also unifies the letter. The importance of a general thesis or *partitio* in the structure of Pauline letters is so great that when it responds to verifiable criteria it also sheds light on the genre of the letter. Without disregarding its deliberative <sup>54</sup>, hortatory <sup>55</sup>, consolatory <sup>56</sup> and epideictic function <sup>57</sup>, 1 Thessalonians contains the characteristic features of a kerygmatic letter <sup>58</sup> whose paramount aim is to fulfil what the believers still lack in terms of faith (1 Thess 3,10). Being unable to return to Thessalonica (1 Thess 2,17), Paul entrusts the gospel in tribulation to the letter with a view to the final encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ. Rather than addressing the issue of the faithful who died in the period between Paul’s first entry into Thessalonica and the present letter, and of whom no mention is made, the letter focuses on the announcement and welcome, amidst great suffering, of the gospel in the fervent expectation of Christ’s second coming.

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<sup>54</sup> KENNEDY, *New Testament Interpretation*, 142.

<sup>55</sup> A.J. MALHERBE, “Exhortation in First Thessalonians”, *NovT* 25 (1983) 238-256.

<sup>56</sup> B.C. JOHANSON, *To All the Brethren. A Text-Linguistic and Rhetorical Approach to 1 Thessalonians* (Uppsala 1987) 165-166.

<sup>57</sup> S. WALTON, “What has Aristotle to do with Paul? Rhetorical criticism and 1 Thessalonians”, *TynB* 46 (1995) 229-250, here 249-250; D.F. WATSON, “The Three Species of Rhetoric and the Study of the Pauline Epistles”, in J.P. SAMPLEY – P. LAMPE (eds.), *Paul and Rhetoric* (New York – London 2010) 25-47, here 31.

<sup>58</sup> For the kerygmatic as opposed to the apostolic genre of Paul’s letters, see B. BOSENIUS, “Kann man die neutestamentlichen Briefe der Gattung ‚Apostelbrief‘ zuordnen?”, *NovT* 57 (2015) 227-250.

## SUMMARY

1 Thess 1,9-10 is like a peg on which the whole letter hangs. Introduced by pre-erition (1 Thess 1,8), the passage engenders the four parts of the body of the letter (1 Thess 2,1 – 5,11). Against those who consider the passage as a pre-Pauline fragment, 1 Thess 1,9-10 is a *partitio* which sheds new light on the genre of the letter. Rather than a consolatory letter about those who died between Paul's first entry into Thessalonica and the writing of the letter, in which there is no mention, 1 Thessalonians is a kerygmatic letter, aimed to complete what is lacking in faith among the addressees about the gospel by tribulations in view of the last encounter with the Lord.