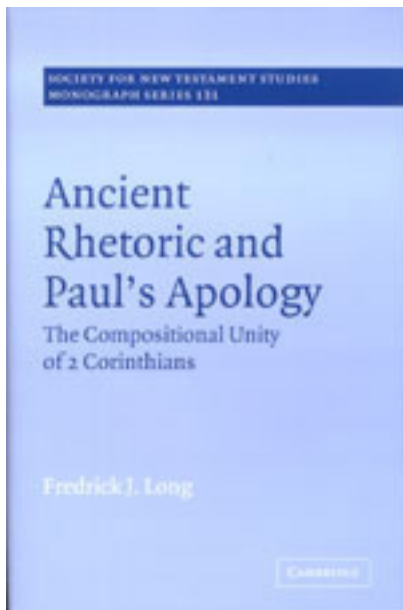


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Long, Fredrick J.

Ancient Rhetoric and Paul's Apology: The Compositional Unity of 2 Corinthians

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The present monograph, originally a doctoral dissertation under Carol Stockhausen, may be regarded as something of a tour de force in the application of rhetorical criticism to the Pauline corpus. The use of this discipline, according to the author, is the “best way to argue *conclusively*” for the unity of 2 Corinthians (10, emphasis original). In his view, Paul’s writings should be classified not as personal letters but as examples of official correspondence, and 2 Corinthians in particular is said to function as “an official apologetic letter” (101)—indeed, as “a propagandistic apologetic letter” (112). Paul needed to respond “to damaging charges about his methods and growing suspicions about his motivations” and therefore “deliberately fashioned 2 Corinthians in conformity with forensic practice in the Greco-Roman tradition” (230). Long argues that his rhetorical analysis, by accounting for the literary features of the letter, leads to an understanding of the whole of 2 Corinthians as a unified discourse: even the change of tone at the beginning of chapter 10 “is to be expected, since Paul [here] begins the *refutatio*” (235). Moreover, the author claims that his analysis supports viewing 1 Corinthians as the “sorrowful letter” and makes it unnecessary to posit an intervening visit by Paul to Corinth between the writing of 1 and 2 Corinthians (238).

After an introductory chapter in which the author ably summarizes scholarly publications dealing with the unity of 2 Corinthians, the work is divided into two parts. The first of

these, consisting of chapters 2–6, explores the nature of forensic discourse in the ancient world and focuses on the three major features of this genre: exigency (the circumstances that required the composition of the discourse), invention (types and structure of argumentation), and disposition (the arrangement of the various sections of the discourse). For his evidence, Long depends not only on the standard “textbooks” of the ancient world but also, and primarily, on numerous works that model the forensic genre (see the lists on 18–22). In particular, he focuses (ch. 6) on selected apologetic letters of Isocrates (*To the Rulers of the Mytilenaeans*), Plato (*Third and Seventh Letters*), and Demosthenes (*Second, Third, and Fourth Letters*). He argues that 2 Corinthians is most similar to the two letters by Plato and the *Second Letter* of Demosthenes (232).

In part 2, Long offers his rhetorical analysis of 2 Corinthians. Chapter 7, on exigency, concludes that “Paul was the recipient of serious accusations” related “to criticisms that he had issued earlier against the Corinthians,” for he too was charged with being worldly and unapproved. Moreover, the apostle was accused of inconsistency in that he denied having used sophistic rhetoric, failed to visit Corinth as he had promised, and received money from the Macedonian Christians “after denying patronage from the Corinthians” (141). The following chapter deals with the rhetorical disposition of the letter, which is analyzed as follows: opening (1:1–2), *prooemium* (1:3–7), *narratio* (1:8–16, but “distributed” in 2:12–13 and 7:2–16), *divisio* and *partitio* (1:17–24), *probatio* (2:1–9:15), *refutatio* (10:1–11:15), self-adulation (11:16–12:10), *peroratio* (12:11–13:10), and closing (13:11–13). In chapter 9 Long focuses on invention (using *stasis* theory) and argues that “Paul drew upon *the most fundamental arguments recommended for qualitative forensic cases*” (201, emphasis original); to put it differently, “Paul *consciously* employed features of forensic rhetorical invention in 2 Corinthians” (228, emphasis added). These features include “a discussion of intention and the amplification of benefits rendered and sufferings endured,” the use of “inartificial proofs, such as witnesses, physical evidence, and oracles,” and other techniques (229). The last chapter of the book is a concluding summary in which Long relates the rhetoric of the letter to the nature of Paul’s theology. (Two appendixes, bibliography, and indexes conclude this monograph.)

