

Affects and Emotions in the Rhetoric of Paul's Letter to Philemon: A Rhetorical-Psychological Interpretation

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I. Introduction

Quintilian calls the method of emotionalising the most effective means of conquering an audience.¹

There is some advantage to be gained by pleasing our audience and a great deal by stirring their emotions (Inst. 5.8.3).

As soon as they begin to be angry, to feel favourably disposed, to hate or to pity, they begin to take a personal interest in the case ...; the judge, when overcome by his emotions, abandons all attempt to enquire into the truth of the arguments, is swept along by the tide of passion and yields himself unquestioning to the torrent (6.2.6; see 6.2.3; 12.10.62).

Pity (*miseratio*) alone may move even a strict judge (4.1.14).²

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- 1 Inst. 6.2.2,5f.; 5.8.3; 4.1.14; 3.5.2; etc. (The English translations of Quintilian are based on the Latin text according to H. Rahn [ed.], *M. Fabii Quintiliani Institutionis Oratoriae Libri XII – Ausbildung des Redners: 12 Bücher* [TzF 2–3], Darmstadt 1972.)
 - 2 Quintilian's treatment of the affects is representative of contemporary rhetoric: Affects are used to influence the audience. Aristotle's teaching, however, was more ambitious. He integrated the affects into an overarching anthropological construct, in which they are connected with both the non-rational sector of willpower, of wanting and aspiring, and with the sector of the intellect. They bridge both sectors and thus unify the human being (Rh. 2.1–11). Furthermore, Aristotle analyzed the different ways in which the affects work in the context of various age groups, as well as in different social groups. See also E. Papadimitriou, *Ethische und psychologische Grundlagen der aristotelischen Rhetorik* (EHS.Ph 43), Frankfurt etc. 1977, 195–229. For a discussion of psychological insights found in Quintilian's *Institutio*, see P. Lampe, *Psychologische Einsichten Quintilians in der Institutio Oratoria*, NTS 52 (2006) 533–554; reprinted in: G. Theißen/P. v. Gemünden (eds.), *Erkennen und Erleben: Beiträge zur psychologischen Erforschung des frühen Christentums*, Gütersloh 2007, 209–230, and the English version entitled "Quintilian's Psychological Insights in His *Institutio Oratoria*" in: P. Sampley/P. Lampe (eds.), *Paul and Rhetoric*, London 2010, 180–199. With regard to the affects found in ancient Jewish and early Christian literature, see, e.g., P. v. Gemünden, *Die urchristliche Taufe und der Umgang mit den Affekten*, in: J. Assmann/G.G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions* (SHR 83), Leiden 1999, 115–136; eadem, *Einsicht, Affekt und Verhalten: Überlegungen zur Anthropologie des Jakobusbriefes*, in: P. v. Gemünden/M. Konradt/G. Theißen (eds.), *Der Jakobusbrief: Beiträge zur Rehabilitierung der "strohernen Epistel"* (BVB 3), Münster 2003, 83–96; eadem, *Die Wertung des Zorns im Jakobusbrief auf dem Hintergrund des antiken Kontexts und seine Einordnung*, in: *ibid.*, 97–119;

By using the word τὰ σπλάγχνα three times in Phlm (vv. 7.12.20) — on two occasions in prominent places, namely at the beginning and at the end of the letter — Paul directly refers to his and other Christians' innermost feelings. Indeed, the situation underlying the letter is loaded with conflicting emotions that Paul can exploit, or which he at least needs to bear in mind in the writing of his letter.

(a) First of all, there is Philemon's *anger*. He is angry with his slave, who has been "useless" to him (v. 11) because of some wrongdoing and damage that needs to be compensated for (ἀδικεῖν, ὀφείλειν, ἀποτίνειν [vv. 18–19]). We do not know precisely what this damage was.

(1.) The damage probably did not only lie in the fact that Onesimus, "for a short time" (πρὸς ὥραν [v. 15]), had left the house without Philemon's consent, and had therefore missed work or possibly even incurred expenses resulting from a search.

