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Rhetoric in the New Testament

By WALTER A. JENNRICH

It is a most natural and yet striking fact that the New Testament originally was written in Greek. This is striking because the literature of the Greek New Testament had its origin in a Hebrew background; it is natural because the Greek language was the *Weltsprache* in the century that gave birth to the New Testament.

This Jewish use of the Greek language was due to the widespread influence of Greek that resulted from Alexander's conquests. The Macedonian victories opened up the East to Greek culture and tended to make Greek manners and Greek speech popular all around the eastern Mediterranean. Men of all tribes and nations met in the lands dominated by Alexander's army. Naturally, they soon felt the need of a speech by means of which they could communicate readily with one another, and so a new dialect was formed from those elements which the old Greek dialects had in common. Thus was born the Koine, which meets us in the Apocrypha and the New Testament. The word *Koine* (sc. dialect) means simply "common language," or "dialect common to all," a "world speech" (*Weltsprache*),¹ and the term is regularly used as denoting the Greek in common use all over the world, from the Alexandrian period to the Roman period, both for literary and oral² purposes.

This common speech is in the main a somewhat modified Attic in which were omitted such difficulties as appeared too strange to the Greek-speaking people of that day. Blass remarks: "As a matter of course, it is the later Attic, not the older, which lies at the base of it, which explains, to take one example, the absence of a dual in this language." Thumb is

¹ Kuehner-Blass speak of the Koine, or the Hellenic, dialect. *Griech. Gr.*, Bd. 1, p. 22. So also Schmiedel and Winer. Jannaris suggests "Pan-Hellenic," or "New Attic" (*Hist. Grk. Gr.*, p. 6). Deissmann proposes: "Hellenistic world-speech." Cf. discussion in A. T. Robertson, *Gr. of Grk. N. T.*, p. 50.

² This definition is accepted by Hatzidakis and Schwyzer, Thumb, Moulton, A. T. Robertson, et al. Some distinguish between the Hellenistic Koine itself and a form of the Koine, a name restricted by them to the language of the New Testament and the LXX. *Hellenistic* is derived from the Greek verb of the same root, meaning, to speak Greek. It is a term applied to persons not of Greek birth (especially Jews) who had learned Greek. No accurate distinction can be drawn between the Koine and the Hellenistic. Smyth, H. W., *A Greek Grammar*, p. 4.

more specific on this point. "Das Attische, wie es im Gebiete des delischen Seebundes gesprochen wurde, betrachtet Thumb neuerdings (*Archiv*. IV, 488) als die Grundlage der Koine."³

Now, a spoken language is never identical with the literary language in style, and therefore we must make this distinction in the Koine. The vernacular Koine grew out of the vernacular Attic, and it was this Koine, the vernacular, which was spread all over the world by Alexander's conquests. It was the normal speech of the common people. The literary Koine, in like manner, was an outgrowth of the literary Attic. It was an "artificial, almost stationary idiom, from which the living speech drew farther and farther apart. It was employed by the cultured writers and scholars of that period."⁴

It is usually supposed (and wrongly so) that the era generally contemporaneous with the time of the writing and forming of the New Testament canon was a barren period in the field of Greek literature. For example, Olmstead suggests this supposition when he asks the doubting question: "Where are the examples from any part of the Roman world of literary works written in the Greek tongue and still in existence which one might bring as a parallel to the New Testament, between Strabo near the beginning and Dio Chrysostom and Plutarch near the end of the first century?"⁵ In other words, who are the writers and scholars of the first century A. D. who wrote in the literary Koine Greek? Very simply this is answered by referring to the Stuart Jones edition of the standard Greek-English lexicon,⁶ which lists 61 Greek writers of the first century after Christ. This figure does not include any New Testament writers, Philo, or any writer whose period overlaps either the first century before Christ or the second century after. For example, note the following authors (and their works) who used the literary Greek as their prose medium of expression:

³ Moulton, J. H., *Einl. in die Spr. d. N. T.*, p. 49.

