

Pentecostal Preaching as a Modern Epistle: A Comparison of Pentecostal Preaching with Paul's Practice of Letter Writing

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Abstract

This article focuses on the practice of Pentecostal preaching in comparison with Paul's letter writing. It argues that the adoption and use of technology and modern forms of communication by Pentecostal preachers is in fact in keeping with Paul's (and the early church's) adoption and use of their contemporary form of communication: the letter.

Keywords

Paul – technology – communication – performance – letter writing – epistles

Introduction

A central feature of the Pentecostal worship service, and one of the means by which a Pentecostal encounters the Holy Spirit, is the sermon. The Pentecostal sermon is typically an engaging experience, where the listener is captivated by the performance of the preacher while at the same time being transformed by the Spirit's activity through the word of God. This is one of the traditional hallmarks of Pentecostalism. That is, Pentecostal preaching was always characterised by its spontaneity and fervour. Preachers spoke with conviction as God

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moved upon them and God's message penetrated the hearts of listeners.¹ In this sense, the sermon is in fact a word given by the Holy Spirit for a particular time and place. But one of the less discussed features of Pentecostal preaching yet equally characteristic of the movement, is the use of innovative means of communication in the actual presentation. In this paper, it will be argued that the use of modern technology and communication methods in a sermon is a characteristic that has always set Pentecostalism apart, but at the same time, aligns it with the practices of the first Christian preachers.

This paper will focus the performance of the Pentecostal sermon. First, it will briefly look at the methods used in preaching. Here it will be argued that the use of modern media and technology in a sermon has always played an important role in Pentecostal preaching. Second, the paper will then look at the practice of letter writing in the first Christian communities, with particular focus on Paul. Here it will be shown that his letters to the Christian communities were highly innovative by the standards of the time. These letters drew on all of the available forms of media, as well as contemporary rhetorical techniques in order to fully relate to its audience. The paper will conclude by suggesting that what we aim to do in the performance of a Pentecostal sermon would be right at home in a first century house church.

Pentecostal Preaching

One area of Pentecostalism that has largely gone undiscussed in our scholarship is preaching.² So it was both refreshing and exciting to read the most recent publication on the topic, *Toward a Theology of Pentecostal Preaching*, a collection of essays focusing on a broad range of issues within the area. In the introduction to the work, Lee Roy Martin makes the following observation:

1 John Gordy, 'Toward a Theology of Pentecostal Preaching', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 10.1 (2001), p. 86.

2 For a basic synopsis of the scholarly situation, see, Gordy, 'Toward a Theology of Pentecostal Preaching', p. 81; Randy Eaton, 'Pentecostal Preaching in a Modern World', in R. Keith Whitt and French Arrington (eds.), *Issues in Contemporary Pentecostalism* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2012), p. 149. Two major works on the topic are Ray H. Hughes, *Pentecostal Preaching* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2004); Charles T. Crabtree, *Pentecostal Preaching* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2003). For a helpful overview and critique of Crabtree's book, see Josh P.S. Samuel, 'The Spirit in Pentecostal Preaching: A Constructive Dialogue with Haddin W. Robinson's and Charles T. Crabtree's Theology of Preaching', *Pneuma* 35 (2013), pp. 199–219.

Preaching has played a crucial role in the Pentecostal movement and continues to be a vital component of the Pentecostal experience. The significant place of preaching is due in part to the prominence of orality in the Pentecostal tradition. Walter Hollenweger argues that Pentecostalism emerged out of the African-American oral context and that Pentecostal theology is primarily oral in nature. *Like the first Christian communities, early Pentecostalism was a 'charismatic community which placed emphasis on hearing, not reading'* (Italics my own). The orality of Pentecostalism has led, in part, to a celebration of preaching as a mode of divine revelation. In the Pentecostal tradition, therefore, preachers have served as authoritative interpreters of Scripture and formulators of ground level theology for a mostly uneducated constituency. Although Pentecostalism's oral character may have been diluted to some degree in the West because of greater access to education, preaching remains a dominant gene in the Pentecostal DNA.³

As I read Martin's introduction, I was most intrigued by the statement: 'like the first Christian communities, early Pentecostalism was a "charismatic community which placed emphasis on hearing, not reading"'. Martin goes on to state: 'In its theology, spirituality, and practices, the Pentecostal tradition shares much with historic Christianity. In some ways, however, Pentecostalism is a unique movement, and that uniqueness has produced a rich heritage of Pentecostal preaching'.⁴ The idea that Pentecostalism placed emphasis on hearing and that it shares much with historic Christianity stood out to me both as a Pentecostal preacher and pastor, as well as a New Testament scholar; as I considered these ideas, I felt that they called for further investigation. What proceeds from here are some of my findings.

The importance of the role of preaching within Pentecostalism is beyond doubt. As Martin notes, 'the phenomenal growth of Pentecostalism is a direct result of effective Pentecostal preaching and the life-changing effects of that preaching'.⁵ At the same time, however, the criticism of our preaching is well established. To point out that a typical Pentecostal sermon lacks in academic content is not an original observation, not by any stretch of the imagination.⁶

3 Lee Roy Martin 'Introduction', in Lee Roy Martin (ed.), *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Preaching* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2015), p. 1.

4 Martin, 'Introduction', p. 3.

5 Martin, 'Introduction', p. 7.

6 I myself have been one of these voices of criticism, cf. 'Not in Lofty Speech or Media: a Reflection on Pentecostal Preaching in Light of 1 Cor 2:1-5', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 24 (2015), pp. 117-135.

Examples of poor exegesis, faulty theology, and emotional excesses abound.⁷ In fact, Pentecostal preachers quite often see their lack of education and their extemporaneous methods of preaching as their strength.⁸ For this reason, a 'typical' Sunday message in a Pentecostal church is less of an exercise in rigorous biblical exposition and much more of an oratorical display aimed at motivating the church members to whatever course of action is being encouraged.⁹

But this emphasis on motivation over exegesis is not without intent or purpose. The Pentecostal sermon, as with the entire Sunday service, is geared toward community engagement and transformation. 'In Pentecostal worship, the prayers prayed, the words read, the sermon preached, the songs sung are all interactive and engaging acts which connect the worshiping community to each other and to God'.¹⁰ In this setting, Pentecostal preaching is an act of worship. During the sermon, both the preacher and the congregation worship God, and at the same time, the delivery and the reception of the Word of God generate worship,¹¹ resulting in community transformation. This focus on presentation and divine encounter resulting in community transformation is clearly understood amongst Pentecostals. For example, a recent blog by Brian Houston outlines 31 points that are essential for anyone who preaches on the Hillsong platform.¹² Of these 31 points, 42% (13/31) concern presentation and inspiration, and the individual quality displayed by the preacher;¹³ a further

7 Martin, 'Introduction', p. 1.

8 Martin, 'Introduction', p. 10.

9 John O. Enyinnaya, 'Pentecostal Hermeneutics and Preaching: An Appraisal', *Ogbomosho Journal of Theology* 13.1 (2008), p. 150–51 has noted, 'Pentecostal preachers tend to have good packaging or delivery and less hermeneutics ... Pentecostal preachers tend to be entertaining. Many times, this quality of being entertaining overshadows the need for spiritual enrichment. Preaching that appeals only to the emotions can be hardly expected to also produce the depth required for a concomitant change of life and attitude'.

10 Johnathan Alvarado, 'Worship in the Spirit: Pentecostal Perspectives on Liturgical Theology and Praxis', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 21 (2012), p. 143. He notes further, 'It is interesting to note that many other Christian traditions have begun to adopt this "playful" style as their own in order to enliven and energize their worship offerings and to facilitate a more meaningful encounter between the worshiping community and God'.

11 Martin, 'Introduction', p. 6.

12 Brian Houston, '30 Rules for the Hillsong Australia Preaching & Teaching Team', *Let's Talk Leadership*, July 11, 2015, accessed August 4, 2015, <http://www.brianhouston.com/blog/2015/08/30-rules-of-the-hillsong-preaching-platform/>.