Typically, studies that seek to understand Paul’s letters in the light of rhetorical and epistolary conventions are ambiguous as to whether the apostle was *deliberately* following the models described in the ancient handbooks. Thus it is difficult to determine whether, according to these modern investigators, the rhetorical analysis of the Pauline letters corresponds to the apostle’s calculated intention or whether it simply reflects in a general and subconscious way features that, so to speak, “were in the air.” Or to put it differently, if the apostle had seen an analysis of 2 Corinthians in terms of such concepts as *narratio*, *probatio*, and *peroratio*, would he have said, “Well, of course—after all,

that's the way I was trained to compose formal letters in my rhetoric classes at Tarsus University," or would he have scratched his head and responded sheepishly, "Honestly, I'm not quite sure what you're talking about—I was just trying to write a letter"?

As one can readily gauge from the quotations above, however, Long cannot be accused of being ambiguous about this issue: in his opinion, Paul was indeed attempting to model his letters on those composed by the great orators. To be sure, Long does not quite tell us whether the apostle received a formal education in rhetoric or merely that at the Beth Hamidrash he was allowed by Gamaliel to read Demosthenes during recess. But the whole argument of the monograph makes sense only if Paul (1) was highly skilled in the art of rhetoric and (2) expended considerable time and effort composing 2 Corinthians, paying a great deal of attention to numerous technical details. One must admit that Long has made as persuasive a case for this view as can be imagined, but it is uncertain that readers will accept his conclusion unless they are already predisposed in its favor.

In my case, when reading the letters of Demosthenes and Plato what impresses me is how different they are from Paul's (without denying that there are certain significant points of contact or that the Christian context and content of the latter skew the comparison). Moreover, it is difficult to understand why the early Greek fathers, themselves no strangers to formal oratory, seem oblivious to features that, in the view of Long and others, are fundamental to the Pauline writings. If anything, patristic authors appear embarrassed by the lack of literary sophistication in the apostolic documents. Chrysostom, who was trained in forensic rhetoric by the great Antiochene orator Libanius, failed to identify 2 Corinthians as belonging to the kind of genre proposed by Long (if he saw in this letter the relevant rhetorical features, he apparently thought they were not worth mentioning in his *Homilies on Second Corinthians*; even in homily 11, when touching on 2 Cor 5:11, an important verse for Long [200], Chrysostom lets the opportunity pass). In addition, there is his well-known comment, "the Greeks demand of us a rhetorical style, and the acuteness of sophistry," yet "we not only fail in producing what they demand, but also produce the very opposites of their demand" (*Homilies on First Corinthians*, no. 4, on 1 Cor 1:18–20). Chrysostom, of course, is not forswearing literary or persuasive art in toto, but neither is he being disingenuous. It may be that Long, in response, would appeal to the ancient tenet that fine rhetorical discourse *conceals* the art of rhetoric, a principle he considers important (see 33 and 98). Such an appeal, however, would be self-defeating, for in the case of the Greek writings being used as models, it takes only a short time of reflection to detect their rhetorical structure and features. So one would be left with the hardly credible view that Paul's technique is far superior to that of Demosthenes precisely because it is so difficult to tell that the apostle used rhetorical art.

