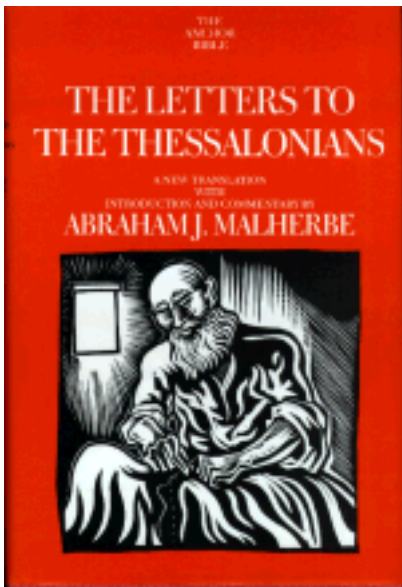


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Malherbe, Abraham J.

The Letters to the Thessalonians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary

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1. Introduction

In this eagerly awaited commentary on the Thessalonian letters, Abraham J. Malherbe, Buckingham Professor Emeritus of New Testament Criticism and Interpretation at Yale Divinity School, provides a translation and detailed exposition of these two shorter New Testament letters, both of which he considers genuinely Pauline. His interpretation places a salutary focus on the two areas where he has contributed important research in New Testament studies throughout his distinguished scholarly career: (1) ancient epistolography, and (2) forms of moral education and exhortation. The composite picture, one well anticipated in Malherbe's earlier studies on 1 Thessalonians,¹ is of Paul as a dedicated religious leader who through the epistolary medium engages in long-distance pastoral care with his recent converts—new Christ-believers who, though in general commendably faithful, require the apostle's guidance and mentorship to mature in the faith. In Malherbe's view 1 Thessalonians, written four months after Paul had left the community, "is essentially a pastoral letter" (78) that Paul wrote, not to address opponents or charges against himself, but to provide them with on-going "paraenesis." Extending beyond his previous scholarship on the first letter, Malherbe here argues that

¹ *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophic Tradition of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989; collected essays from 1968–86).

1 Thessalonians was, unfortunately, misunderstood, both because there was no single audience at Thessaloniki (with Jewish converts and Gentile converts not seeing things always the same way) and, most importantly, due to the fact that, he speculates, an unreliable “glossed or emended copy of 1 Thessalonians” (355) was circulating among some readers, resulting in the eschatological miscalculations Paul confronts so soon thereafter in 2 Thessalonians.

Despite this shift in the historical situation, in Malherbe’s reading both letters show Paul participating in pedagogical strategies that have many analogues in the philosophical schools and popular oratory of his time. Indeed, the most impressive contribution of this commentary is its careful and plentiful citations of parallel material in such authors as Epictetus, Seneca, Dio Chrysostom and Plutarch.² The importance of these correspondences for Malherbe’s thinking cannot be overestimated (even as he here goes to greater lengths than in previous writings to emphasize also Paul’s distinctiveness as a theologian vis-à-vis these philosophers). Indeed, by tracing Malherbe’s research from his earliest articles to this commentary one can perceive the crucial role played by a single passage from Dio Chrysostom (in which the itinerant popular philosopher, with tongue in cheek, sought to convince the Alexandrines that he was different from “the sophists”), which, because of its numerous lexical resonances with 1 Thess 2:1–9 in particular, has become a cornerstone of Malherbe’s interpretation of the Thessalonian correspondence as standing within philosophical traditions of paraenesis.³

2. Patristic Exegesis in Malherbe’s Commentary: Overview

A new feature of the present commentary is the prominence given, not just to Dio, the renegade “golden mouth” of the early second sophistic, but also to the Christian “golden mouth,” John Chrysostom, who will follow two and a half centuries later, and to other early Greek readers of Paul. Although Malherbe cites the philosophers more often than these early Christian exegetes, he draws upon the latter at some key junctures to corroborate his reading of the Thessalonian correspondence as rooted in significant and illustrious precedent. My assignment in this review is to evaluate the place and appropriateness of use of patristic interpretation in the unfolding of Malherbe’s contemporary scholarly reading of the Thessalonian letters.

² See the index on pp. 490–96 for the depth and amplitude of these references.

³ Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 32.11–12; see its role already in the 1970 essay, “‘Gentle as a Nurse’: The Cynic Background to 1 Thess. 2,” *NovT* 12 (1970): 203–17; reprinted in *Paul and the Popular Philosophers*, 35–48. Dio’s *Alexandrian Oration* is rhetorically a very complex speech, self-consciously and overtly poised awkwardly and suggestively across the boundary between epideictic and deliberative oration. It deserves further investigation in its own right and in relation to scholarship that debates the rhetorical categories that might or might not be applicable to 1 Thessalonians.

First, I would like to register enthusiastic applause for Malherbe's decision to broaden the net of the Pauline interpreters consulted beyond the customary attention to modern European and American publications from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This direction in scholarship, to emphasize the history of reception and the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the text, is only to be encouraged. Despite some recent forays into this territory, patristic Pauline interpretation remains on the whole a field sadly and unaccountably neglected by contemporary New Testament scholars. One hopes others will continue the undertaking.⁴ Second, Malherbe has taken an important step by his recognition—which I regard as very much on the right track—that the earliest exegetes are uncommonly valuable for more than simple lexical matters (though this is of course not to be dismissed); they can possibly tell us much about how members of the same broad Greco-Roman literary culture as Paul evaluated his epistolary practice, his style and tone, and his catechetical purpose. The fathers play a key role in Malherbe's commentary because he claims that they corroborate its main thesis: the designation of these letters as “pastoral,” “paraenetic,” and “psychagogic”:

The identification of 1 Thessalonians as pastoral and paraenetic is not new. Patristic commentators, especially John Chrysostom and Theodoret, frequently comment on Paul's pastoral sensitivities and in the process use the language of paraenesis and psychagogy. (86)

3. Modern Questions and Patristic Answers

The key issue for evaluating this central argument is whether Malherbe's questions correspond with what he takes to be patristic answers. In line with modern exegetical approaches Malherbe's preoccupation is with the identification of the literary type of these letters and of the “traditions” they incorporate. For him paraenesis stands as a counterthesis to other proposals about the genre and purpose of these letters, as either apocalyptic, rhetorical (epideictic, deliberative, or forensic argumentation), consolatory, or didactic. Malherbe presents paraenesis as a designation superior to any of these other options; his argument proceeds either by outright *rejection* (1 Thessalonians, particularly 2:1–12, is not apologetic [153–56], nor did Paul employ the classic species of Greco-Roman rhetoric [96]), *diminishment* (Malherbe continually states that Paul's use of apocalyptic traditions was “sparse” or minimizing [274–76, 402–3]), or *absorption* (consolation, he claims, “was viewed as belonging to” paraenesis [279]). By treating the patristic authors through selected quotations of their comments construed as exegetical

⁴ Perhaps more would be incited to follow his lead if he had included patristic authors in the list of commentaries at the beginning of the volume (19–21; the only one there is Theodore of Mopsuestia). See the last note of this review essay for further bibliographic discussion.

judgments (in much the same way as he does modern commentators), Malherbe concludes that they stand in support of his thesis, chiefly because they use similar terms. But can patristic interpreters be read piecemeal, apart from the larger network of interpretive assumptions and procedures within which they operated?

In Chrysostom's case, for example, his "writings" are not "commentaries" but stenographic and in some cases reedited records of orally delivered homilies to congregations at Antioch and Constantinople (the latter, in the case of the homilies on the Thessalonian letters)—and they are every bit as "occasional" and "pastoral" as the Pauline letters that they seek, not just to exegete, but to bring to life for his present Christian congregations.⁵ Hence, to say that Chrysostom reads Paul as "pastoral" in the Thessalonian letters is to name what is true *for all the Pauline letters* as far as John is concerned; consequently, it is logically problematic to use him as a witness of a particular argument about these two letters as though they were somehow distinct in this regard (at least, without taking in hand to demonstrate that the homilies on the Thessalonian letters are in some way remarkable among those on the other twelve letters). Moreover, it is important to appreciate that Chrysostom's applauding of Paul's pastoral technique is not merely a "reading" of the Thessalonian correspondence as text but a reenactment of that aspect of its desired effect for his own late fourth-century audience.⁶ That Chrysostom could do this so easily with the Thessalonian letters may indeed support Malherbe's point, but the evidentiary value of Chrysostom's reading of Paul as "pastoral" and "paraenetic" for Malherbe's own claim—one about the literary type and purpose of 1 and 2 Thessalonians—is perhaps less sure than it appears.

