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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

¹ Cf. R. KIEFFER, *Le primat de l’amour*. Commentaire épistémologique de 1 Corinthiens 13 “(LD 85; Paris 1975); J.T. SANDERS, “First Corinthians 13. Its Interpretation Since the first World War”, *Int* 20 (1966) 159-187; D. WISCHMEYER, *Der höchste Weg*. Das 13. Kapitel des 1. Korintherbriefes (SNT 13; Mohn 1981).

² E.g.: G. FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI 1987) 626; J. KREMER, *Der Erste Brief an die Korinther* (Regensburger Neues Testament; Regensburg 1997) 279; W.G. KÜMMEL, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (Heidelberg 1983²¹) § 16,1: “exkursartig”; V. MASALLES, *La Profecía en la Asamblea Cristiana*. Análisis retórico-literario de 1 Cor 14,1-25 (TG.T 74; Roma 2001) 146-147; A. ROBERTSON – A. PLUMMER, *First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (ICC; Edinburgh 1911) 285; J. SMIT, “Argument and Genre of 1 Corinthians 12–14”, *Rhetoric and the New Testament*. Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference (ed. T. Olbricht – S. Porter) (Sheffield 1993) 228; B. STANDAERT, “1 Corinthiens 13”, *Charisma und Agapè (1 Ko 12–14)*. (ed. L. de Lorenzi) (Rome 1983) 127; IDEM, “Analyse Rhétorique”, 29-30; J. WEISS, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (MeyK 5; Göttingen 1910⁹) 311; B. WITHERINGTON, *Conflict and Community*. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians

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.³ SCHENKE-FISCHER maintain the view that chap. 13 belonged to a “Vorbrief”, a preliminary letter, and is therefore foreign to chaps. 12 and 14.⁴ ORR and WALTHER 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 12–14.⁵ BARRETT, however, holds that it was added later.⁶ SCHMITHALS and SCHENK, for their part, propose that 12:31b-13:13 originally followed chap. 14.⁷ DIBELIUS is of the opinion that Paul may have intercalated between chaps. 12 and 14 a sermon that he had prepared for public delivery.⁸ SCHMID also considers chap. 13 a separate Pauline composition.⁹ SANDERS maintains that the text was transferred from its original location, and inserted in its current place, by a redactor.¹⁰

Other authors even maintain that chap. 13 is of non-Pauline origin,¹¹ 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 8-13.¹²

(Grand Rapids 1995) 264; W. WUELLNER, “Greek Rhetoric and Pauline Argumentation”, *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition* (FS. Robert M. Grant) (Hrsg. W.R. Schoedel – R.L. Wilken) (Théologie Historique 54; Paris 1979) 185,187-188.

³ Cf. WEISS, *Korintherbrief*, 309-311.

⁴ Cf. H.-M. SCHENKE – K.M. FISCHER, *Einleitung in die Schriften des Neuen Testaments I. Die Briefe des Paulus und Schriften des Paulinismus* (Gütersloh 1978) 93-94.

⁵ Cf. W. ORR – J. WALTHER, *1 Corinthians* (AB; Garden City, NY 1976) 290.

⁶ Cf. C.K. BARRETT, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York 1968) 297: “It may be that the awkwardness of the sentence [12:31b] is due to the fact that the connection between chapter xii and chapter xiii is somewhat artificial. It suggests the view... that chapter xiii, though written by Paul, was not written by him freshly for the present occasion, but was inserted because he saw its relevance to the argument, and to the Corinthian situation.”; see also p.299.

⁷ Cf. W. SCHMITHALS, *Die Gnosis in Korinth. Eine Untersuchung zu den Korintherbriefen* (Göttingen 1956) 17; IDEM, “Die Korintherbriefe als Briefsammlung”, *ZNW* 64 (1973) 268-269; W. SCHENK, “Der 1. Korintherbrief als Briefsammlung”, *ZNW* 60 (1969) 226-229.

⁸ Cf. M. DIBELIUS, “Zur Formgeschichte des Neuen Testaments”, *TRu* 3 (1931) 231.

⁹ Cf. U. SCHMID, *Die Priamel der Werte im Griechischen von Homer bis Paulus* (Wiesbaden 1964) 136.

¹⁰ Cf. SANDERS, “Corinthians”, 181-187.

¹¹ E.g.: E. LEHMANN – A. FRIDRICHSEN, “1 Kor. 13. Eine christlichstoische Diatribe”, *TSK Sonderheft* (1922) 55-95; E.L. TITUS, “Did Paul write 1 Corinthians 13?”, *JBR* 27 (1959) 299-302; W.O. WALKER, “Is First Corinthians 13 a Non-Pauline Interpolation?”, *CBQ* 60 (1998) 484-499.