13 The message is to be positive, it has a set time limit, it sees humour as a bonus, not the goal, and is focused as much on delivery as content. The speaker him/herself is encouraged to reflect the life they are living, not just the sermon they are preaching. Their sermon is to reflect *their* personality, not an imitation of someone else. The message is to

36% (11/31) concern community transformation;¹⁴ while only 22% (7/31) concern content – and that only very loosely.¹⁵ Again, I recently asked a class of college students to give me several one-word descriptions of Pentecostal preaching. Words such as ‘engaging’, ‘anointed’, ‘encouraging’, ‘inspiring’, ‘relatable’, and ‘applicable’ were all agreed terms.¹⁶

Generally speaking then, Pentecostal preaching is characterised by its engaging style and presentation. A Pentecostal worship service is dynamic, inspiring, and motivating, it is as much a concert as it is a worship service. Brilliant light shows, extravagant multimedia displays, and professional quality presentations either define in the case of larger churches or are often the benchmark in the case of smaller churches. For this reason, the preaching, like the rest of the service, is reliant on technology. The use of various forms of multimedia and the latest technologies characterise a Pentecostal sermon as much as the charisma of the preacher. This is certainly true of our movement today, but historically, has been part of Pentecostalism from the very beginning.

Early Pentecostals, like the revivalists preachers who went before them, adopted the most contemporary forms of media in their presentations. Payne notes that the first great revivalist of the eighteenth century, George Whitefield, used print media to build anticipation for meetings as well as recount stories of conversion through a mass distribution of handbills. Similarly, Charles Finney encouraged other preachers across the country to embrace ‘new measures’ such as an ‘anxious bench’ and colloquial language in their

leave people feeling better about themselves than when they came in. It must reflect their level of authority and project confident humility. It needs to combine faith with transparency. The message must be left behind on Monday and not dwelt on. It should also be listened to or watched by the preacher. Finally, it needs to help people overcome and believe what God says about them.

- 14 Houston says that the message must be in line with our belief. It needs to be checked for overuse of ‘I’ (it is not about the preacher). It should be focused on helping, not impressing. It should be Reinforcing – never contradicting – our cultural values. It must affect people’s Mondays, not just Sunday. It should reflect what we are for, not against. It needs to be easily transitioned into an altar-call; telling not just what, but how; aware of a greater audience than the room. Finally, it exalts Jesus and brings glory to God.
- 15 In regard to the content, the sermon must be proven in the bible; it also requires many hours of meditation, preparation & familiarisation. It should be from a New Testament perspective. The preacher is warned not to stray into things they don’t understand; to present something noteworthy; to preach from notes they would be proud to show Brian. Finally, the message must be able to stand alone in a newspaper.
- 16 Used with permission. On the negative side, ‘over-hyped’, ‘scripturally lacking’, ‘proof-texting’, ‘mishandling scripture’, ‘showy’, ‘too topical’, and ‘NT emphasis’ were also expressed.

worship service. In the nineteenth century, Phoebe Palmer widened her revivalist reach through her monographs, pamphlets, and periodicals. In the twentieth century, Pentecostal preachers like Aimee Semple McPherson harnessed the power of the radio and were pioneers in creating churches 'made entirely of radio waves'.¹⁷ In fact, Payne suggests that early Pentecostals were merely carrying out (and perhaps even perfecting) a longstanding tradition in revivalist circles of adopting the latest technology in their preaching.¹⁸ Pentecostals, in other words, built upon their church heritage in using technology; however, the adoption of these technologies was also a direct result of the period in which the movement emerged.

Historically, Pentecostalism was born and grew up alongside innovations in mass communication technologies like radio and television, and, for the most part, these new innovations were optimistically embraced and became key for quality preaching.¹⁹ Pentecostals adapted to their own purposes radio and older technologies like pamphlets and newsletters, which had become affordable through modern inventions.²⁰ With the advent of television came the rapid rise of American Pentecostal televangelists.²¹ By the 1990s 'preaching within Pentecostal churches was enhanced by wearable wireless microphones or merged with high-tech worship music and, as the 20th century drew to a close, PowerPoint presentations and multimedia aids might make sermons indistinguishable from the business presentations of motivational speakers'.²² Now in the 21st century, ministries are streamed live over the Internet or viewed on YouTube.²³ In other words, a central feature of Pentecostal preaching has always been an innovative adoption of the most contemporary means of communication. This use of technology has served an important purpose in the success and expansion of Pentecostalism, particularly in the modern mega-church.

In the large city based mega-churches, communion or personal prayer is more difficult, so pride of place is given to preaching. Here, the preacher needs to sustain a multi-faceted ministry and therefore relies heavily upon a variety of technology, through which they have the ability to stream sermons

17 Leah Payne, "Fully Equipped": Technology and Pentecostal Preaching', in Lee Roy Martin (ed.), *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Preaching* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2015), p. 249.

18 Payne, "Fully Equipped": Technology and Pentecostal Preaching', p. 243.

19 Payne, "Fully Equipped": Technology and Pentecostal Preaching', p. 245.

20 Payne, "Fully Equipped": Technology and Pentecostal Preaching', p. 245–46.

21 Payne, "Fully Equipped": Technology and Pentecostal Preaching', p. 247.

22 William K. Kay, 'The Ecclesial Dimension of Preaching', in Lee Roy Martin (ed.), *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Preaching* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2015), p. 208.

23 Kay, 'The Ecclesial Dimension of Preaching', p. 209.

to watchers elsewhere in the same city or overseas.²⁴ The pastor also needs to be able to speak both interestingly and authoritatively; a sermon series needs to be targeted to the requirements of the congregation.²⁵ Pastors in large city churches need to be excellent and professional communicators, ‘pacing the stage, adept in the use of a microphone, engaging, humorous, good storytellers, and adopting a teaching rather than an evangelistic style’.²⁶ In this type of church, the shape of day-to-day congregational life is consequent upon the preaching and implicit theology of the senior pastor or preacher.²⁷

In summary, more than many of their Protestant counterparts, Pentecostals have been, and continue to be enthusiastic about integrating new technologies into worship services, and especially into their preaching, as they emerged.²⁸ Pentecostal sermons are ideally engaging and inspiring performances, aimed at moving and shaping the community to whatever ends. Preachers themselves are charismatic and relatable, easy to engage, but challenging at the same time. These are the characteristics that make our preaching somewhat unique in the modern church. But as we will see, these were also the characteristics of the first Christian preachers such as Paul.²⁹

Paul's Letters as Modern Media

I am suggesting in this paper that the first Christians such as Paul embraced and adapted to their particular needs contemporary forms of communication, in particular, the letter. A letter like Romans is more than just a written document for the purposes of outlining the gospel; rather, it is an innovative use of the available means of communication. It is a product of its culture, but in some ways, also ahead of its time. For Paul, the letter was the most effective

24 Kay, ‘The Ecclesial Dimension of Preaching’, p. 209.

25 Kay, ‘The Ecclesial Dimension of Preaching’, p. 210.

26 Kay, ‘The Ecclesial Dimension of Preaching’, p. 211.

27 Kay, ‘The Ecclesial Dimension of Preaching’, p. 215.

28 Payne, “Fully Equipped”: Technology and Pentecostal Preaching’, p. 241.

29 For the sake of brevity, I will focus my discussion on Paul. For discussion of the gospels, see Joanna Dewey, ‘The Gospel of Mark as an Oral-Aural Event: Implications for Interpretation’, in Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Edgar V. McKnight (eds.), *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament* (JSNTSup 109; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), pp. 145–63; Jeffrey E. Brickley, ‘Seeing, Hearing, Declaring, Writing: Media Dynamics in the Letters of John’, in Anthony Le Donne and Tom Thatcher (eds.), *The Fourth Gospel in First-Century Media Culture* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), pp. 11–28.

means by which he could sustain his fledgling communities in the midst of a hostile culture.