3.1. Paraenesis

With this difference in commentarial purpose in mind, we must next ask whether Malherbe and the patristic exegetes he cites even mean the same thing by what appears to be identical language: παραίνεσις/παραίνεῖν in patristic Pauline interpretation, and the transliterated, nonitalicized term, paraenesis, as used repeatedly throughout Malherbe's commentary. Although I was not able to find (in reading the book or through the index) a precise definition of paraenesis in this commentary, Malherbe comes closest to delineating what he means by it when he disputes the implicit definition of Martin Dibelius, the German scholar who was largely responsible for the Greek lexeme becoming a loanword *terminus technicus* in New Testament scholarship: "while Dibelius correctly identified certain paraenetic characteristics, he worked with too narrow a view

⁵ See Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen, *John Chrysostom* (The Early Church Fathers; London: Routledge, 2000); M. M. Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation* (HUT 40; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

⁶ See esp. Mayer and Allen's chapters, "John as Soul-Carer" and "Pastoral Care and Daily Life" (41–52).

of the style, and was not aware of differing ancient opinions about some paraenetic features, and absolutized what he thought paraenetic” (82). Yet Malherbe’s own use of the term is surprisingly hard to pin down, as the following sentence shows: “As to style, then, 1 Thessalonians is clearly a paraenetic letter; indeed, it is one of the best examples of such a letter” (85). The ambivalence is evident: paraenesis starts out as a “style” but ends up as an epistolary type (τύπος); on the same page the term is also used for a “content” (“The content of chaps. 4 and 5 is paraenetic, even 4:13–17, which was written to console his readers, for consolation was viewed by the ancients as belonging to paraenesis” [85]). On page 81 1 Thess 4–5 is called “the paraenetic section” (cf. the previous page: “the properly paraenetic sections”), but Malherbe also maintains that “the paraenetic style is actually reflected in the form and function of the letter and is present throughout [the letter].” Further complicating matters, in the compositional analysis and headings those same chapters are called “Exhortation” (216; also termed “advice” in the text), but the index refers to this part of 1 Thessalonians as the “paraenetic section of 1 Thess” [504]).

Malherbe identifies this paraenetic “style” or “content” mostly by giving inventories of what he terms variously “features,” “elements,” or “characteristics.” These include: “personal examples,” “the call to imitate someone as your model,” “antitheses,” “reminder of the qualities of virtuous people,” and “the advice given by father to son,” antitheses (83; see the entire section 81–86, 155, etc.). He also considers a whole host of terms to be “the language of paraenesis,” including παράκλησις/παρακαλῶ, παραμυθία/παραμυθεῖσθαι, παραγγελία, οἶδατε, μνημονεύετε, and so forth. But Malherbe has not demonstrated that “paraenesis” alone includes these features or uses these terms. All these appeals, for example, may be found in deliberative argumentation, even as παραίνεσις and συμβουλευτική are used sometimes with overlap, and sometimes synonymously, in ancient texts.⁷ Indeed, that patristic commentators did not presume παραίνεσις to be distinct from rhetorical deliberation (as Malherbe does) is at least suggested in the easy equivalence made by John Chrysostom himself on 1 Thess 5:23: “Ὁρα διδασκάλου φιλοστοργίαν· μετὰ τὴν παραίνεσιν καὶ εὐχὴν ἐπάγει· καὶ οὐ τοῦτο μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τοῖς γράμμασι· δεῖ γὰρ καὶ συμβουλῆς καὶ εὐχῆς. Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἡμεῖς πρότερον συμβουλευόντες, τότε τὰς ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν εὐχὰς ποιούμεθα.”⁸ Furthermore, if Malherbe’s goal was to see what literary-critical terms the

⁷ References and discussion may be found in M. M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (HUT 28; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 50–53, “Excursus: Paraenesis and Deliberative Rhetoric.”