(1.1.) Neither Paul nor Onesimus himself considered the latter's status to be that of a runaway slave. This was not the nature of his wrongdoing. As a runaway slave, Onesimus would have been hunted down; for a pagan slave, the prison of a Christian friend of the master would have been a terrible hiding place. Secondly, returning a runaway slave was a public act; Paul did not have the authority to simply send back such a slave. Fugitives had to be handed over to public officials, who kept them under guard before they were returned to their masters.³

(1.2.) P. Arzt-Grabner⁴ has taken the wordplay implicit in the use of the term "useless", which refers to Onesimus' name ("useful") in v. 11, as the basis for reconstructing the damage caused by Onesimus' misbehaviour. According to Arzt-Grabner, Onesimus was a "useless" stray slave, an *erro*, who merely wished to take a short vacation from work before returning home. However, a rhetorical wordplay, based on the

eadem, La gestion de la colère et de l'agression dans l'Antiquité et dans le sermon sur la montagne, *Henoch* 25 (2003) 19–45; eadem, Der Affekt der ἐπιθυμία und der νόμος: Affektkontrolle und soziale Identitätsbildung im 4. Makkabäerbuch mit einem Ausblick auf den Römerbrief, in: D. Sänger/M. Konradt (eds.), *Das Gesetz im frühen Judentum und im Neuen Testament: Festschrift für Christoph Burchard zum 75. Geburtstag* (NTOA 57), Göttingen/Fribourg 2006, 55–74; eadem, Affekte und Affektkontrolle im antiken Judentum und Urchristentum, in: G. Theißen/P. v. Gemünden (eds.), *Erkennen und Erleben: Beiträge zur psychologischen Erforschung des frühen Christentums*, Gütersloh 2007, 249–270; eadem, La culture des passions à l'époque du Nouveau Testament: une contribution théologique et psychologique, *ETR* 70 (1995) 335–348; eadem, La femme passionnelle et l'homme rationnel? Une chapitre de psychologie historique, *Bib.* 78 (1997) 457–480; eadem, Methodische Überlegungen zur historischen Psychologie exemplifiziert am Themenkomplex der Trauer, *EvTh* 65 (2005) 86–102.

3 See P. Arzt-Grabner, *Onesimus erro: Zur Vorgeschichte des Philemonbriefes*, *ZNW* 95 (2004) 131–143, here: 140f.; idem, *Philemon* (PKNT 1), Göttingen 2003, 105–108, and Dig. 11.4.1.1–8.

4 See Arzt-Grabner, *Onesimus* (see n. 3), 141–143.

term “useless”, should not comprise the main basis for reconstructing Onesimus' misbehaviour. Moreover, why would a pagan slave enjoying vagrancy decide to visit a Christian friend of his master in a prison? Arzt-Grabner⁵ speculates that a member of the Christian community in the city of Paul's imprisonment must have taken Onesimus to visit Paul in jail. But why would a pagan vagabond consent to this? *The erro theory does not adequately explain why Onesimus met up with Paul.*⁶ Did the slave suddenly experience pangs of *remorse* about missing work and *fear* of his master, and therefore decide that he needed help from this Christian apostle? What would have triggered such a sudden turnaround? A concrete cause would have to be postulated. The text does not indicate one.

(2.) I myself have proposed a different solution.⁷ Some unknown material damage (ἀδικεῖν, ὀφείλειν, ἀποτίνειν [vv. 18–19]) *in addition to* the absence without leave, had triggered Philemon's anger (possibly the slave had broken something). When Onesimus left the house, he already knew that he needed an intercessor; in fact, he only left the house in order to find such an advocate. Roman legal texts dating back to the first and second centuries, as well as a text by Pliny (Epist. 9.21,24), depict a scenario that exactly matches the situation underlying the Letter to Philemon: A slave who had a conflict with his master could go to a third person, ideally a friend of his master, in order to win this person over as a mediator and intercessor in the conflict. Nobody considered such slaves to be runaway or stray slaves. This scenario offers a plausible explanation as to why the pagan Onesimus met up with the Christian apostle in prison.