⁴ Smyth, H. W., *op. cit.*, p. 4. Attention should be called to the Atticistic reaction. The Atticists of the Koine period attempted to imitate the old Attic style. But they were definitely out of harmony with the trend of language, as A. T. Robertson (*op. cit.*, p. 60) points out: "This artificial, reactionary movement, however, had little effect upon the vernacular Koine, as is witnessed by the spoken Greek of today."

⁵ A. T. Olmstead, *Could an Aramaic Gospel be Written?* in the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January, 1942, p. 51.

⁶ Liddell and Scott, 1940.

Dioscorides, whose great work on *Materia Medica* stands like a beacon in its field. Written in 77—78. Five books on the art of medicine.

Onosander, a Greek philosopher who wrote a commentary (now lost) on Plato's *Republic* and a work on the art of war entitled *Strategicus*.

Cornutus, a Stoic philosopher (banished 66—68) who wrote *On Greek Theology*.

The *Tablet of Cebes*, which treats of education and morality.

The *Bibliotheca of Apollodorus*, of which 3 out of 7 books survive on the topic of "Greek Mythology."

Demetrius' treatise *On Style* (Rhetoric).

The famous essay *On the Sublime* in the field of criticism.

Poimandres, 15 chapters of hermetic literature.

A Greek romance, *Chaereas and Callirrhoe*, by Chariton of Aphrodisias in Caria. It is a historical novel of 8 books.

The epigrammatists, whose combined works total 164 complete short poems.

The Wisdom of Solomon, written in Greek about A. D. 40.

The fourth book of the Sibyllines (80 A. D.).

Book of Baruch, which was written soon after the fall of Jerusalem.

The Letter of Jeremiah.

The Letter of Claudius to the Alexandrians (A. D. 41).

Of course, not all 60 of these literary works are extant today, and many of them are, perhaps, alluded to only by title, but even so, this listing overwhelmingly does show that the New Testament writings arose in an age which was by no means unlearned and lacking in culture. For these Greek literary achievements quoted above reveal a highly developed, alert, sensitive, appreciative Greek civilization, very active in the field of science, medicine, rhetoric, education, theology and religion. This provided an ideal soil—broad, tolerant, and enquiring—for the literary expression of the new Christian faith.

Deissmann denies any literary quality to the New Testament except the Epistle to the Hebrews. He insists that "New Testament philology has been revolutionized; and probably all the workers concerned in it both on the Continent and in the English-speaking countries are by this time agreed that

the starting point for the philological investigation of the New Testament must be the language of the non-literary papyri, ostraca, and inscriptions."⁷ We have no quarrel with the acknowledged value of the papyri for comparative linguistic studies in the New Testament, but we must be careful to consider also the literary atmosphere of the New Testament era and realize the debt which the New Testament owes to the culture of its authors.

Blass, on the other hand, readily acknowledges the literary factor in the New Testament. "The language employed in the New Testament is such as was spoken in the lower circles of society, not such as was written in works of literature. But between these two forms of speech there existed even at that time a very considerable difference. The literary language had always remained dependent in some measure on the old classical masterpieces; and though in the first centuries of Hellenic influence it had followed the development of the living language and so had parted some distance from those models, yet since the first century before Christ it had kept struggling back to them again with an ever-increasing determination."⁸ He then continues by saying that this "literary language has also furnished its contribution to the language of the New Testament, if only in the case of a few more cultured writers, especially Luke, Paul, and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. A very large number of good classical constructions are indeed found in the New Testament, but confined to these particular writers, just as it is only they who occasionally employ a series of words which belonged to the language of literary culture and not to colloquial speech. Persons of some culture had these words and constructions at their disposal when they required them and would even employ the correct forms of words as alternatives to the vulgar forms of ordinary use."⁹

Today scholarship generally concurs with Robertson in his statement that the "new and true view is that the New Testament is written in the popular Koine, with some literary elements, especially in Paul, Luke, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and James."¹⁰

⁷ Deissmann, A., *Light from the Ancient East*, p. 63.

⁸ Blass, F., *Gr. of N. T. Grk.*, tr. by H. St. J. Thackeray, p. 1.

⁹ Blass, F., *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁰ Robertson, A. T., *op. cit.*, p. 87.

