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INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study is to determine the literary structure of First Corinthians 12–14, by way of the consideration of a multiplicity of literary indicators and their convergence. A determination of this structure constitutes an important aid to an understanding of Paul’s argumentation in the said chapters, particularly, the function of chapter 13. Furthermore, it offers a response to various questions relative to the authenticity of certain sections of 1 Cor 12–14.

1. Literary Unity of 1 Cor 12–14

Chapters 12–14 of the First Letter to the Corinthians have been the object of particular attention in biblical studies, especially by reason of the profound content of chapter 13, concerned with love.1 Nevertheless, the peculiar character of the said chapter has provoked certain problems in its interpretation, especially vis-à-vis its relationship with the preceding (chap. 12) and succeeding (chap. 14) chapters.

While in chaps. 12 and 13 Paul discusses the question of the charisms, in chap. 13 he seems to create a parenthesis, or “digression”.2 Indeed, some


authors actually consider it to be the later insertion of a passage originally located elsewhere.

Thus, for example, according to Weiss, chap. 13 originally followed chap. 8, and belonged to another letter to the Corinthians. Schenke-Fischer maintain the view that chap. 13 belonged to a "Vorbrief", a preliminary letter, and is therefore foreign to chaps. 12 and 14. Orr and Walthers consider chap. 13 as having been written by Paul separately from chaps. 12 and 14, and as having been added to the latter at the moment of redaction 1 Cor 12–14. Barretts, however, holds that it was added later. Schmithals and Schenk, for their part, propose that 12:31b-13:13 originally followed chap. 14. Di belius is of the opinion that Paul may have intercalated between chaps. 12 and 14 a sermon that he had prepared for public delivery. Schmid also considers chap. 13 a separate Pauline composition. Sanders maintains that the text was transferred from its original location, and inserted in its current place, by a redactor.

Other authors even maintain that chap. 13 is of non-Pauline origin, or that chap. 13 is a combination of various texts. According to Conzelmann, for example, while a literary unity, 1 Cor 13 is the outcome of a combination of three different passages: vv. 1-3, 4-7, and 8-13.
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The upshot of all of this is that it is sometimes preferable to study chap. 13 in isolation, without relating it to chaps. 12 and 14. Weiss, for example, asserts that it is useful to consider chap. 13 without reference to its current connection with chaps. 12 and 14.13

The question of the literary unity of 1 Cor 12–14 has been the object of many discussions. Nevertheless, the majority of commentators opt for maintaining the literary unity of chaps. 12–14. Suffice it to mention, among others, E. Allo 14, G. Barbaglio 15, U. Brockhaus 16, F. Bruce 17, R. Collins 18, F. Grosheide 19, W. Grudem 20, J. Hurd 21, M. Mitchell 22, W. Schrage 23, T. Söding 24, B. Standaert 25, O. Wischmeyer 26.

But the question of the function of chap. 13 with respect to chaps. 12 and 14 has not been resolved. Indeed, there is a great diversity of opinion with regard to the internal articulation of 1 Cor 12–14, and the function of chap. 13.

For Grudem, Paul’s thought is linear. Everyone possesses spiritual gifts (c. 12); but these must be used with love (chap. 13), for the edification of the community (chap. 14).27 A similar position is that of Brockhaus, who maintains that chap. 13 lays the foundation for a presentation of edification as the

“Chap. 13… Internally, the passage is composed of various stylistic forms, to which various other materials correspond.”