The relevant first- and second-century juridical texts are quoted in Dig. 21.1.17.4 (Proculus, the legal scholar, a contemporary of the apostle Paul); Dig. 21.1.17.5 (Pliny's contemporary Vivianus); Dig. 21.1.43.1 (the

5 See P. Arzt-Grabner, *How to Deal with Onesimus? Paul's Solution within the Frame of Ancient Legal and Documentary Sources*, pp. 113–142, here: 134f., in this volume.

6 R.P. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon* (NCEB), London 1974, 145, speculates that Onesimus might have come on an errand to Paul and simply overstayed his time. But why did Paul not mention this? Such a circumstance would have added weight to his argument. Especially at the end of v. 18, a statement pointing out that “it is exclusively my fault; I converted him and therefore he stayed longer” would have been most helpful in furthering Paul's argument. As an *argumentum e silentio*, however, this objection against Martin is less significant than the following: The opposition of ποτέ and νῦν in v. 11 disproves that Onesimus' wrongdoing comprises a current (“now”) “overstaying” in Paul's prison. The transgression is ποτέ and not νῦν.

7 P. Lampe, *Keine “Sklavenflucht” des Onesimus*, ZNW 76 (1985) 135–137; idem, *Der Brief an Philemon*, in: N. Walter/E. Reinmuth/P. Lampe, *Die Briefe an die Philipper, Thessalonicher und an Philemon* (NTD 8/2), Göttingen 1998, 203–232.

legal scholar Paulus, 2nd/3rd cent. CE); see also Dig. 21.1.17.12 (Labeo and Caelius, 1st cent. CE).

J.A. Harrill objected that these texts reflect only academic discussions among jurists in far-way Rome, and that these discussions did not have any impact on the provinces. Pliny's text, and also several provincial papyri and wax tablets dating back to the first century and first half of the second century, however, disprove the theory that these Roman jurists merely played academic games.⁸ Dig. 21.1, in which these legal authors are quoted, focuses on the Edict of the Curule Aediles, which dates back to Republican times, and which stipulated that slave traders had to provide information about the slaves' past on the market, and specifically, *inter alia*, whether they had ever run away or strayed before. This rule was followed in the practice of the markets during imperial times, as demonstrated *expressis verbis* in the following eleven texts, both Latin and Greek, dating back to the time period of 38–154 CE: in the first-century (38 CE) wax tablet T.Sulpicii 43 from Italy ("not a *fugitive*, *erro* et cetera according to the Edict of the Curule Aediles"); similarly the first-century (before 63/64 CE; 47 CE) tablets T.Hercul. 60 and 62 from Italy; the second-century (139 CE; 142 CE) wax tablets T. Dacia 6–7 from Dacia; the second-century (142 CE; 151 CE) papyri P. Turner 22 and BGU III 887 from Pamphylia; the second-century (154 CE) papyrus SB III 6016 from Egypt; as well as Gell. 4.2.1; Hor., *Epist.* 2.2.1–19; and Dig. 21.1.48.3f. (Pomponius 23 ad Sabinum; 2nd cent.). Thus, the legal authors quoted above did not play hair-splitting academic games. Their discussions about the regulations of the aediles were of consequence for the markets all over the empire. Slave traders had to know exactly who needed to be marked as a former fugitive or an *erro*. This directly impacted on the market value of the slaves; traders were pleased about every slave that they did not have to label as a "fugitive".

Concerning my analysis of the social and legal situation behind Phlm, Arzt-Grabner⁹ objects that Paul, similarly to Pliny in *Epist.* 9.21, 24, would have expressly mentioned that Onesimus had come to him to ask for intercession. According to Arzt-Grabner, this would have been a strong argument. But does the obvious need to be pointed out? If Onesimus had caused some damage in Philemon's household and subsequently left, then returning with a placating and pleading letter from Paul, it would have been crystal clear to Philemon that Onesimus had

8 Contra J.A. Harrill, *Using the Roman Jurists to Interpret Philemon: A Response to Peter Lampe*, ZNW 90 (1999) 135–138. The papyri listed below in this paragraph are helpfully discussed in more detail by Arzt-Grabner elsewhere in this volume.