In addition to the evidence cited above, the Greek-speaking world is further absolved from the astounding charge of literary illiteracy by three indubitable facts: (1) the great number of Greek literary papyri copied in that century to be read by the people then living; (2) the enormous libraries which were built reached their peak in the first and second century: at Alexandria, for example, 400,000; (3) every considerable house in Greco-Roman times contained a library room.

To be sure, the age of the New Testament was almost seething with literature on all subjects written in the literary Koine. Were, then, the writers of the New Testament totally unacquainted with this vast body of literature? Were they altogether outside of the stream of the current literary Koine? For instance, Luke, as a physician, surely would be interested in the various medical works which were written and assembled in his day. Is it necessary to exclude him from the possibility of such associations? And then what about the undoubted Alexandrian culture of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews? Is it not even fairly possible that he had received a modicum of schooling and training at that great cultural and library center whence emanated the reflected gleam of the great classical age of Greece? And even with respect to such an "illiterate" as Mark, whose Gospel is the most un-Greek of all—is it necessary to conclude that he was completely and wholly free from the influence of the culture of his day? Did he not have as his boon companions on a missionary tour through the principal cities of Asia Minor such acknowledged men of letters as Paul and Barnabas? Travel and association with great minds are in themselves an education and lesson in culture.

This is not to conclude or even suggest that all the New Testament writers in equal measure were the shining literary lights of their day and renowned exponents of the accepted cultural standard of the literary Koine. But these possibilities do prove that the rich literary background of the New Testament is potentially a greater influence upon the style and language of the New Testament than has been heretofore imagined. Consequently, it is well to restudy and perhaps, as a result, re-evaluate these literary elements in the New Testament which Roberston and others admit. And that is the need which has prompted this essay.

Granting the undoubted literary background of the New Testament, does this necessarily mean its writers were conscious artists of the refined literary Koine of their day? Or did they write simply and plainly in the vulgar dialect while completely oblivious of the intricate beauties of the Greek language?

As far as the golden age of the Greek classics is concerned, the answer to the question of a conscious literary art is affirmative. For to the Greeks literature was a conscious art as much as painting and sculpture. With them the sound was echo to the sense. They were keenly alive to all the magic and music of beautiful speech. For example, Isocrates and Plato took great pains in the production of their literary masterpieces. Dionysius tells us: "Isocrates spent ten years over the composition of his *Panegyricus*, according to the lowest estimate; while Plato did not cease, when eighty years old, to comb and curl his dialogues and reshape them in every way. Surely every scholar is acquainted with the stories of Plato's passion for taking pains, especially that of the tablet which they say was found after his death, with the beginning of the *Republic* ('I went down yesterday to the Piraeus, together with Glaucon, the son of Ariston') arranged in elaborately varying orders."¹¹

On the other hand, in regard to New Testament literature the opposite point of view has been taken in the past with reference to St. Paul. It is claimed that in his Letters Paul spoke naturally, always, of course, as the Spirit gave him utterance, and hence used no rhetorical embellishment to commend his message to his hearers. This position has been set forth as follows by Juelicher, one of the foremost of his modern critics: "Unconsciously he makes use of the tricks of popular speech with the greatest effect . . . but he avoids all straining after effect through the observance of oratorical rules. He finds without effort the most striking form for his lofty ideas, and it is because his innermost self breathes through every word that most of his epistles bear so unique a charm."¹²

¹¹ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *De Compositione Verborum* (Roberts ed.), p. 265.

¹² Duncan, T. S., "The Style and Language of St. Paul in His First Letter to the Corinthians" in the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. LXXXIII, No. 330, April, 1926, p. 11.

What, then, is the answer to this general question of a conscious literary art? Is it a logical necessity that consummate poets are also consummate craftsmen? Or is art the spontaneous upwelling of native genius from the soul?