How do these considerations affect Long's ultimate goal of demonstrating the compositional unity of 2 Corinthians? Naturally, the answer depends to a large extent (but not completely) on whether his case for the rhetorical structure of the letter proves persuasive. But the matter is a bit more complicated than that. Here again, it seems unlikely that Long will persuade those scholars who are already predisposed to identifying some sections of 2 Corinthians (esp. 6:14–7:1 and chs. 10–13) as separate documents. On the other hand, his analysis does serve to exhibit the cohesiveness of Paul's writing. Thus, for example, one may question whether 2 Cor 1:17–25 consists of "partition headings" that are then developed in the *probatio* (see table 8.3 [158–59]), but it is difficult to deny that there are important thematic-lexical links tying the initial material in chapter 1 with the various sections of chapters 2–9. Similarly, Long makes a respectable case for the view that the section from 12:11 to 13:10 recapitulates (in inverted order) the major arguments of the letter (see appendix 1 [242–44]). It is less clear, however, whether the abruptness (not just a change in tone) at 10:1 is satisfactorily explained by saying that this verse beings the *refutatio*.

A final point that requires comment is Long's reconstruction of the background to 2 Corinthians. The commonly held view (with some variations) is as follows: (1) Paul writes 1 Corinthians; (2) Timothy visits Corinth (1 Cor 4:17; 16:10–11) and reports to Paul that the church has not responded well; (3) Paul makes a "painful visit" to Corinth not mentioned in Acts (2 Cor 2:1; 12:14; 13:1–2) that apparently produces a negative reaction; (4) Paul writes a now-lost "sorrowful letter" that serves as a kind of ultimatum (2 Cor 2:3–4; 7:8, 12), and Titus, the bearer of this letter, is instructed to meet Paul in Troas after delivering it (2 Cor 2:12–13); (5) not finding Titus in Troas, Paul continues on to Macedonia, where Titus gives him a joyful report (2 Cor 7:5–16) but mentions that there remains a recalcitrant group in Corinth; (6) Paul writes 2 Corinthians.

In contrast, Long (136–37) proposes that (1) the "sorrowful letter" carried by Titus was 1 Corinthians; (2) Titus then met Paul in Macedonia and gave him a good report, so Paul sent Titus back to Corinth to prepare the offering; (3) in the meantime, however, the situation had turned sour in Corinth, and it was at that point that Timothy visited the church; (4) while Titus was still en route from Macedonia to Corinth, Timothy traveled from Corinth to Macedonia and gave Paul the bad news; (5) before continuing on to Corinth himself, Paul decided he needed to write an apology (i.e., 2 Corinthians) to prevent a "painful visit" (thus there was no intermediate visit between the writing of 1 and 2 Corinthians).

No reconstruction is free of difficulties, of course. Some scholars will doubt, as they have in the past, whether 1 Corinthians can naturally be described as having been written "out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears" (2 Cor 2:4) "on account of the

one who did the wrong or of the injured party” (7:12; this point Paul puts in the negative, but evidently it reflects the way the Corinthians perceived the letter in question). Particularly unpersuasive is Long’s suggestion that Paul’s statement, “I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time” (13:2), refers to the apostle’s “presence in proxy, which he explicitly evoked in 1 Cor. 5:1–5” (238). What the present reviewer finds more puzzling, however, is that Long seems to place considerable importance on this reconstruction yet devotes very little space to it: there is no real development of the argument, no detailed interaction with the opposite viewpoint, and no clear demonstration that his rhetorical analysis supports this proposal (or, conversely, that the reconstruction bolsters the case for the unity of 2 Corinthians).

Long’s monograph may not be the definitive solution to the difficult problems raised by 2 Corinthians, but it is certainly a major contribution to the field. Thoroughly researched and clearly written, this volume provides an education on ancient apologetic discourse and an abundance of provocative suggestions regarding the literary analysis and exegesis of Paul’s writings.