9 See Arzt-Grabner, *Solution* (see n. 5), 134.

asked for intercession, just as other slaves did in such a situation. There was no need to mention this. *Argumenta e silentio* do not go far.

To sum up, Onesimus, in all likelihood, had caused some material damage, and anticipated a burst of anger by his master. He therefore went to the apostle, a friend of Philemon (Phlm 1.6.17), in order to win Paul over as an advocate and mediator in the conflict. Instead of running away, he wanted to return home and restore peace.

In which ever way the specifics of the social and legal situation are reconstructed, it remains true that the psychological situation is loaded with

(a) *anger* on Philemon's part, and correspondingly with

(b) *fear* of the master on the slave's part.

(c) At the same time, Onesimus has *trust* in the apostle that he will be a good mediator in the conflict. Otherwise he would not have tried to find Paul or consented to the writing of a mediating letter.

(d) Fourthly, Paul *loves* Philemon (ἀγάπη [vv. 1.9]) and feels *thankfulness* (εὐχαριστῶ [v. 4]), "much *joy*" (χαρά), "*comfort and encouragement*" (παράκλησις) because of him (vv. 5.7). Philemon, as Paul emphasises in the *captatio benevolentiae* at the beginning (vv. 4–7, *prooemium*), has shown so much "love" (ἀγάπη [twice]) and "faithfulness" (πίστις) toward Christ and "all the saints" that the word has spread and Paul has heard all about it (vv. 5.7). Because of Philemon, the "innermost selves and feelings" (τὰ σπλάγχνα) of "the saints" are refreshed (v. 7). The hyperbolic use of παντ-, three times in vv. 4–6, indicates the intensity of Paul's positive feelings towards Philemon.

(e) Fifthly, Paul is in prison (vv. 1.9.10.13.22¹⁰.23), and is therefore a possible object of *pity*. The mentioning of his old age (v. 9) is to be read along the same lines.¹¹

¹⁰ χαρίζομαι implies his release from prison.

¹¹ There is no indication that the mentioning of Paul's old age was meant as a reminder of his authority. In v. 9b, "old" is positioned in a parallelism to "prisoner" ("Although I have all fearlessness in Christ to command you to do what is right, I rather, for the sake of love, ask you, because I am such a person as Paul, an old man, but now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus"). Syntactically, both old age and imprisonment are connected with the self-humbling gesture expressed in παρακαλεῖν, in v. 9a, and not with παρησίαν ἔχων ἐπιτάσσειν in v. 8, which itself, as an adversative participial phrase, is only subordinate to παρακαλῶ (with regard to παρακαλῶ, see n. 26, below). Whenever Paul wishes to highlight his authority, he never points to his old age, but to his apostleship, his Damascus experience, his union with Christ (1Cor 9,1f.; 5,4), etc.; at the time of the writing of 1Cor, he was not much older than when he wrote Phlm. Contra G.J. Steyn, *Some Figures of Style in the Epistle to Philemon: Their Contribution towards the Persuasive Nature of the Epistle*, *EkkIPh* 77 (1995) 64–80, here: 72, who takes both imprisonment for Christ and old age as authority attributes.

(f) Sixthly, Philemon presumably feels *respect*, if not *admiration* for Paul. Paul is the apostle and founder of Christian congregations and also converted Philemon himself to Christianity (v. 19b).

(g) Therefore, seventhly, Philemon owes something to Paul (vv. 19b and 13¹²) and most probably feels *indebtedness*, if not *thankfulness*, towards Paul. Before Paul begins to write the letter, their relationship is clearly hierarchical, as vv. 13^{10,8–9}13.19b.21¹⁴.22¹⁵ demonstrate. It is the relationship of a patron to his dependant, in which the dependant is indebted to the patron and is expected to show obedience (v. 21) and respect, if not admiration and thankfulness. Paul's authority over Philemon is even guaranteed by Christ himself, as v. 8a subtly implies.