We have grown accustomed in our habits of thought (as W. Rhys Roberts reminds us) to dwell on the spontaneity of literary achievement rather than on its artistic finish. We are apt to sneer, as some degenerate Greeks did in Dionysius' time, at the contention that even genius cannot dispense with literary pains and to insist in a one-sided way on the axiom that where genius begins, rules end. But a reference to the greatest names in our own literature will confirm the view that the highest excellence must be preceded by study and practice, however eminent the natural gifts of an author may be. Would anyone hesitate to say whether *Paradise Lost* or *Lycidas* is the more mature example of Milton's poetry? Shakespeare, with his creative genius and all-embracing humanity, may seem to soar far above these so-called artificial trammels. But, here again, could anyone doubt, on the grounds of style alone, whether *Hamlet* or *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* was the earlier play?¹³

Longinus, long ago, was keenly aware of the psychological aspect of this interplay between natural ability and rules of a system. His statements are profound and worth quoting in full. He begins by asking the same question: Is there such a thing as an art of the sublime? His emphasis is on the word art. He answers: "Some hold that those are entirely in error who would bring such matters under the precepts of art. A lofty tone, says one, is innate and does not come by teaching; nature is the only art that can compass it. Works of nature are, they think, made worse and altogether feeble when wizened by the rules of art. But I maintain that this will be found to be otherwise if it be observed that, while nature as a rule is free and independent in matters of passion and elevation, yet is she wont not to act at random and utterly without system. Further, nature is the original and vital underlying principle in all cases, but system can define limits and fitting seasons and can also contribute the safest rules for use and practice. Moreover, the expression of the sublime is more exposed to danger when it goes its own way without

¹³ Roberts, W. Rhys, *op. cit.*, p. ix, cf. pp. 262—270.

the guidance of knowledge — when it is suffered to be unstable and unballasted — when it is left at the mercy of mere momentum and ignorant audacity. It is true that it often needs the spur, but it is also true that it often needs the curb." ¹⁴

Though we cannot, perhaps, make the fantastic claim that the writers of the New Testament were always consciously aiming at artistic effect and great rhetorical display, as was the wont of Isocrates, yet it is evident, from the standpoint of human make-up, that they did take pains, as indeed any intelligent person would seek to facilitate and even to make more agreeable and possibly more beautiful the public recitation of his writings. And in doing so, would it not be only natural that he should utilize the rhetorical devices that were native and well suited to the Greek language as such? that he should use such artistic niceties as were the vogue of current Koine literature and as were found also in classical Greek?

But if in a limited measure we attribute conscious artistry to St. Paul among the New Testament writers, we are faced with his own positive declaration that he makes no pretensions to rhetorical art in his writing. His claim is expressed thus: "But though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge." ¹⁵ He says further: "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God . . . and my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." ¹⁶

Origen, among ancient critics, understood these statements of Paul in a strictly literal sense and accepted them at their face value. Basing his opinion on these passages, he speaks of Paul's literary inferiority. ¹⁷

Among modern scholars Juelicher also takes Paul at his word here: "His style is not smooth, elegant, or correct, and he himself never considered that he excelled in the art of writing." ¹⁸

¹⁴ Longinus, *On the Sublime* (Roberts ed.), p. 43.

¹⁵ 2 Cor. 11:6.

¹⁶ 1 Cor. 2:1 ff.

¹⁷ Origen, *c. Celsus*, VII, 59 f.

¹⁸ Juelicher, *Introd.*, p. 50.

However, Simcox looks to the spirit rather than the letter of Paul's words when he remarks that "one is not to stress Paul's language in 1 Cor. 2:1-4 into a denial that he could use the literary style. It is rather a rejection of the bombastic rhetoric that the Corinthians liked and the rhetorical art that was so common from Thucydides to Chrysostom."¹⁹

Or it may well be that Paul honestly thought that the Corinthians would expect his message to be set forth with all the embellishments of rhetoric; and he may have felt sincerely that he could not measure up to their expectations, and hence the apology.