Not unlike the early Pentecostals, the first Christians were a largely ostracised group. The official Roman position towards Christianity was unequivocally negative. Christianity was categorised as *superstitio*, rather than *religio*.³⁰ The Greeks, likewise, viewed Christians as *atheoi*, or 'godless'.³¹ Christians were believed to hold nocturnal gatherings for magical purposes, ritual cannibalism, and incest – all fundamental breaches of humanity.³² At the same time, Christians were ostracised from their Jewish roots, thus negating any ancestral legitimacy. In terms of their place in society, the Christian communities would have consisted of a reasonable cross section of the social and educational levels of the surrounding culture. Most inhabitants of the Graeco-Roman world were illiterate but could get by without being able to read or write. In fact, the lack of access by most to education meant that a literate society was impossible to conceive. Most skills were acquired orally through apprenticeship, not through books.³³ The majority of the Christian community would have reflected this largely illiterate culture. All of this meant that the first Christian preachers and leaders had the task of solidifying and strengthening the community in the midst of difficult and hostile circumstances, wherever they were found. But in a community of people who were largely illiterate, new and creative ways needed to be developed to achieve this.

Ancient Communication

The world of the New Testament was one in which literature was flourishing. In the first century, transmission of written communication throughout the empire was well established.³⁴ The emperor at the time of Paul's second

30 *Religio*: those who carried out or omitted ritual in accordance with the custom of the state and are not involved in superstitions. The threat to *religio* was *superstitio*. That is, excessive forms of behaviour, irregular religious practice and excessive commitment to the gods. *Superstitio* was often seen as an inappropriate desire for knowledge. Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 217.

31 Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, p. 225.

32 Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, p. 225

33 Ann Ellis Hanson, 'Ancient Illiteracy', in Mary Beard (ed.), *Literacy in the Roman World* (Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series 3; Ann Arbor, MI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1991), p. 162. For this reason, governments were able to largely ignore the high level of illiteracy, as there was enough literates in their midst to carry out the duties required of these.

34 Claudia Moatti, 'Translation, Migration, and Communication in the Roman Empire: Three Aspects of Movement in History', *Classical Antiquity* 25.1 (2006), pp. 126–33.

missionary trip, Claudius, was a keen author and a noted advocate of literature. During his reign, Roman intellectual life was strong and spreading internationally,³⁵ a significant contrast to the neglectful and even suppressive attitudes of his predecessors.³⁶ During this period there was also an increasing demand among the elite for literary works. To be interested in literature was an integral part of social life.³⁷ As a result, Romans became more active in literary composition. Private homes now provided space and facilities for intellectual discussion and creativity; moreover, it was increasingly common for private libraries to be set up in the homes of aristocratic Romans.³⁸ It also became common for authors to perform their literary works at public or private gatherings; auditors would then purchase copies of these works for later performances by a professional reader.³⁹ This emphasis on the performance of literature was an important part of the culture.

The first-century Mediterranean world was a fusion of oral and scribal culture; that is, one familiar with writing but in essence still significantly, even predominately, oral. In this type of culture, reading was largely vocal and illiteracy was the rule rather than the exception.⁴⁰ Books and writing were elements of this society, and even used so that oral culture shared a stage with written culture; however, a written text was something conceived as realisable only in the vocal act of reading aloud.⁴¹ In this culture, reading was not experienced as a silent scanning, mainly mental activity. It was a performative, vocal, oral-aural event. The reader recited, with vocal and bodily gestures, the text that one usually memorised.⁴² This was especially true in schools. In the

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- 35 Eleanor Huzar, 'Claudius-the Erudite Emperor', in Wolfgang Haase and Hildegard Temporini (eds.), *Aufstieg Und Niedergang Der Römischen Welt: Geschichte Und Kultur Roms Im Spiegel Der Neueren Forschung* 32 1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1984), p. 650.
 - 36 F.R.D. Goodyear, 'Tiberius and Gaius: Their Influence and Views on Literature', in Wolfgang Haase and Hildegard Temporini (eds.), *Aufstieg Und Niedergang Der Römischen Welt: Geschichte Und Kultur Roms Im Spiegel Der Neueren Forschung* 32 1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1984), pp. 603–10.
 - 37 Kenneth Quinn, 'The Poet and His Audience in the Augustan Age', in Wolfgang Haase and Hildegard Temporini (eds.), *Aufstieg Und Niedergang Der Römischen Welt: Geschichte Und Kultur Roms Im Spiegel Der Neueren Forschung* 30 1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1982), p. 123.
 - 38 Beryl Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 153; Quinn, 'The Poet and His Audience in the Augustan Age', p. 125.
 - 39 Quinn, 'The Poet and His Audience in the Augustan Age', p. 90.
 - 40 Pieter J.J. Botha, *Orality and Literacy in Early Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), p. 14. For similar discussion, see Joanna Dewey, 'Textuality in an Oral Culture: A Survey of the Pauline Tradition', *Semeia* 65 (1994), pp. 37–65.
 - 41 Botha, *Orality and Literacy in Early Christianity*, p. 15.
 - 42 Botha, *Orality and Literacy in Early Christianity*, p. 91. Cf. Brickle, 'Seeing, Hearing, Declaring, Writing', p. 17.

classroom, teachers would instruct students orally, with students learning prescribed works by heart.⁴³ In other words, there was a clear preference for the 'living voice' over the written word. The oral tradition was recognised to have a higher authenticity-value than written texts. For the teacher, the role of the 'living voice' was crucial. In this context, the written word was seen as an extension of speech;⁴⁴ a text, words written, the implied author was meant to become a living voice.

Ancient communication, including reading and writing, was an oral, collective activity and not the private, silent experience that we consider it to be (such as reading books, magazines, watching TV, and even listening to the radio and lectures). Reading silently was unusual, reading in solitude even more so. Graeco-Roman communication was connected to the physical presence of people and to living speech to and extent that is consistently underestimated today.⁴⁵

Christianity emerged in the midst of this literary and oral culture and was quick to adopt all of these elements in its practice. Like Judaism, Christianity was characterised by its use of the written word, setting it well apart from the traditional Roman cults.⁴⁶ In fact, the Christian community would have more likely resembled a philosophical school than a traditional religion;⁴⁷ and like other philosophical traditions, it was dependant on orally transmitted teaching based on written texts to shape and solidify the community. Letters of encouragement and instruction were written to communities all over the Empire, not to be silently studied, but rather, to be read aloud and performed before the gathered congregation. These letters were an innovation on the standard Graeco-Roman letterform, and at the forefront of this innovation was Paul.

Paul the Letter Writer

Most scholars agree that Paul almost certainly attained at least a grammatical level of training.⁴⁸ Under the *grammaticus*, the student would primarily

43 Botha, *Orality and Literacy in Early Christianity*, p. 24.

44 Botha, *Orality and Literacy in Early Christianity*, p. 37.

45 Botha, *Orality and Literacy in Early Christianity*, p. 53–54.

46 Botha, *Orality and Literacy in Early Christianity*, p. 284.

47 Stanley Kent Stowers, 'Does Pauline Christianity Resemble a Hellenistic Philosophy?', in Ron Cameron and Merrill P. Miller (eds.), *Redescribing Paul and the Corinthians* (Early Christianity and its Literature 5; Atlanta: SBL, 2011), pp. 219–44.

48 For discussion and summary of this point, see Thomas Schmeller, *Schulen Im Neuen Testament? Zur Stellung Des Urchristentums in Der Bildungswelt Seiner Zeit* (Herders Biblische

develop their literary skills including literary analysis, letter writing, speaking, and speech writing. Paul, while not demonstrating the skills of one classically trained in rhetoric, certainly exhibits a good, sometimes even elegant, style of *koine* Greek,⁴⁹ indicating such a level of training. More than that, he would have known from observation and experience what styles of argument would, and would not, hold the attention of his target audience. Paul, in other words, was well trained in, or at least very conversant with the literary techniques of his culture. At the same time, he was also adept at drawing on the practical resources available to him at the time.