(h) Eighthly, Philemon's *honour and shame* will play a role in the epistolary communication between Paul, Timothy, Onesimus, Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchos, Demas, and Luke on the senders' side, and Philemon, Apphia, Archippos, and Philemon's whole house church in Colossae on the recipients' side.

(i) Thus – ninthly – there are at least a dozen people involved in this communication, who know about it and who are *curious* about its outcome. The letter is not a private matter between Paul, Onesimus, and Philemon. In other words, as soon as a group of people are involved,¹⁶ who feel curiosity and suspense with regard to the conflict's ending, the honour and shame of the person who is expected to alter his behaviour or attitude are at stake.

II. Rhetorical Aggression Management

All of the above mentioned feelings are “in the air”, as it were, at the onset of the communication. How does Paul navigate them in the letter? His main rhetorical task is to calm Philemon's reactive aggression toward Onesimus and to prevent him from seeking revenge for his pagan slave's misbehaviour. Instead, Philemon must be persuaded to welcome Onesimus back as a Christian brother and to receive him with love; Philemon needs to “swallow” his anger. Not an easy task!

As Paul sits down to write, the psychological constellation is as follows: As other slaves of the time do when they are in severe conflict

12 ὑπὲρ σοῦ μοι διακονῆ (“service to me in your place”). Philemon is morally obligated to “serve” Paul.

13 πολλὴν ἐν Χριστῷ παρησίαν ἔχων ἐπιτάσσειν σοι.

14 ὑπακοῆ σου.

15 An unabashed imperative! See also the imperatives in vv. 17.18.20.

16 Not to mention Christ himself, who is a witness of Philemon's behaviour as well. Philemon has to act in the presence of Christ: vv. 6.20.25.

with their masters,¹⁷ Onesimus has sought refuge with a friend of his master. In this way, slaves place an efficient protective wall between themselves and the anger of their masters. Onesimus, the object of Philemon's reactive aggression, is shielded by Paul, an object of Philemon's positive feelings. Having converted Onesimus in the meantime, Paul gladly takes on the role of mediator. In his letter, he rhetorically presents us with a classic example of the restraint of aggression by diverting Philemon's reactive aggression towards replacement objects. The change of objects is proposed in two steps.

(1.) First, in Phlm 12.16–18, Paul rhetorically steers Philemon's aggression away from Onesimus — toward himself. "I am sending him back to you, *him*, that is, *my* inmost self" (αὐτόν, τοῦτ' ἔστιν τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα [v. 12]).¹⁸ "Receive *him* like *me*" (αὐτόν ὡς ἐμέ [v. 17]). What *he* owes you, "charge it to *my* account" (εἰ δέ τι ἠδίκησέν σε ἢ ὀφείλει, τοῦτο ἐμοὶ ἐλλόγα [v. 18]). By stepping in front of the slave, as it were, Paul closely identifies with him.¹⁹ Paul and Onesimus are "beloved brothers" now (v. 16); that is, what affects one of them touches the other as well. The message is clear: If you, Philemon, choose to vent your anger on Onesimus, you will be venting it on me. I offer myself as the replacement object for your avenging aggression. In v. 19, Paul, with his own hand, writes a legally binding note taking over Onesimus' debt. Philemon technically could take this paper to court and force Paul to pay.

However, all this is merely rhetorical. Now that Paul has offered himself as a replacement object, Philemon still cannot vent his anger. Paul, of course, is the last person onto whom he could unload aggression — for several reasons that Paul makes sure to mention. Already at the end of v. 19, he reminds Philemon that he is in debt to Paul, and not vice versa. Philemon even owes Paul service (v. 13), since the apostle converted him to Christ. Furthermore, Paul is an apostle. In the light of vv. 8–9.13.19b.21.22, we have already seen that their relationship so far has clearly been hierarchical and that Philemon has friendly (v. 17) feelings toward Paul (see [f]–[g] above). Paul deploys these emotions artfully. It is more than clear that Philemon could never vent aggression onto Paul — all the more since the apostle is an old man and has already been humbled by being imprisoned and suffering for Christ's sake.