⁸ “Look at the teacher’s love! After the advice he adds a prayer. And not only this, but even in the [middle] letters [i.e., 3:11–13], since there is need of both counsel and prayer. For this reason we, too, first give

patristic exegetes use for Paul's Thessalonian correspondence (hence lining up modern question and patristic answer more exactly), then one might have expected at least equal mention and consideration of the even more conspicuous language of the rhetoric of praise (ἔπαινος/ἔπαινεῖν/ἐγκώμιον) found throughout in Chrysostom's and Theodoret's comments on these letters as part of his quest to classify this text according to ancient literary categories.⁹

Nonetheless, Malherbe has rightly noted that John Chrysostom and Theodoret do use the terms παραίνεσις/παραινεῖν in discussions of the Thessalonian letters. What do they mean by them? Malherbe wisely draws attention to the "introductory summary" to Theodoret's treatment of 1 Thessalonians in his commentaria. Indeed, he might have stressed the point more, for these sections of ὑπόθεσις, in which the Antiochenes lay out the essential historical and literary framework of each letter much as their teacher Libanios did for the speeches of Demosthenes, are very important sources for contemporary research into the composition of Paul's letters.¹⁰ And Theodoret does use παραίνεσις/παραινεῖν rather conspicuously here. But do the terms have a quasi-technical sense for a recognizable literary "style" or "content," such as Malherbe uses them?

Οὗτος ἐπανεληθὼν ἐπήνεσε μὲν τὸ τῆς πίστεως ἄμαχον, ἔφη δεδεῖσθαι αὐτοὺς διδασκαλίας τινὸς παραίνεσεως περὶ τινῶν ζητημάτων παρ' αὐτοῖς κινουμένων. Γέγραφε τοίνυν τὴν ἐπιστολὴν, πρῶτον μὲν αὐτῶν τὸ στερρὸν τῆς πίστεως εὐφημῶν, ἔπειτα προσμένειν τῶν νεκρῶν τὴν ἀνάστασιν παραινῶν, τῆς δὲ τοῦ Κυρίου παρουσίας μὴ πολυπραγμανεῖν τὸν καιρὸν. Προσενήνοχε δὲ αὐτοῖς καὶ τῆς ἠθικῆς διδασκαλίας παραίνεσιν. (*Interpretatio in xiv epistulas sancti Pauli*, 1 Thess. Arg. [Migne, PG 82.629])

deliberative counsel, then make prayers on your behalf" (*Hom. in 1 Thess.* 11.2 [PG 62.463], my translation, as with all patristic quotations in this essay).

⁹ See, e.g. (among many more examples), John Chrysostom, *Hom. in 1 Thess.* 1.1 [62.393]: Εἶδες εὐθὺς ἀπὸ ἐγκωμίων τὸ προοίμιον τῆς ἐπιστολῆς; 1.1-2 [62.393], ἐπαινεῖν; 2.2 [62.402]; 2.3 [62.403]; 3.1 [62.406]: Ἐδει αὐτοὺς πάλιν ἐπαινεῖν, etc.; *Hom. in 2 Thess.* 3.2 [62.481]: ἡ παραίνεσις πάλιν μετ' ἐγκωμίου καὶ προτροπῆς; 5.1 [62.493]: Ἐγκωμιάζει πάλιν αὐτοὺς; Theodoret, *Interpretatio in xiv epistulas sancti Pauli* 1 Thess 1:6 [82.632]: Μέγα μὲν Θεσσαλονικέων ἐγκώμιον καὶ τὸ τοὺς ἀποστόλους ζηλῶσαι.

¹⁰ For documentation of this point, and discussion of the importance of the literary form of ancient published homilies for modern New Testament interpretation, see M. M. Mitchell, "Reading Rhetoric with Patristic Exegetes: John Chrysostom on Galatians," in *Antiquity and Humanity: Essays on Ancient Religion and Philosophy Presented to Hans Dieter Betz on His 70th Birthday* (ed. A. Y. Collins and M. M. Mitchell; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 333–55.

Timothy, upon his return, praised the unconquerability of their faith, but said they were in need of some teaching of advice (advisory teaching) about some matters of dispute which were being agitated among them. Therefore Paul has written this letter, first speaking well of the steadfastness of their faith, then advising/exhorting them to await the resurrection, and not to busy themselves about the time of the parousia of the Lord. And he has added for them also advice/exhortation about ethical teaching.