¹² H. CONZELMANN, *Der erste Brief and die Korinther* (MeyerK 5; Göttingen 1969) 256-257:

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. ALLO¹⁴, G. BARBAGLIO¹⁵, U. BROCKHAUS¹⁶, F. BRUCE¹⁷, R. COLLINS¹⁸, F. GROSHEIDE¹⁹, W. GRUDEM²⁰, J. HURD²¹, M. MITCHELL²², W. SCHRAGE²³, T. SÖDING²⁴, B. STANDAERT²⁵, O. WISCHMEYER²⁶.

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.”

¹³ Cf. WEISS, *Korintherbrief*, 311; también: CONZELMANN, *Korinther*, 264.

¹⁴ Cf. E.B. ALLO, *Saint Paul. Première Épître aux Corinthiens* (EB; Paris 1956) 340-342.

¹⁵ Cf. G. BARBAGLIO, *La Prima Lettera ai Corinzi* (SOC 7; Bologna 1995) 609.

¹⁶ Cf. U. BROCKHAUS, *Charisma und Amt. Die paulinische Charismenlehre auf dem Hintergrund der frühchristlichen Gemeindefunktionen* (Wuppertal 1975) 175-185.

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.

²⁰ Cf. W.A. GRUDEM, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* (Washington 1982) 57.

²¹ Cf. J. HURD, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (Macon, Georgia 1983) 189-192.

²² Cf. M. MITCHELL, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation. An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie 28; Tübingen 1991) 270-271.

²³ Cf. W. SCHRAGE, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (EKKNT 7/3; Neukirchen 1999) 3:276-277.

²⁴ Cf. T. SÖDING, *Das Liebesgebot bei Paulus. Die Mahnung zur Agape im Rahmen der paulinischen Ethik* (NTAbH NF 26; Münster 1995) 124.

²⁵ Cf. B. STANDAERT, “Corinthiens 13”, 127; IDEM, “Analyse rhétorique des chapitres 12 à 14 de 1 Co”. *Charisma und Agapè (1 Ko 12–14)* (ed. L. De Lorenzi) (Rome 1983) 32.

²⁶ Cf. WISCHMEYER, *Weg*, 29-31.

²⁷ Cf. GRUDEM, *Gift*, 57.

finality of the charisms.²⁸ 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.²⁹ Chap. 13 is an attempt to devalue the charisms.³⁰ 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).³¹ 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.³² 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.³³

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 SMIT³⁴ and SIGOUNTOS³⁵ 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.

²⁹ J. SMIT, "Two Puzzles: 1 Corinthians 12,31 and 13,3: A Rhetorical Solution", *NTS* 39 (1993) 262s.

³⁰ J. SMIT, "The Genre of 1 Corinthians 13 in the Light of Classical Rhetoric", *NT* 33 (1991) 215.

³¹ Cf. HURD, *Origin*, 192.

³² Cf. Ira J. MARTIN, "1 Corinthians 13 Interpreted by Its Context", *JBR* 18 (1950) 101-105.

³³ Cf. WISCHMEYER, *Weg*, 30.

³⁴ Cf. SMIT, "Argument", 211-230.

³⁵ Cf. J. SIGOUNTOS, "The Genre of 1 Corinthians", *NTS* 40 (1994) 246-260.

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. VANHOYE, who has applied them to a study of the Letter to the Hebrews.³⁶ VANHOYE 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 VANHOYE's method of a consideration of literary structure. This method has been employed here in detailed fashion, with the

³⁶ A. VANHOYE, *La structure littéraire de l'épître aux Hébreux* (Paris 1976).

³⁷ A. VANHOYE, *I carismi nel Nuovo Testamento* (Roma 1990) 32-96.

³⁸ The structures that we have considered have been those whose authors present a more or less detailed justification. Although the commentaries on First Corinthians are countless, the commentators generally do not present a demonstration or justification of the structure that they have proposed. Even extremely detailed commentaries, like that of SCHRAGE (W. SCHRAGE, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (EKKNT 7/1-4, Neukirchen, 1991-99, 4 vols.)), which offers an excellent grammatical analysis of 1 Cor 12–14 throughout its analysis, only presents, at the beginning, two pages of discussion on the theological-literary articulation of 1 Cor 12–14 (SCHRAGE, *Korinther*, 3:111-113). Likewise to be mentioned is the recent commentary by THISELTON (A. C. THISELTON, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC, Grand Rapids, Mich., 2000)), which gives a fine, detailed view of the current debate with reference to each verse of the letter, but without discussing a literary plan of the unit 1 Cor 12–14.

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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