A common feature of the New Testament world was the secretary. In a largely illiterate society, people of low status and education would employ secretaries to write letters for them. But even the educated elite would use secretaries, or had slaves for such purposes, in order that they could simply dictate what they had to say and leave it to the amanuensis to finish the final piece. For such a person, it was often easier to have someone else do the lengthy task for them.⁵⁰ This secretary could also have a role in the production of the letter. Their involvement could range from making minor editorial changes more sizable contributions such as selecting genre, selecting appropriate stereotyped phrases, or even the proper people to greet and the correct greeting formulae. In this process, the author would suggest the basic content and the secretary offered the appropriate phraseology.⁵¹ The secretary could also be the composer. Letters, particularly formal letters, followed a standard format, so a person might tell the secretary the basic situation and they would compose a suitable letter. Secretaries, in other words, were an integral part of the letter writing process at all levels of society, so it is no surprise to find that Paul frequently used them to write his own letters.⁵²

Studien 30; Freiburg: Herder, 2001), p. 102. Similarly, Christopher Forbes, 'Ancient Rhetoric and Ancient Letters: Models for Reading Paul, and Their Limits', in J. Paul Sampley and Peter Lampe (eds.), *Paul and Rhetoric* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2010), p. 148.

49 F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (ed. and trans. Robert W. Funk; Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 2. Similarly, George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1984), pp. 9–10.

50 E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), pp. 66–67.

51 Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, p. 74.

52 Paul's use of a secretary is indicated in the postscripts of his letters. Here, the author would pick up the pen after the secretary was finished writing and add a greeting in their own handwriting to indicate the letter's authenticity. We see this numerous times

For Paul, one of the major reasons for having a secretary would have been the time it took to write a letter like the ones he wrote. He would have most likely hired a secretary from the local markets where he and the team were staying and their involvement would have been somewhere between transcribing and contributing. The first stage would involve a preliminary draft. Here Paul might gather together preformed materials (1 Cor. 15.3–5; Rom. 1.3–4; 4.25; 8.34; 10.8–9; 1 Thess. 1.10; Gal. 1.3–4), hymns (Phil. 2.6–11; Col. 1.15–20; 1 Tim. 3.16; Eph. 5.14), and catechetical material (1 Thess. 4.1–12; Gal. 11.23–25), or simply notes he had made along his journeys.⁵³ His co-authors might have also contributed to the process. After meals it was common for literary works to be read out and discussed; it would be easy to imagine this happening as a letter or ideas were being formulated.⁵⁴ The secretary would then take all this away to prepare a first draft. After returning with this draft, any corrections or additions would be made and a new draft would be prepared. This would continue until a final product was agreed upon and a polished version produced.⁵⁵ For Paul, this use of a secretary was a very standard practice; however, what was not standard was the length of his letters; in fact, as the table below demonstrates,⁵⁶ Paul was in many ways peerless in his use and length of letters.⁵⁷

We can see already that Paul was a man of his culture, not afraid to use the latest means available to him to communicate to his churches. But we can also see that he was innovative, willing to take the standard letter and stretch it to lengths not really seen by his contemporaries. These long letters are one of the

Author	Shortest letter (words)	Longest letter (words)	Avg. length (words)
All extant papyrus letters (14,000)	18	209	87
Cicero	22	2,530	295
Seneca	149	4,134	995
Paul	335	7,114	2,495

through Paul's letters: 1 Cor. 16.21; Gal. 6.11; Col. 4.18; 2 Thess. 3.17; Philemon 19). We also meet one of his secretaries in Rom. 16.22.

53 Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer*, p. 36.

54 Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, p. 45; J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer: His World, His Options, His Skills* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), p. 33.

55 Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, pp. 90–91.

56 Table cited in Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, p. 163.

57 Ben Witherington, *The Paul Quest: The Renewed Search for the Jew of Tarsus* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), p. 103.

unique features of Christianity; however, the real innovation was in the content and style of the letter itself.

The General Purpose of the Ancient Letter

Ancient letters fell into two broad categories, the first being the personal correspondence between friends or family.⁵⁸ Epistolary theorists asserted that the genre of the letter was epitomised in the friendly letter. This was considered the true type of letter.⁵⁹ Personal letters such as these were primarily the means of maintaining relationship.⁶⁰ Here they served to communicate information, and request information or favours.⁶¹ In addition, they were a substitute for the presence of the author within a conversation.⁶² In other words, they served to maintain contact between the parties; they were written conversations designed to create an appearance in the experience of the recipient(s) by evoking the physical presence of the author(s).⁶³

The second main kind of letter was the official correspondence to or from government official, business relationships, etc.⁶⁴ These were letters that substituted for a speech that in other circumstances would have been delivered in person by the sender and are addressed to officials or communities to deal with executive or administrative matters.⁶⁵ Unlike personal letters, official letters were frequently addressed to multiple recipients as a community.⁶⁶

58 Sean A. Adams, 'Paul's Letter Opening and Greek Epistolography: A Matter of Relationship', in Stanley E. Porter and Sean A. Adams (eds.), *Paul and the Ancient Letter Form* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p. 36.

59 Stanley Kent Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), p. 29; William G. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), p. 11.

60 Cf. Cicero, *Ad Fam.* 30.1; *Ad Att.* 10.1; 14.1; 30.1.

61 Adams, 'Paul's Letter Opening and Greek Epistolography: A Matter of Relationship', p. 38.

62 Philip L. Tite, 'How to Begin, and Why? Diverse Functions of the Pauline Prescript within a Greco-Roman Context', in Stanley E. Porter and Sean A. Adams (eds.), *Paul and the Ancient Letter Form* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p. 59; John L. White, 'Saint Paul and the Apostolic Letter Tradition', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 45 (1983), p. 435.

63 Botha, *Orality and Literacy in Early Christianity*, p. 56. Cf. Seneca, *Ep.* 40.1.

64 Adams, 'Paul's Letter Opening and Greek Epistolography: A Matter of Relationship', p. 36.

65 M. Luther Stirewalt, *Paul, the Letter Writer* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 30. Similarly, Helmut Koester, 'Writings and the Spirit: Authority and Politics in Ancient Christianity', *Harvard Theological Review* 84.4 (1991), p. 357. For other discussion of the official letter, see Adams, 'Paul's Letter Opening and Greek Epistolography: A Matter of Relationship', pp. 36–37.

66 Stirewalt, *Paul, the Letter Writer*, p. 41.

Paul's letters appear to resemble both of these kinds. In the official sense, Paul is an intermediary official in a divine organisation representing a higher authority, namely, Christ.⁶⁷ He writes to his congregations in an official capacity as an apostle. At the same time, Paul's letters betray characteristics of a personal letter; namely, the familiarity and tenderness with which he addresses his recipients. For example, his frequent use of terms such as 'beloved' and '*adelphoi*' suggest a close bond between him and the recipients.⁶⁸ In other words, there is in Paul's letters a mixture of the leadership found only in the official letter, and at the same time an equality that is only found in a personal letter.⁶⁹ Moreover, as with both kinds of letters above, Paul's letters served as surrogates for the sender's absence. This was in fact a main reason for Paul's using them.

It is well established in biblical scholarship that Paul's letters acted as surrogates for face-to-face communication.⁷⁰ Ancient letters were related to oral communication—to a dialogue or everyday speech.⁷¹ Letters served as a means of communication in the absence of the sender.⁷² This was so well assumed that Paul could have been accused of not conforming to standard convention when he appeared in person.⁷³ However, for Paul, his choice of using letters may have been due to his belief that they were more effective than his personal presence (cf. 2 Cor. 10.10). According to Mitchell, this is perhaps the reason for

67 Stirewalt, *Paul, the Letter Writer*, p. 29.

68 Stirewalt, *Paul, the Letter Writer*, p. 46. For similar discussion and conclusions, see Adams, 'Paul's Letter Opening and Greek Epistolography: A Matter of Relationship', p. 38.