But whatever allowances one may make for these statements, it is nonetheless true that Paul is here speaking in contrasts and is naturally depreciating his powers of expression in order to set forth more strongly the higher importance of the matter that is within him. And this very "depreciation of powers of expression was one of the common characteristics of the Greek rhetorician, as it is of the rhetorician always, and perhaps, while implicitly a condemnation of the untrustworthiness of rhetoric, is a tacit admission of its effectiveness."²⁰

The theory is fairly generally held and is possibly true that the writers of the New Testament did not look upon their writings as literature for a wide constituency of readers, and the conclusion is drawn that therefore they did not waste the flowers of rhetoric upon them. If the truth of the theory be granted, yet the conclusion drawn from it could hardly be admitted to be exactly logical. Duncan discusses this theory in relation to Paul and his Letters to the Corinthians and shows the inadequacy of setting forth such a claim to prove that Paul therefore disdained the use of rhetoric. "In his writings to the church at Corinth particularly, the center of Greek life and culture and of rhetoric, among other arts, undoubtedly he would strive to be as effective as his powers and training permitted him to be. His letters had, indeed, a present mission to fulfill. They were intended to convince the church at Corinth of sin and judgment, and all the arts of which Saint Paul had command were employed to accomplish that end. No one can read the letters to the Corinthians

¹⁹ Simcox, *Lang. of the N. T.*, p. 15.

²⁰ Duncan, *T. S.*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

without realizing that he was keyed up to a high pitch during all the time that he was employed in their composition. The resistance that the intellectualism of the Corinthians offered to his demands for faith, and the laxity of Greek morality which came out very strongly in religious practice, not only deepened his conviction of the superiority of love over reason and caused him to detest a theory of life that miserably failed to produce right conduct, but inspired him to express his convictions in lofty and noble terms, and, withal, with the dogmatism of a prophet. In fact, at times his earnestness and enthusiasm are so great that critics, religious and secular alike, assert that in such chapters as the thirteenth and fifteenth he is the inspired poet and seer. Furthermore, it may be very seriously questioned whether Saint Paul or any other writer could discuss in a purely informal way, even with a very restricted community, questions of so vital importance."²¹

Of ancient Greek criticisms of style in the New Testament, mention has already been made of Origen's evaluation of Paul's style. The Christian Father St. John Chrysostom also records his criticism of rhetoric in the New Testament. He was a pupil of Libanius and was himself one of the greatest of Christian orators. Regarding the power of artistic speech for the preacher's use he asks: "Why, then, did Paul lay claim to none of this art? He expressly declares that he is without art, and that, too, when writing to the Corinthians, who were admired for their art of speaking, and who prided themselves on it." He then continues in his treatise on the *Priesthood* to say that it was precisely because of his power of rhetoric that Paul was admired among Christians, Jews, and heathen, a power which will find a response in the hearts of men to the end of time. Yet it is not the rhetoric of the world that Chrysostom finds in St. Paul. He finds there neither "the smoothness of Isocrates, the weight of Demosthenes, the dignity of Thucydides, and the elevation (sublimity) of Plato."²² Such literary labels as Chrysostom here incidentally mentions are often misleading, but here they are well chosen and indicate taste and classical training on his part. And it is no wonder, for among the Greek Fathers, Greek learning had been conspicuously possessed at a much earlier date by

²¹ Duncan, T. S., *op. cit.*, p. 2 f.

²² St. John Chrysostom, *De Sacerdotio*, IV. 6. J. A. Navin's ed., p. 120.

Clement of Alexandria (160—215 A. D.), though usually theological rather than literary reasons led Clement to quote from the classic masters.

Chrysostom is well qualified by virtue of his background in oratory to speak authoritatively of rhetoric in the New Testament. The same testimony is continued in the statement of Gregory of Nyssa (d. 395 A. D.): "Paul himself, the noble minister of the Word, using no other embellishment than the truth alone, deemed it a shame to dress out his language by such adornments, and, with an eye on the truth alone, instructed us with noble and fitting counsel."²³

Testimony from a Latin source is contained in the letters that are supposed to have passed between Paul and Seneca. "Teuffel calls the correspondence fictitious, but Norden accepts it. Whether true or not, the story will illustrate a general point of view. In *Epistle VII* Seneca urges St. Paul to pay more attention to style that it may correspond in excellence with the matter; '*vellem, cures et cetera ut maiestati earum (his letter) cultus sermonis non desit.*' With Letter IX he sends to him a book *de verborum copia*. In Letter XIII he draws his attention to the fact that he employs allegory much and urges him accordingly to avoid excessive embellishments and take care to use exact and appropriate language. St. Paul answers commending Seneca's accomplishments and recommending to him in turn '*irreprehensibilem sophiam.*'"²⁴