I have translated the term παραίνεσις as both “advice” and “exhortation” in this passage to show the difficulty of determining whether Theodoret is using the term in a precisely defined technical sense or a more general one (coordinated, in these cases, with another rather garden-variety term, διδασκαλία). Yet even if we agree with Malherbe in principle that Theodoret knows of παραίνεσις as a specific literary category,¹¹ is it evident that the bishop uses the term, as does Malherbe, for a “style,” or, rather, is it a descriptive category for the content or function of portions of what Paul wrote—“ethical advice”? However we decide on this difficult point, it bears notice that Theodoret actually contradicts Malherbe’s argument, *for he uses the term only with reference to 1 Thess 4:1–5:12*. He nowhere employs the noun or the verb in the exegesis that follows of 1:2–3:1; the language reappears abruptly in the commentary (in complete correspondence with this statement in the ὑπόθεσις) at 4:1 as a description of the next part of the letter: Τούτῳ κεχρημένοι τῷ σκοπῷ, προσφέρομεν ὑμῖν τὴν παραίνεσιν [82.644], “With this goal in mind, we are adding the advice for you.” Theodoret will use παραίνεσις five more times to describe where Paul moves on to ἕτερος εἶδος παραίνεσεως (“another form of advice”), thus demarcating the sequential pieces of topical advice Paul offers in the last two chapters of 1 Thessalonians.¹² This impression is solidly confirmed in Theodoret’s treatment of 2 Thessalonians, where once again, quite tellingly, he replicates this same pattern, only using the term παραίνεσις (or the corresponding verb παραίνεῖν) for the specific instructions on work and idleness near the very end of the letter, in chapter 3.¹³ Consequently, at least in terms of his language, Theodoret actually provides counterevidence for Malherbe’s wish to expand the referent of his designation παραίνεσις (as style or content) to cover the entirety of either epistle.

¹¹ In a forthcoming essay David Hellholm and Vemund Blomqvist have argued that the κεφάλαια lists in early manuscript traditions do sometimes use the term in a technical sense (“Parainesis as Ancient Genre-Designation: The Case of the ‘Euthalian Apparatus’ and the ‘Affiliated Argumenta,’”), which would buttress Malherbe’s claim for such a usage among early Christian readers.

¹² On 4:2 [82.644]; 4:9 [82.645]; 4:11 [82.645]; 5:6 [82.652]; 5:12 [82.653]. This is quite similar to the use of the term in the Euthalian matter, as documented in Hellholm and Blomqvist, “Parainesis as Ancient Genre Designation.”

¹³ Arg. [82.657]; 3:10 [82.672]; 3:13 [82.672].

3.2. Psychagogy

Malherbe's alignment of ψυχαγωγία/ψυχαγωγεῖν with his English term "psychagogy" may be a false or at least inexact cognate. John Chrysostom, for one, actually never uses these terms in his homilies on 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Theodoret, as we have seen above, does, but we should note that he uses these terms throughout his commentary on the Pauline corpus, not uniquely or unusually for the Thessalonian letters.¹⁴ Furthermore, the bishop of Cyrus appears to mean by ψυχαγωγία a very specific thing—consolation and encouragement that directly counters experiences of suffering and death with the hope of the gospel.¹⁵ This is rather more narrow than the scope Malherbe accords to the English term: "the endeavor that aimed at moral and intellectual growth and combined spiritual exercises, psychotherapy and psychological counseling" (151). Furthermore the ancient sources do not document Malherbe's insistence on the embeddedness of consolatory practices and literary *topoi* in the kind of overarching philosophical curriculum that the term *psychagogy* suggests; nor can one put generic boundaries around the literature such that "in Paul's day, consolation was viewed as belonging to paraenesis or protreptic, which were not yet sharply distinguished" (279). To document the latter point, Malherbe cites Theon, *Progymnasmata* 3.117 Spengel,¹⁶ which I think actually tells against his reading.¹⁷ Theon does not support the idea that paraenesis or protreptic is the umbrella category which encompasses consolation, but places them side by side.

3.3. Consolation

The lack of precise alignment between the questions asked by Malherbe and the possible answers provided by the patristic exegetes is tellingly revealed in his on the whole very thoughtful discussion of the ancient *consolatio* and 1 Thess 4:13–18. Malherbe gives a valuable overview of ancient consolatory literature and insightfully notes that, although Paul shares some things with those classics, his letter is also lacking essential consolatory elements ("But Paul differs from his pagan contemporaries in that he avoids the most common conventions they used, for example, reflecting on suffering and human life,

¹⁴ See, e.g. (among more than fifty examples of uses of this terminology in the entire commentary), *Interpretatio in xiv epistulas sancti Pauli* on Rom 4:18 [82.93]; Rom 5:1-3 [82.96]; Rom 8:11 [82.132]; Rom 8:17 [82.136]; 1 Cor 12:7 [82.324]; 1 Cor 15:51 [82.368]; 2 Cor 1:7 [82.380].