69 Adams, 'Paul's Letter Opening and Greek Epistolography: A Matter of Relationship', p. 55. Moreover, while Paul encourages friendship amongst the communities, this is not like the friendships of the surrounding culture. Here, friendship was exclusively amongst social equals; Paul, on the other hand, encourages loving relationships amongst the most socially disparate. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, pp. 42–43.

70 Robert W. Funk, 'The Apostolic Parousia: Form and Significance', in William R. Farmer, C.F.D. Moule, and Richard R. Niebuhr (eds.), *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 249–68. Funk argues that Paul had three different ways in which he could make his presence felt: his own physical presence, his presence via an envoy, and his presence via a letter.

71 Witherington, *The Paul Quest*, p. 89; Samuel Byrskog, 'Epistolography, Rhetoric and Letter Prescript: Romans 1.1–7 as a Test Case', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 65 (1997), p. 27; Lars Hartman, 'On Reading Others' Letters', *Harvard Theological Review* 79.1–3 (1986), p. 138; White, 'Saint Paul and the Apostolic Letter Tradition', p. 439; Dewey, 'Textuality in an Oral Culture: A Survey of the Pauline Tradition', p. 51.

72 Botha, *Orality and Literacy in Early Christianity*, p. 60; White, 'Saint Paul and the Apostolic Letter Tradition', p. 439.

73 Byrskog, 'Epistolography, Rhetoric and Letter Prescript: Romans 1.1–7 as a Test Case', p. 31.

sending Titus with 2 Corinthians instead of returning himself (7.5–16).⁷⁴ This is also possibly true for Galatians, Romans and perhaps 1 Thessalonians. The emissaries could probably perform functions that Paul could not do even if was there himself.⁷⁵ As Lampe suggests:

Paul's written communication with his congregations was not just a lesser evil due to geographical distance; his letter were not just would be oral speeches. For the apostle, the written medium was a welcome alternative to oral communication, a gladly embraced compensation for the problems that he had when delivering in person. He and his audiences seemed to know about weaknesses of his when speaking and about problems he faced when they responded to his oral-personal appearances (2 Cor. 11.16; 10.1, 10–11; 13.10).⁷⁶

For Paul, the unique nature of his congregations, combined with the often-prohibitive geographical distance as well as his apparent weak persona while present, meant that he needed to adapt and improvise the resources available to him in order to communicate instructions to his churches. As part of somewhat isolated or ostracised groups within their cities, the Christians needed clear moral and social teaching in order to demarcate the boundaries of the community. This was central to Paul's reasons for writing, and as such, he needed to draw on another kind of Graeco-Roman letter, that of the philosophers.

Philosophers would use letters as a means of expressing their moral teaching,⁷⁷ as we find in the collections of Seneca and the Cynic Epistles, for example. Such letters served a hortatory purpose intended to change the behaviour of the recipient. The recipient or student was to imitate the behaviour of the teacher, and the letter was the genre that best expressed this character.⁷⁸ In this sense, letters provided a more direct and specific means of social control. This certainly fits with Paul's usage. Paul seeks to persuade those to whom he writes both to believe certain principles and to act in specific ways. He instructs, admonishes, and exhorts. He includes list of virtues and vices, things

74 Margaret M. Mitchell, 'New Testament Envoys in the Context of Greco-Roman Diplomatic and Epistolary Conventions: The Example of Timothy and Titus', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111.4 (1992), p. 642.

75 Mitchell, 'New Testament Envoys', p. 643.

76 Peter Lampe, 'Rhetorical Analysis of Pauline Texts-Quo Vadit?', in J. Paul Sampley and Peter Lampe (eds.), *Paul and Rhetoric* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2010), p. 16.

77 Lampe, 'Rhetorical Analysis of Pauline Texts-Quo Vadit?', pp. 36–37.

78 Lampe, 'Rhetorical Analysis of Pauline Texts-Quo Vadit?', p. 39.

to do and things not to do. He expresses shock, disgust and heartbrokenness.⁷⁹ His letters could provide instruction, they could give response to specific local issues, they could act as general reminders of the mode of social life deemed appropriate to the Christian community, they could argue against viewpoints that Paul deemed incorrect, they could even direct particular disciplinary actions against other community members.⁸⁰ In fact, the overall rhetorical function of these kinds of hortatory letter was to serve as a coherence device. Paul's letters, like those of the philosophers, worked to cement the readers and listeners into a common-message community.⁸¹

This element of community formation was central to Paul's letters. His letters were designed to accomplish change in the communities to which he wrote, but lacking any means to impose his will, he was not able to enforce, only persuade.⁸² Letters enabled Paul to address the community as a community, with the congregation gathered as the primary recipient; it also allowed him to take more detached position from the community and function in an authoritative office when necessary. It also facilitated the publicising of his message and maintained the relationships between himself and his congregations.⁸³ A letter such as Galatians, one designed to address numerous congregations, was also able to do what would be impossible for Paul to do by himself. That is, to address all of these assemblies simultaneously or even in a reasonable time; something impossible for an individual to achieve.⁸⁴

In summary, Paul was adept at drawing upon the resources available to him, but he was also highly innovative in his use of them. His letters fit into all of the aforementioned contexts, but with modifications created by the uniqueness

79 Todd Penner and Davina C. Lopez, 'Rhetorical Approaches', in Joseph A Marchal (ed.), *Studying Paul's Letters: Contemporary Perspectives and Methods* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), p. 37.

80 Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 114. Similarly, see Koester, 'Writings and the Spirit', p. 357.

81 James J. Murphy, 'Early Christianity as a 'Persuasive Campaign': Evidence from the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters of Paul', in Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht (eds.), *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference* (JSNTSup 90; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), p. 97.

82 Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer*, p. 69.

83 Stirewalt, *Paul, the Letter Writer*, pp. 113–14.

84 Stirewalt, *Paul, the Letter Writer*, p. 117. A letter seems to have been geared to become a part of an act of worship. Witherington (*The Paul Quest*, p. 109) suggests that the holy kiss (1 Cor. 16.20; 2 Cor. 13.12) or the beginning with prayer and ending with benediction (1 Cor. 1.4–9; 16.23) made these letters a part of the worship in the community gathering.

of the church.⁸⁵ This modification is apparent at the macro level, but is also apparent at the micro level as well.

The Typical Structure of a Letter

An ancient letter always opened and closed with a formulaic set of greetings and prayers. The standard letter opening began with a prescript or salutation that contains the sender, the recipient, and a greeting, following the formula: X to Y, Greetings.⁸⁶ According to the ancient manuals, to elaborate on this basic formula was to risk flattery or meanness being attached to the letter.⁸⁷ This greeting might be followed by a prayer, a health wish, or thanks to the gods.⁸⁸ This prescript functioned to express the relationship between the sender and the recipient.⁸⁹ After this came the body of the letter, followed by the closing, which would usually end with the word 'farewell', sometimes preceded by a wish for health of the recipient or a request for the recipient to greet others.⁹⁰ Paul adopts this three-part structure of the ancient letter (salutation, body, and closing) and expands it to a five-part letter (salutation, thanksgiving, body, par- enesis, and closing),⁹¹ and then substantially increases the length.

Looking first at the prescript, Paul would typically expand this depending on the particular purposes of the letter. He might add '(called) apostle' (1 Cor. 1.1; 2 Cor. 2.1; Gal 1.1) or 'servant' (Phil 1.1) or both (Rom 1.1) depending on the context of the letter.⁹² In the event that he needed to reprove or improve the community, it was necessary to establish his authority to speak.⁹³ To Paul's name would be added his co-senders, the only exception being the letter to the

85 Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, p. 31. For discussion of the letter to the Philippians as a 'family' letter, see Loveday Alexander, 'Hellenistic Letter Forms and the Structure of Philippians', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 37 (1989), pp. 87–101.