Hieronymus, while holding that St. Paul was an accomplished Hebrew scholar and that he had a good knowledge of Greek secular literature, yet declared that he was unable to express in another language (i. e., in Greek) the deepest thoughts and cared nothing for elegance of expression, provided he set forth his meaning intelligibly.²⁵

Augustine, himself a good rhetorician, appreciated the rhetorical in St. Paul. "He sets forth the view that the apostle used the rhetorical to produce the effect that he desired—that its use, in other words, was always conscious. This is perhaps fairly generally true, but in some of his most striking passages rhetoric must have been unconscious, and, so to speak, of second nature." Augustine, in support of his view,

²³ Duncan, T. S., *op. cit.*, p. 7.

²⁴ Duncan, T. S., *op. cit.*, p. 7.

²⁵ Duncan, T. S., *op. cit.*, p. 7 f.

cites particularly one figure which commends itself to him, though he thinks it may be easily abused. He refers to the figure called by the Greek rhetoricians "climax" and by the Romans "gradatio" and cites Rom. 5:3-5: "Let us rejoice in our tribulations: Knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, probation; and probation, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Ghost which was given unto us." He commends the use of this because it allows the thought to ascend to completeness by short and simple steps and thus renders it easy.²⁶

Gregory the Great expresses the professed contempt of Christian writers for the devices of rhetoric as aids to the expression of spiritual truth. He remarks: "*Ipsam loquendi artem desperi . . . quia indignum vehementer existimo ut verba caelestis oraculi restinguam sub regulis Donati.*"²⁷ Whether this expressed contempt was in every instance sincere is a question. It is, at any rate, easy to understand that they might hesitate to profane, as it were, sacred truth with secular things.

It is well thus briefly to remind ourselves that among the early Christians there were many writers, including St. Paul himself, who knew and appreciated ancient Greek literature, though concerning themselves little with formal rhetoric and literary criticism.

But even if one admits, in spite of contrary declarations, that some of the New Testament writers were trained rhetoricians, it need not be supposed that their training was derived from the study of the ancient Greek masters; for instance, that Paul had ever studied Demosthenes, as is alleged, is hardly capable of proof. Or that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews had ever studied Isocrates, whose style he very closely approached, is highly problematical. Dobschuetz hesitates to say that Paul was a student of the Greek orators. "Von den Kuensten der griechischen Rhetorenschule hat Paulus schwerlich viel gewusst."²⁸

This question links itself up with the broader question of

²⁶ Duncan, T. S., *op. cit.*, p. 8.

²⁷ *Moral. praef.*, p. 1 f., as found in Duncan, T. S., *op. cit.*, p. 2.

²⁸ Dobschuetz, E. von, *Zum Wortschatz und Stil des Roemerbriefs*, p. 65.

any New Testament writer's acquaintance with the general body of Greek literature. Indeed, to establish as truth the supposition that any of them was widely read in Greek literature is a more than difficult matter inasmuch as its answer depends upon the weighing of probabilities. To build up a theory of borrowing or discipleship between a New Testament writer and the classics on the basis of such slight and insignificant parallels as are discovered seems almost fatuous. Robertson remarks that Paul seems to have understood Stoic philosophy, but Robertson declines to say how extensive was his literary training other than that he had a "real Hellenic feeling and outlook." And concerning *Hebrews* he is rather noncommittal when he says that it has oratorical flow and power with traces of Alexandrian culture.²⁹ But Norden makes a strong protest against the assumptions of those who profess to read between the lines of St. Paul's Letters ideas of Plato or the Stoics or other Greek schools of thought. Critics are always ready to carry analysis too far. Indeed, as Duncan noted, one cardinal principle of criticism seems to be to take from a given author as much as possible and assign it to some predecessor not only as the source of inspiration, but as the original possessor.