¹⁵ This point is corroborated by G. W. Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 1542 (s.v.).

¹⁶ The citation should be corrected to 2.117.

¹⁷ There, in a discussion of the need for appropriateness in προσωποποιία ("rhetorical personification"), Theon quite clearly names alongside παρηγορεῖν ("giving consolation"), not paraenesis, but the two species of deliberative rhetoric [προτρέπειν and ἀποτρέπειν; see 2.115.22 for Theon's apparent association of these terms, as already in Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.3.3, with deliberative rhetoric, γένος συμβουλευτικόν]. One can see the parallelism on 2.116 lines 24–25 and in the descriptions that follow for each genre, which do not subordinate but place on an equal footing.

observing that death is common to all, recalling the noble way in which the grieving person had faced loss and was dealing with adverse circumstances, reminding the recipient of the consolation of noble examples of persons who had suffered, warning against excessive sorrow, and urging that reason and decorum prevail” [286]). But this caution stands within Malherbe’s wider argument that “The numerous similarities between 4:13–18 and the Greek tradition of consolation make it understandable why the church fathers thought that these verses *belonged to that tradition*” (286, emphasis added). Even if John Chrysostom, Theodoret, and others noted approvingly that Paul was offering comfort and consolation to his congregations, they most certainly did not wish to place Paul or his letter as “belonging to that tradition,” for their major point in exposition of this section was to identify Paul’s οἱ λοιποὶ οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες ἐλπίδα (“the rest who do not have hope”) with the Greeks and their (now-defeated) philosophical traditions and mourning rites. Hence Malherbe has, through a premature identification of their language with his, also presumed a like goal or intent, when in fact they held to the opposite (remarkably, he himself noted this earlier in the commentary [264], but it did not temper his wish to invoke them as his partners in literary detective work!). While they agree with him that Paul was attempting to console the Thessalonians, and may unwittingly reveal that they saw in Paul some recognizable ancient approaches to that task, John Chrysostom and Theodoret did not and would not place Paul in “that tradition” of what they considered “pagan” motifs of consolation in the face of death—which for them, in a now-Christian empire, had been decisively vanquished by the gospel.

4. Pauline Authorship of 2 Thessalonians

Patristic interpretation plays a less prominent role in Malherbe’s interpretation of 2 Thessalonians. He is to be commended for having avoided a simplistic appeal to patristic exegetes to support his own theory that Paul wrote this second missive, since the lack of ancient doubt about the authorship of any of the letters attributed to Paul save Hebrews (which, unlike the others, lacks a Pauline epistolary prescript) does not of itself constitute strong evidence for it. Malherbe wisely recognizes that what is controversial in his own exegetical context—defending the Pauline authorship of this letter—was not in theirs.

But there are a few ways in which the patristic commentators upon whom Malherbe drew for support in the first part of the commentary might actually have worked against his rather ingenious way of defending the Pauline authorship of the second letter. First, the robustly apocalyptic nature of 2 Thessalonians (hardly, as Malherbe terms it, “relatively sparse use of apocalyptic traditions” [428]) is precisely what Chrysostom and Theodoret

seize upon as the purpose of the letter.¹⁸ Crucial to Malherbe's exegesis of the second letter is his denial that 2:1–2 (and full context) is “the main reason why 2 Thessalonians was written” (427). His view is quite unequivocal: “The judgment that the major [sometimes the only] theme in the letter is eschatology is totally arbitrary” (373). Now Malherbe claims as his allies “more recent” scholarly voices, by whom, “it has correctly been seen that this section is not dogmatic in character but is intended to calm the congregation and provide it security in the way that comfort had been the intention of chap. 1” (427–28).