86 Tite, 'How to Begin, and Why?', p. 67.

87 Adams, 'Paul's Letter Opening and Greek Epistolography: A Matter of Relationship', p. 35.

88 Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, p. 20; Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity*, p. 14.

89 Byrskog, 'Epistolography, Rhetoric and Letter Prescript: Romans 1.1–7 as a Test Case', p. 35.

90 Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, p. 20.

91 Stanley E. Porter, 'A Functional Letter Perspective: Towards a Grammar of Epistolary Theory', in Stanley E. Porter and Sean A. Adams (eds.), *Paul and the Ancient Letter Form* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p. 19; Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity*, p. 27.

92 Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, p. 21.

93 Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity*, p. 30. Romans is the longest example of this sender unit. Here, Paul goes to great length to outline his credentials indicating that he is working very hard to establish his ethos with the church. Byrskog, 'Epistolography, Rhetoric and Letter Prescript: Romans 1.1–7 as a Test Case', p. 40.

Romans (and effectively Galatians). Here, Paul is the sole sender, as he most likely needs to assert his primary authority in the situation.⁹⁴ Scholars generally assume that these co-senders are actually the names of co-authors.⁹⁵ The mention of their names might also suggest that they are the carriers and the ultimate readers of the letter.⁹⁶

Turning to the addressee, Paul's letters were all addressed to congregations. Even in the case of a seemingly private correspondence such as Philemon, the household as well as the whole community is addressed in order to add weight to the instruction.⁹⁷ Here in particular, Paul's letters are unique. Unlike the typical letter that is only addressed to the individual, Paul's letters were communal letters addressed to *ecclesiae* or to house churches to whom he ministered in an authoritative capacity.⁹⁸ In other words, even something so basic as the opening greeting of the ancient letter is modified and expanded in Paul to deal with the uniqueness of his context. As Adams notes: 'A sizeable introduction with the title was used almost exclusively by those in the highest authority ... by lengthening his self-introduction, (Paul) is attempting to exert his influence in the hearer by increasing his epistolary presence'.⁹⁹

Paul's letters also expand and customize the standard Greek greeting. In an ancient letter, the standard greeting that follows the sender unit is 'greetings' (*chairein*). Paul, however, drastically expands this to 'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'. In this uniquely Christian greeting, Paul preserves a common Semitic practice of adding a wish for peace, while the 'grace' (*charis*) presents a play on the standard Greek and Roman *chairein*.¹⁰⁰ This new phrase 'grace and peace', with the addition of 'from God' reflects early Christian worship language adapted to the epistolary context. Tite notes, 'this innovation within early Christian epistolary style accommodates ancient conventions for the more specific context of the network of early Christian communities'.¹⁰¹ In other words, Paul combined both Greek

94 Tite, 'How to Begin, and Why?', p. 70.

95 Tite, 'How to Begin, and Why?', p. 67; Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, pp. 34–35; Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer*, p. 19.

96 Tite, 'How to Begin, and Why?', p. 70.

97 Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer*, p. 53; Tite, 'How to Begin, and Why?', p. 71.

98 Stirewalt, *Paul, the Letter Writer*, p. 9.

99 Adams, 'Paul's Letter Opening and Greek Epistolography: A Matter of Relationship', p. 50.

100 Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, p. 21; Tite, 'How to Begin, and Why?', p. 73; Adams, 'Paul's Letter Opening and Greek Epistolography: A Matter of Relationship', p. 47.

101 Tite, 'How to Begin, and Why?', p. 74. Cf. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity*, p. 29.

and Hebrew formulas and added Christian theology to make the letter greeting thoroughly Christian and identifiably his.¹⁰²

The thanksgiving sections of Paul's letters are also a unique adaption. In rhetorical terms, they function as a *capitatio benevolentiae* designed to attract the goodwill of the reader/listener, making them more attentive and receptive; they also functioned as a form of index, indicating the content or key topics of the letter to come (e.g. 1 Cor. 1.4–9).¹⁰³ At other times such as in Galatians, the thanksgiving is foregone due to the nature of the letter in which Paul is extremely upset. Instead it is substituted for another common form of ironic rebuke 'I am astonished!'¹⁰⁴

In summary, Paul expands the standard 'A to B, Greetings' formula of the Greek letter in order to address the particular situations he is writing to. His letter opening could thus serve numerous functions: to reinforce and draw upon the positive relations existing between Paul and his recipients (1 Thessalonians Philippians, and Philemon); to reinforce his authority within the context of reconciliation and advice (the Corinthian correspondence); or to claim apostolic authority either within a heightened context of conflict (Galatians) or as a form of self-recommendation or introduction (Romans).¹⁰⁵

When we turn to the body of Paul's letters, we see that they draw upon various subgenres of ancient letter writing. Stowers has extensively detailed the various genres and sub-genres of Graeco-Roman letter types and compared these to the letters of Paul. He notes that the most important was the letter of friendship. As the name would imply, this letter was used to maintain a friendship. There is no complete form of this in the New Testament, but examples of the genre exist within Paul's letters. For example, the expression 'absent in body but present in spirit' appears in 2 Cor. 5.3; Col. 2.5; 1 Thess. 2.17. Again, the theme of 'longing to be with the loved one' appears in 2 Cor. 1.16; 1 Thess. 3.6–10; Phil. 22.¹⁰⁶

There was also the letter of praise or blame. Praise and blame were fundamental activities by which the ancient world was maintained. In a world defined by honour and shame, praising or blaming were essential in locating

102 Adams, 'Paul's Letter Opening and Greek Epistolography: A Matter of Relationship', p. 48. Cf. White, 'Saint Paul and the Apostolic Letter Tradition', p. 437.

103 Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer*, p. 62; Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, p. 22; Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity*, p. 31–32.

104 Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, p. 22.

105 Tite, 'How to Begin, and Why?', p. 98.

106 Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, p. 60.

people in their appropriate place in society.¹⁰⁷ There could also be a presence of both praise and blame in the same letter. Again we find no complete New Testament letter of this genre, however, we find praise throughout the thanksgiving sections (Rom. 1.8; 1 Thess. 1.3; 2 Thess. 1.3–4) or a combination of both through 1 Cor. 11.¹⁰⁸

There was the letter of exhortation and advice. Under this broad category were numerous sub-genres, such as the paraenetic letter. These sorts of letters were intended to exhort a person towards something or dissuade them from something else. 1 Corinthians and 1 Thessalonians provide lengthy examples of this genre.¹⁰⁹ A similar sub-genre was the letter of advice, designed to give advice in various situations. 1 Corinthians combines paraenesis and advice, as does 2 Corinthians.¹¹⁰ A further sub-genre includes the protreptic letter. Philosophers and sophists used this form of rhetoric to convert listeners or readers to a particular way of life, to join their school, or accept a set of teachings appropriate to that way of life. The letter to the Romans would fall into this genre.¹¹¹ A further sub-genre is the letter of admonition. Again there is no complete New Testament example, but 1 Cor. 4.14 (e.g.) explains that the preceding instruction was intended by way of admonition.¹¹² Galatians 1.6–10 and 3.1–5 could be categorised as letters of rebuke.¹¹³ 1 Thessalonians 4.13–18 could be categorised as a letter of consolation.¹¹⁴

Other categories include the letter of mediation, which is further divided into the letter of introduction or recommendation. As the name suggests, the letter was written to introduce the bearer of the letter to its recipients or substantiate their character. 2 Corinthians 8.16–24 functions as an introduction of Titus who is collecting the offering. Similarly is the letter of mediation between two people who have fallen out of relationship. Philemon exemplifies this genre well.¹¹⁵

In examining the bodies of Paul's letters, it is quite apparent that Paul was adept in drawing on the many resources available to him. Murphy-O'Connor

107 Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, p. 77.

108 Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, p. 80.

109 Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, p. 94.

110 Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, pp. 107–109.

111 Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, p. 112–14.

112 Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, p. 128.

113 Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, p. 134.

114 Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, p. 145.