15 Cf. G. Barbaglio, La Prima Lettera ai Corinzi (SOC 7; Bologna 1995) 609.
17 Cf. F.F. Bruce, 1 and 2 Corinthians (NCBC; Grand Rapids – London 1971) 124-126.
18 Cf. R. Collins, First Corinthians (SP 7; Collegeville, MI 1999) 443.
19 Cf. F.W. Grosheide, Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians (Grand Rapids, MI 1953) 303.
27 Cf. Grudem, Gift, 57.
finality of the charisms. SMIT disagrees, assigning chap. 13 a polemical function, instead. According to SMIT, chap. 13 is ironical and concerns the Corinthians’ ambitious quest for greater charisms: compared with love, nothing is of any value. Chap. 13 is an attempt to devalue the charisms. For HURD, chaps. 12–14 are a criticism of the Corinthians’ conception that glossolalia is the greatest manifestation of the Spirit. Actually, it is lesser, (chap. 12), and love is the greatest (chap 14). So glossolalia ought to be suppressed from public practice (chap. 14). FOR MARTIN, the unit constituted by chaps. 12–14 concerns the gift of glossolalia alone, and chap. 13 means to present the characteristics of love in contrast with the glossolalia of Corinth. Finally, for WISCHMEYER, the charisms are all of them equal, and in themselves contain no soteriological value. Love alone (chap. 13) joins the human being to God in enduring fashion.

2. Literary Structure of 1 Cor 12–14

With a view to a resolution of the questions mentioned in the preceding section, the question has been posed of a determination of the literary genre of chap. 13, and consequently a determination of its function with respect to chaps. 12 and 14. The studies of SMIT and SIGOUNTOS constitute a good example.

But the dominant focus has been on an attempt to determine the literary structure of 1 Cor 12–14, and consequently to conclude to the function or chap. 13 in the said structure. The basic notion of the latter focus is rooted in the premise that every text must present a structure, and that the logical function of each section of the text depends upon its position in that structure.

But what type of structure underlies 1 Cor 12–14? The structures proposed for these can be classified in two groups: formal or literary structures and rhetorical structures.

While the formal or literary structures have been established especially on the basis of relations between words, or else between subjects, the rhetorical structures have been determined especially on the basis of parallels with classical literature.

28 Cf. BROCKHAUS, Charisma, 175-185.
31 Cf. HURD, Origin, 192.
33 Cf. WISCHMEYER, Weg, 30.
The two foci are not altogether exclusive. Indeed, both foci entertain a consideration of the presence of vocables or key subjects in the text, which may in some manner give the key to an understanding of the subject to be treated in the text, as well as of their development.

However, what has been missing in both cases is a systematic consideration of literary indications to be considered, as well as rigorous criteria in their management. Without these elements, a determination of the structure is based on subjective criteria, resulting in mutually incompatible structures.

3. Convergence of Literary Indications

The object of the present study is an investigation of the structure of chaps. 12–14 as a whole, based on a series of objective literary indications, and rigorously employing rules in considering them. The literary indications that we shall be considering are: (a) announcements of theme (propositiones), (b) characteristic vocabulary, (d) change of literary genre, (d) inclusions, (e) hook-words, (f) symmetrical arrangements, and (g) figures. Except for the last of these indications, all have been proposed by A. Vанхоэй, who has applied them to a study of the Letter to the Hebrews.36 Vанхоэй himself has summarily presented a proposal relating to the text of 1 Cor 12–14, without detailing the reasons for this proposal.37 The present work constitutes a detailed application of his method to the text of 1 Cor 12–14.

Our study is articulated in the following fashion. First, a view is given of the main structural proposals of 1 Cor 12–14, as well as a detailed critique of the said proposals38 (chaps. 1-2). Then we conduct a study of the structural literary indications of 1 Cor 12–14, and deduce from them a structure (chap. 3). Finally, the theological consequences to be derived from the adoption of that structure are indicated (chap. 4).

The method employed is Vанхоэй’s method of a consideration of literary structure. This method has been employed here in detailed fashion, with the
intent of demonstrating the objective and rigorous use of various literary indications. The present work is therefore offered as a practical, detailed example of the method in question.

Although a discussion of the unity of 1 Cor 12–14 or the specific function of chap. 13 are not the principal objective of this work, a determination of the literary structure of 1 Cor 12–14 will offer a response to these questions.
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