Malherbe's marginalizing of 2 Thess 2:1–12 on both literary and, apparently, theological grounds is contravened by his patristic colleagues, not just because they indeed do focus on those verses, but because they would not recognize the dichotomy upon which it rests, between dogmatic or threatening teaching and “pastoral” purpose: “The same pastoral intention is evident in Paul's relatively sparse use of apocalyptic traditions in 1 Thess 4:13–5:11 and in 2 Thess 1:5–10” (428). But Chrysostom and Theodoret saw these sections as pastoral *precisely because they were so vividly apocalyptic*, as, for instance, in Chrysostom's comment on 2 Thess 1:5–6:

For if the fear of present day laws has such power that it leads us away from evil actions, how much more the memory of the future events, the immortal punishment, the eternal chastisement? If the fear of the king on earth leads us away from such evil deeds, how much more that of the eternal king? How then are we able to have this fear unceasingly? If we listen continuously to the scriptures . . . for discourse about sweet things doesn't benefit the soul at all, but makes it more flaccid. But discourse about grievous and gloomy things prunes off every part of the soul that is dissipated or wasting away, and turns it back around and stops the soul from being weakened.¹⁹

Apocalyptic threats of hell and frightening specters of the future placed before the eyes of the listener were quite “pastoral” in their view (the goal of which was saving souls from

¹⁸ See, for example, Theodoret's ὑπόθεσις: “the divine apostle, knowing the benefit that accrued from his first letter to the Thessalonians, and that, sorely embattled on behalf of the faith, they nobly bore the onslaughts of the opponents, has written them also a second letter, provoking them to bravery, and encouraging their souls with the hope of the future. Since some people tried to persuade them that the time of the completion had come, saying that the apostle had said these things, *he wrote concerning these things*, and teaching what is fitting—to wit, that it is necessary for the enemy of truth to appear first, speaking of the Antichrist, and then thereafter the epiphany of our God and Savior. And he gave advice with additions also for those who were choosing an idle life (Theodoret, *Interpretatio in xiv epistulas sancti Pauli*, Arg. to 2 Thess [82.657], emphasis added). Furthermore, Chrysostom, for one, does interpret 2 Thess 2:2 “in light of passages like 2 Tim 2:18,” which, according to Malherbe, “is to miss the mark” (428; Chrysostom, *Hom. in 2 Thess.* 1.1 [62.469]).

¹⁹ *Hom. in 2 Thess.* 2.3 [62.476-77].

the real threat of damnation), though they may not be in the minds of the contemporary readers who turn to the Anchor Bible commentary series. Perhaps it is because Malherbe generally downplays the apocalyptic nature and emphasis of this text, and its horrific prolepsis of the punishment of unbelievers, that precisely where patristic exegetes exert considerable energies Malherbe mentions them the least.²⁰

Malherbe's main argument that Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians involves a complex and rather speculative recreation of the historical circumstances between the two letters that he defends by appeal to ancient epistolary practice. After 1 Thessalonians was dispatched to Thessaloniki, a city in which most probably "there was more than one group of Christians" (353, divided along Jew/Gentile lines), an edited and unreliable version of 1 Thessalonians was being read to some of the brethren. Paul writes the second letter to address this concern. The logic of Malherbe's argument in itself is vulnerable, for it depends upon one induction about ancient letters (that copies circulated among groups of readers) to this particular context, when one could make the same move about pseudepigraphical texts that we know were being composed, not just among philosophical groups in the ancient world but among those who considered themselves followers of Paul (as even Malherbe acknowledges [356]: "The Pauline wing of the early church engaged in intense literary activity"). Why the former option is any more likely than the latter in this specific case, at least on the basis of an appeal to ancient epistolary culture, is not clear. Here it is useful to turn to patristic exegetes (although Malherbe does not do so in this connection), for they are on the whole quite astute about ancient epistolary forms and practices, painstakingly poring over the epistolary prescripts and other forms and comparing what Paul does in one letter with the others. In this sense they are very much already in the spirit of epistolary analysis that Malherbe has done so much to encourage and facilitate in his scholarly writings and that has as a result become a staple of modern New Testament studies. However, no patristic exegete that I know of comes close to any such elaborate theory about the relationship between the two Thessalonian letters. Chrysostom, for instance, attributes the need for the second letter to Paul's unwished-for further absence from Thessaloniki and his need to fulfill the wish expressed in 1 Thess 3:10 of "restoring what is lacking in your faith," not face to face, but διὰ τῶν γραμμάτων.²¹ Theodoret, as quoted above, thought Paul wrote again because he perceived that the first letter was so successful. Might these interpretations be due to the fact that patristic authors were quite aware of places where Paul *did* correct an inaccurate impression received from his previous letter (especially in the Corinthian

²⁰ The summary exegesis of 2:1-12 contains a scant two references to patristic interpreters (427-34) and simply pronounces as "failed" efforts in the history of interpretation to identify the figure or figures named with known historical figures (431-32).