115 Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, p. 155.

gives the following categorisation of Paul's letters according to the twenty-one types listed by Pseudo-Demetrius:¹¹⁶

Romans:	Mixed, essentially protreptic but with a commendatory conclusion
1 Corinthians:	Mixed, paraenetic and advisory
2 Corinthians:	Mixed, hortatory, advisory, blaming, threatening, accusing
Galatians:	Mixed, hortatory and advisory
Philippians:	Mixed, paraenetic, commendatory, thankful
1 Thessalonians:	Paraenetic
2 Thessalonians:	Admonishing
Philemon:	Supplicatory
2 Timothy:	Paraenetic

Finally, as we look at the closing greetings of Paul's letters, it is here that he is closest to the standard formulas, though he still adds his own religious flavour with the request for a holy kiss.¹¹⁷ In summary, Paul's letters are both a product of their communication culture as well as a unique development of the same. Already Paul emerges as one who effectively plays with the elements of epistolary style in order persuasively influence the recipients of his letters.¹¹⁸ But there is another side to his letters, one that further sets them apart from anything else at the time. While Paul's letters clearly served the purposes of a formal letter, they also functioned as speeches.

¹¹⁶ Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer*, pp. 97–98. For other discussion and examples of epistolary styles in Paul's letters, see e.g., Terence Y. Mullins, 'Formulas in New Testament Epistles', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91.3 (1972), pp. 380–90; Alexander, 'Hellenistic Letter Forms and the Structure of Philippians'; John L. White, 'Introductory Formulae in the Body of the Pauline Letter', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 90.1 (1971), pp. 91–97. Porter, 'A Functional Letter Perspective: Towards a Grammar of Epistolary Theory', p. 16, has also noted specific formulas within Paul's epistles. These include the thanksgiving formula, disclosure, petition, joy, astonishment, reiteration, hearing or learning, affirmation, blessing and doxology, greetings, and travelogue. For a similar list and discussion, see White, 'Introductory Formulae in the Body of the Pauline Letter'; Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity*, pp. 34–35.

¹¹⁷ White, 'Saint Paul and the Apostolic Letter Tradition', p. 438.

¹¹⁸ Tite, 'How to Begin, and Why?', p. 98.

Paul's Letters as Speeches

It is quite clear from the above discussion that what Paul wrote was letters that drew upon a mixture of ancient epistolary categories. But in as much as they were letters, they were also speeches, designed to be read aloud to the gathered community (cf. 1 Thess. 5.27; Col. 4.16), many of whom unable to read themselves.¹¹⁹ Their primary function was to persuade people to a certain point of view or action, and as such, needed to draw upon rhetorical methods of style and argumentation to accomplish this end.¹²⁰ Some scholars even go as far to suggest that they were rhetorical speeches within an epistolary framework, wholly dependent on the rhetorical handbooks for their structure;¹²¹ however, caution needs to be applied here.¹²²

As speeches, Paul's letters make considerable use of a variety of rhetorical methods and devices. For example, metaphor, parallelism, antithesis, chiasm, figures of repetition, anticipation, apostrophe, *prosopopoiia*, rhetorical questions, and personification are all drawn upon, serving mnemonic purposes.¹²³

119 Stirewalt, *Paul, the Letter Writer*, p. 14.

120 R. Dean Anderson, *Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Paul* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 18; Leuven: Peeters, 1999), p. 127; Steven J. Kraftchick, 'Pathē in Paul: The Emotional Logic of "Original Argument"', in Thomas H. Olbricht and Jerry L. Sumney (eds.), *Paul and Pathos* (Symposium Series (SBL) 16; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), p. 43.

121 Witherington, *The Paul Quest*, p. 119; Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer*, p. 65; Byrskog, 'Epistolography, Rhetoric and Letter Prescript: Romans 1.1–7 as a Test Case', p. 27.

122 Letter writing was not an important topic in the schools of oratory, ancient opinion judged the letter to be a different thing to a rhetorical speech. Rhetoric and epistolography belonged to different theoretical systems. For discussion, see Byrskog, 'Epistolography, Rhetoric and Letter Prescript: Romans 1.1–7 as a Test Case', p. 33; Duane F. Watson, 'The Role of Style in the Pauline Epistles', in J. Paul Sampley and Peter Lampe (eds.), *Paul and Rhetoric* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2010), p. 42. It was also never integrated into the rhetorical handbooks, meaning there were never the detailed systematic rules for letters as there was for speech. However, rules for certain speech types were adapted and incorporated into the corresponding letter types. See Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, p. 34. Cf. Anderson, *Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Paul*, p. 118, and for discussion and critique, see pp. 119–21; Lampe, 'Rhetorical Analysis of Pauline Texts-Quo Vadit?'; Kraftchick, 'Pathē in Paul: The Emotional Logic of "Original Argument"', pp. 39–41; C. Joachim Classen, 'St Paul's Epistles and Ancient Greek and Roman Rhetoric', in Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht (eds.), *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference* (JSNTSup 90; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), pp. 265–91. In other words, there was a clear distinction in the ancient world between letters and speeches.

123 Watson, 'The Role of Style in the Pauline Epistles', p. 133.

His use of strong words, metaphors, comparison, parallelism, antithesis, synonymy, asyndeton, climax, and personification are suited to develop and amplify his argumentation.¹²⁴ Of the five aspects of rhetorical practice, invention (*inventio*), arrangement (*dispositio*), style (*elocutio*), memory (*memoria*), and delivery (*pronunciatio*), the first three are found throughout the letters.¹²⁵

Paul also draws upon the three main branches of ancient oratory. That is, judicial, which sought to convince an audience of the rightness or wrongness of a past action; deliberative, which tries to persuade or dissuade certain individuals concerning the expediency of a future action; and epideictic, which used praise or blame to urge people to affirm a point of view or set of values in the present.¹²⁶ Standard letters in the Graeco-Roman world were generally associated with the epideictic division of rhetoric.¹²⁷ Paul's letters, however, combined all three of these in various degrees to communicate his message.¹²⁸ Scholars generally agree that Philemon can be classified as deliberative rhetoric, Philippians as largely epideictic, 1 Thessalonians is also best classified as epideictic rhetoric; 1 Corinthians is generally agreed to be deliberative rhetoric, while 2 Corinthians is a blend of epideictic and deliberative; arguments are made for Romans as an example of judicial rhetoric; and Galatians is seen as deliberative.¹²⁹ In other words, as with his letter writing, so with his use of oratory, Paul draws from all of the rhetorical methods available to him and adapts them to his own needs with the end goal of their performance.

The Performance of a Letter

It has already been noted above that private, silent reading and writing simply did not exist in this period. Texts were produced to be read aloud in a

124 Watson, 'The Role of Style in the Pauline Epistles', p. 137.

125 Jeffrey T. Reed, 'Using Rhetorical Categories to Interpret Paul's Letters: A Question of Genre', in Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht (eds.), *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference* (JSNTSup 90; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), p. 296.

126 Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer*, pp. 66–68; William W Klein, Craig L Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Nelson, 2004), p. 432.

127 Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, p. 27.

128 Forbes, 'Ancient Rhetoric and Ancient Letters: Models for Reading Paul, and Their Limits', p. 148.

129 Duane F. Watson, 'The Three Species of Rhetoric and the Study of the Pauline Epistles', in J. Paul Sampley and Peter Lampe (eds.), *Paul and Rhetoric* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2010), pp. 28–37.

communal setting.¹³⁰ In fact, letters could be employed purely for aesthetic enjoyment. In this context, the letter was a means of entertainment amongst the leisured elite.¹³¹ Authors such as Pliny, Cicero, and Seneca would compile their letters and publish them in books.¹³² In this way, Paul is once again drawing upon the communicative methods of his culture.