A difficulty, however, presents itself that should be taken into account. For some reason or other, positive citations from Greek literature are hard to find in the New Testament. Robertson notices that Paul quotes from Aratus, Menander, and Epimenides and may have been acquainted with other Greek authors. Other scholars are pleased to see reminiscences in Paul of Demosthenes, Aeschines, Plato, and Cleantes. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews faintly echoes a poetic line from the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus. But all these citations are, to say the least, very uncertain. And even if they were admitted to come from the sources cited, it still would not be certain that they had come directly. They might easily have come from the common store of Greek learning treasured up as apt illustrations by the schools of rhetoric. Clement of Alexandria has gathered the passages from the Epistles that he held to be citations from Greek literature.³⁰ To Jerome we are indebted for the assertion that the oft-

²⁹ Robertson, A. T., *op. cit.*, p. 86.

³⁰ *Strom.* I c. 14, as found in Duncan, T. S., *op. cit.*, p. 6.

quoted "Evil communications corrupt good manners" comes from Menander.³¹

Yet, if one assent to the belief that is fairly general and admit that St. Paul, for instance, knew Greek literature well, it should not be necessary to demonstrate to anyone who has studied the character of Paul that he did not slavishly imitate the Greek masters. Demosthenes was independent in his manner of speech and the imitator of none. Rather he was eclectic and chose the best from each of the great prose masters. So also, if any characteristic stands out in St. Paul, it is his intellectual independence which expressed itself in a unique manner of speech. "And, to be sure, it does not detract from the estimate that one has of Demosthenes to assert that anyone who has read both will find, making allowances for differences of circumstances and time, that the enthusiasm and fire of the Greek is matched by the Hebrew. And no one will claim for Demosthenes that his theme carried him to such a high plane as did that of Saint Paul."³²

Some, on the other hand, profess to have the opposite impression of St. Paul's writings. They feel that his Letters are not Greek in style at all, but have greater affinities with the writings of the Old Testament. They contrast them with the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of Barnabas, which are held to be more in the Greek manner. Renan expresses the opinion that the style of St. Paul is as un-Greek as possible. He puts his criticism in these words: "Le style épistolaire de Paul est le plus personnel qu' il ait jamais eu. La langue y est, si j'ose le dire, broyée; pas une phrase suivie. Il est impossible de violer plus audacieusement le génie de la langue grecque . . . on dirait une rapide conversation sténographiée et reproduite sans corrections."³³

We heartily concur in classing the Epistle to the Hebrews as an example of good Greek style in the New Testament, but to deny to Paul a facile handling of the Greek language is thoroughly untenable. Of course, not all the books of the New Testament are uniform in artistic treatment nor even are

³¹ *Comment. on Ep. ad Tit., c. I (VII, 706 Vall.)*, as found in Duncan, T. S., *op. cit.*, p. 6.

³² Duncan, T. S., *op. cit.*, p. 4.

³³ Renan, *St. Paul*, p. 123.

the many Letters of St. Paul of the same high rhetorical quality. It goes without saying that differences in style would be noticeable according to the occasion that prompted the Letter, the persons or communities to whom it was written, its purpose, its general character, and the time of life at, and the circumstances under, which Paul wrote it. Wilhelm von Christ makes brief mention of this factor: "Die einzelnen Briefe sind auch ihrem literarischen Charakter nach sehr verschieden; der Roemerbrief, die beiden Korintherbriefe, der Galaterbrief nehmen streckenweise mehr den Stil einer Abhandlung oder Lehrschrift an; der Philipperbrief und besonders der an Philemon tragen staerker persoentlichen Charakter. Aber auch die lehrhaften Abschnitte werden durch Wendungen und Gedankengaenge unterbrochen, die nur in der augenblicklichen Stimmung oder Lage des Apostels ihre volle Erklaerung finden."³⁴

These, then, are some of the considerations which make desirable a more thorough investigation of rhetorical style in the New Testament. The estimate of the use of rhetoric in the New Testament has not been in all essentials true. With the view that the sacred writers were more concerned with the sense than the manner of expression one has no quarrel. But they knew as well as any author must know that the two are not quite so easily divorced. And, therefore, if we are to attempt to gain a better appreciation of the New Testament authors, surely it is of supreme importance to lay stress on points of artistic form, especially in a literature in which form and substance are so indissolubly allied as in the Greek, even though the grammar and syntax of the Koine does depart at times from the strict classical rules.

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³⁴ Wilhelm von Christ, *Griech. Literaturg.*, II, 2, p. 934.