²¹ *Hom. in 2 Thess.* 1.1 [62.469].

correspondence),²² but did not see such typical modes of response here? At any rate, if these authors' views about matters literary and epistolary be honored in the case of the first letter, should not these judgments at least be weighed as counterevidence to the predominant thesis about the latter?

5. Conclusion: A Move Ahead

Abraham Malherbe's commentary on the Thessalonian letters—which is sure to be a standard for years to come—is richer for his having worked carefully through the Greek text of John Chrysostom's and Theodoret's exegesis.²³ May his tribe increase! Even as I question the extent to which these early exegetes actually do support the particulars of Malherbe's own modern interpretation of the letter, I think the correspondences he has found point to very important continuing research, in both New Testament and patristic studies, on the convergence and divergence of interpretive questions and frameworks and methods for their discussion, resolution and representation. I very much hope that the inquiry to which Malherbe has drawn attention—patristic exegesis of the Thessalonian correspondence—will be followed up with vigor, and greatly appreciate the efforts of his commentary to prod Pauline scholarship in that direction.²⁴

²² I have elucidated six strategies Paul uses in such circumstances in my essay, "The Corinthian Correspondence and the Birth of Pauline Hermeneutics" (in *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies on a Community in Conflict. Essays in Honour of Margaret Thrall* [ed. T. J. Burke and J.K. Elliott; NovTSup 109; Leiden: Brill, 2003], 17–53, 36–53): (1) quoting back the words of his own earlier text and clarifying referents that were unclear; (2) quoting back the words of the earlier text, juxtaposed with a fresh interpretive statement; (3) quoting back the words of a Corinthian critique, either as a rhetorical question or part of a self-defense of that criticism; (4) writing a new text that supersedes the old ("Then I wrote . . . but now I write. . ."); (5) making a direct appeal to the exact wording of the text in question; and (6) appealing to authorial intention at the time of composition. Quite telling, to my mind, none of those means of dealing with what he considers a misperception of one of his earlier letters is found in 2 Thessalonians.

²³ It would have been useful for Malherbe to have mentioned that the homilies of Chrysostom can be readily found in English translation (vol. 13 of *NPNF*¹). Despite its limitations, especially in terms of technical rhetorical and philosophical vocabulary, this old stand-by would at least afford initial access for nonspecialists.

²⁴ Bibliographic Note: Malherbe cites Chrysostom, Theodoret, and the others from the Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* volumes, which are the most widely available Greek text. But scholars who wish to continue research in this area should also be aware that there is a critical edition of the Greek text of Chrysostom's homilies on the Pauline epistles by Frederic Field (*Sancti patris nostri Joannis Chrysostomi: Interpretatio omnium epistolarum paulinarum* [7 vols.; Bibliotheca Patrum; Oxford: Parker, 1849–62]; the homilies on the Thessalonian letters are in vol. 5 [1862], 313–496), and of the catenae fragments in Karl Staab, *Pauluskommentare aus der griechischen Kirche* (NTAbh 15; Münster: Aschendorff, 1933). Also, though not available to Malherbe, an English translation of Theodoret's commentary on the Pauline epistles has recently been published by Robert C. Hill (*Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrhus, Commentary on the Letters of St. Paul* (2 vols.; Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001). One other early Byzantine author (not that much later than Pseudo-Oecumenius, whom he does cite) to whom I would draw attention is John of Damascus, who has some particularly interesting, if brief, comments on the literary structure and purpose

of the Thessalonian letters (Greek text in Migne, PG 95.905–29). To extend this inquiry further, one might also profitably compare the Eastern fathers Malherbe cites with such Western contemporaries as Ambrosiaster (whose work on 1 Thessalonians is available in H. J. Vogels, *Commentaria in XIII epistulas Paulinas* (CSEL 81.3), or Pelagius (A. Souter, *Pelagius' Expositions of Thirteen Epistles of St. Paul*, vol. 3). Part of this enterprise should include scholarly assessment of the more recent efforts at anthologizing patristic exegetical work, such as the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, which treats the Thessalonian letters in New Testament vol. 9 (Peter Gorday, *Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament 9; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000) 59–127.