Paul's letters were intended for public use within the religious gatherings; each letter was to be read and re-read in order to teach, lead, and secure the stance of the believers.¹³³ Like most ancient letters, their function was to stand in for the absence of the author. They were written as a representation of speech to be performed by a trained lector. This person became the mouthpiece that would allow the audience to read the letter for themselves. They were meant to represent the voice and persona of the author; their task was to re-enact and bring to life the original performance of the text through facial expressions, gesticulations, and vocal inflections,¹³⁴ all considered essential parts of effective communication. Ancient people were trained to read aloud; intonation, cadence of syllables, and rhythm were all parts of effective communication.¹³⁵ During the performance of the text, the variety of sound patterns would assault and provoke, sooth and delight the audiences.¹³⁶ It is in this way that we need to picture Paul's letters being presented to the congregations by those whom he sent.

It was mentioned before that the co-senders named in the opening greetings were the carriers of the letter. Presumably it was this person that also delivered them orally in front of the addressed audiences.¹³⁷ Paul's initial dictation of the letter would have been a coaching of this carrier and eventual reader. It was the carrier's responsibility to ensure that the letter was read like Paul wanted it to.¹³⁸ This process of reading aloud re-animated the words and secured the

130 Dewey, 'The Gospel of Mark as an Oral-Aural Event: Implications for Interpretation', p. 145.

131 Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, pp. 34–35.

132 Cf. Cicero, *Ad Fam.* 17.1; Seneca, *Ep.* 75.1–2. Pliny writes many letters regarding private readings in small gatherings, or being requested or requesting a review of a new book or piece of writing (cf. *Ep.* 2.9.1–4; 3.13, 15; 4.14, 20, 26, 27; 5.3, 12; 7.2, 12, 17, 20; 8.3, 12, 14, 16, 21; 9.31, 34).

133 Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity*, pp. 25–26.

134 Brickle, 'Seeing, Hearing, Declaring, Writing', pp. 17–18.

135 Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, p. 202.

136 Brickle, 'Seeing, Hearing, Declaring, Writing', p. 19.

137 Lampe, 'Rhetorical Analysis of Pauline Texts-Quo Vadit?', p. 14.

138 Pieter J.J. Botha, 'The Verbal Art of the Pauline Letters: Rhetoric, Performance and Presence', in Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht (eds.), *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference* (JSNTSup 90; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), p. 417.

sense of the Paul's presence in the room.¹³⁹ In regard to the authority of the messenger, an envoy in this culture had significant power and authority to speak for those who sent them in accordance with their instruction.¹⁴⁰ (S)he was expected to be treated with the same authority as the one who sent them, rather than their own.¹⁴¹ In this way also, Paul expects his own envoys to be treated (cf. 1 Cor. 16.11). The messenger could also fill in any missing details from the letter. For example, Tychicus, who was carrying the letter to the Colossians was able to fill in the information about Paul (Col. 4.7).¹⁴² They were also able to report back to Paul the outcomes or responses to the letter.¹⁴³ Listeners were also expected to react and interact with the 'performance', even provide critical feedback, making the whole process of reading a complex communal event.¹⁴⁴

Paul's Letters Like Nothing Else of their Time

In summary, we can see that Paul was able to draw upon the communicative resources available to him as well as to improvise and adapt these to his own needs. In many ways, he was an innovator, perhaps ahead of his time. By adopting Graeco-Roman letter models for Christian purposes Paul in fact created a new genre or sub-genre.¹⁴⁵

By his own admission he overrode the concern for rhetorical convention for the sake of the preaching of the gospel without emptying its power (1 Cor. 1.17) ... not only are the content and setting of Paul's epistles different from those prescribed for the rhetorical species, but so are the epistles themselves. Paul created a new genre that does not fit the classical categories. Paul is not writing a speech or a letter per se, but a speech in an epistolary form to be delivered orally by his co-workers.¹⁴⁶

Paul recognised the ministerial needs confronting him and adopted, moulded, and devised a communicative form equal to the challenge. The freedom that Paul used in adapting and transforming the available epistolary models encouraged the transformation of people's lives and at the same time grounded

139 Stirewalt, *Paul, the Letter Writer*, p. 16.

140 Mitchell, 'New Testament Envoys', p. 649.

141 Mitchell, 'New Testament Envoys', p. 647.

142 Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, p. 201.

143 Stirewalt, *Paul, the Letter Writer*, p. 23.

144 Botha, *Orality and Literacy in Early Christianity*, p. 105.

145 Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity*, p. 21.

146 Watson, 'The Three Species of Rhetoric and the Study of the Pauline Epistles', p. 44.

them in a new kind of stability.¹⁴⁷ As Stirewalt notes, 'The Pauline letters arose in a unique setting and may be said to constitute an addition to the epistolary corpus'.¹⁴⁸ This innovation is well described by Forbes:

Paul's congregational letters, then, are a remarkably isolated phenomenon in their cultural context. This is true both at a purely literary level, and in terms of the social context which generated them. As the leader of a loose group of travelling missionaries and as a community-founder, Paul set himself to build and maintain a network of remarkably heterogeneous small groups. They were held together by shared experience, shared beliefs and values, and a regular flow of communication, both in terms of personal visits and via letters. His own prestige as a founder-figure and his ability to persuade were his primary tools of 'social control'. He could cajole, exhort, threaten, or even command, but his whole understanding of Christian community required him to rely on the decisions of his churches. It would seem that, to deal with the exigencies of his task, he developed a highly personal letter-type, the 'congregational letter', which over time became a model for other Christian leaders working in similar circumstances. It worked within the flexible boundaries of the conventional inter-personal letter, appropriating and modifying conventional introductory and greeting formulae, health wishes and transitional forms, and farewell formulae as well. But within these conventional structures, variously modified, Paul stretches the letter-form almost to breaking point. He writes elaborate theological arguments, personal appeals, denunciations and ethical paraenesis, all designed to be delivered in speech to the assemblies of his converts. Paul's letters were not written to be read, but to be performed. As such they function as speeches, as rhetoric, every bit as much as they function as conventional letters. They are thoroughly atypical letters, in size, in content and in style, precisely because they are letters designed to be delivered orally to (thoroughly atypical) groups.¹⁴⁹

In conclusion, it is quite clear that Paul was a remarkable innovator in his means of communicating to the Christina communities he had established. In

¹⁴⁷ Stirewalt, *Paul, the Letter Writer*, p. 116.

¹⁴⁸ Stirewalt, *Paul, the Letter Writer*, p. 26.

¹⁴⁹ Forbes, 'Ancient Rhetoric and Ancient Letters: Models for Reading Paul, and Their Limits', pp. 158–59.

fact, Paul's style of letter became influential for all other NT letters,¹⁵⁰ and his practice of letter writing became the standard means of community formation and control for centuries in the early church.¹⁵¹

Conclusion

I began this paper by noting Martin's comments that Pentecostalism has traditionally placed emphasis on hearing and that it shares much with historic Christianity. As this study has now shown, Pentecostalism does indeed share a fundamental similarity to the early church. Not only is it similar in its oral nature, it is also similar in its innovative use of modern media. Pentecostals, like Paul, use preaching as a means of community formation and maintaining social cohesion. As William Kay notes:

Preaching needs to be able to create and shape newly formed Spirit-filled congregations. [Preachers] need to be able to teach about the relationship between spiritual gifts and ministry gifts, to impart faith, to establish patterns of life synchronised with the secular lives of church attenders, and to teach until moral habits are embedded and spiritual disciplines are established. Preachers need to be wise enough to measure preaching by its results rather than by its polish or sophistication. They need to be able to understand the variety of church structures that can be drawn from New Testament principles and to be able to show in their own lives how to stand counter culturally against the mainstream of opinion – just as the early Pentecostal preachers did in respect to war or ridicule.¹⁵²

But as we have seen in this study, the Pentecostal practice of adopting modern communication tools and technology to do this also aligns it with the earliest Christian practices. We, like Paul, recognise the value of communicating to a modern audience with modern techniques, and the results speak for themselves.

150 White, 'Saint Paul and the Apostolic Letter Tradition', p. 442.

151 Koester, 'Writings and the Spirit', p. 360.

152 Kay, 'The Ecclesial Dimension of Preaching', pp. 207–208.