17 See the juridical texts referred to above.

18 τοῦτ' ἔστιν = "id est/that is". See, e.g., Rom 7,18; 9,8; 10,6–8; Acts 1,19; 19,4; Matt 27,46; Mark 7,2.

19 See also Paul's emphasis on his imprisonment (see above): He is not free, just like the slave Onesimus. More importantly, in v. 20, Philemon's envisaged loving reacceptance of *Onesimus* will be a "benefit" for *Paul* and a "refreshment" for *Paul's* "innermost self". In v. 10, finally, Onesimus is called a "child" of Paul.

(2.) What is the solution? Paul asks Philemon to renounce any compensation for the material loss that he has suffered through Onesimus' wrongdoing. Philemon is expected to swallow his anger and receive both Onesimus (v. 16), and a little later also Paul (v. 22), with love. In terms of psychological categories: Paul proposes a double change of object. From the object "Onesimus", he diverts Philemon's reactive aggression onto himself — and from thence onto Philemon himself. Philemon is expected to *internalise* the aggression that he may not vent on the external world.

Sigmund Freud, in a 1932 letter to Albert Einstein, described the diversion of aggression onto less dangerous objects as an important means of avoiding wars.²⁰ Numerous empirical-psychological studies, also of cross-cultural nature, ever since have illustrated the phenomenon of replacing objects of aggression and of internalising aggression.²¹ Such studies show, for example, that extremely stringent moral standards are developed by people who internalise the aggression that they cannot vent on the outside world. Other internalising subjects develop a high physical and psychological pain tolerance; or they burden themselves with hard physical exercise or with self-sacrificing work for the community. In extreme cases, they even ritually maim themselves. These examples illustrate the ways in which aggression can be directed against the subjects themselves.

Philemon, of course, does not have to go as far as the subjects in the mentioned extreme examples. Renouncing any compensation (v. 19), absorbing the damage, and developing love for the initial object of reactive aggression (vv. 19 and 16) — these are the bitter pills that Paul offers to Philemon to swallow. Nothing drastic; but difficult enough.

In 1Cor 6, Paul extends a similar recommendation to those who have suffered material loss through fellow Christians and who wish to take revenge by suing them in a pagan court. One piece of advice that

20 S. Freud, Warum Krieg? Brief an A. Einstein vom Sept. 1932, in: A. Mitscherlich et al. (eds.), S. Freud, Studienausgabe 9: Fragen der Gesellschaft/Ursprünge der Religion (FTB 7309), Frankfurt/Main 1982, 275–286.

21 I will only mention a few examples from the history of relevant research in this regard: E. Jacobson's classical study on political prisoners: Observations on the Psychological Effect of Imprisonment on Female Political Prisoners, in: K.R. Eissler et al. (eds.), Searchlights on Delinquency: New Psychoanalytic Studies. Dedicated to August Aichhorn, on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday July 27, 1948, New York 1949, 341–368, esp. 363ff.; C. Klüwer, Die Delinquenten und ihre Behandlungsmöglichkeiten, in: D. Eicke (ed.), Tiefenpsychologie 2: Neue Wege der Psychoanalyse, Psychoanalyse der Gesellschaft, Die psychoanalytische Bewegung, Weinheim/Basel 1982, 23–59, esp. 56; E. Lürßen, Das Suchtproblem in neuerer psychoanalytischer Sicht, in: *ibid.*, 101–130, esp. 113; H. Henseler, Der psychoanalytische Beitrag zum Suizidproblem, in: *ibid.*, 87–100, esp. 88. For cross-cultural research, see F. v. Boxberg, Analytische Feldforschungen, in: *ibid.*, 366–395, esp. 386f.

Paul offers is that those Corinthians should tone down the reaction by asking a Christian mediator to help to settle the conflict. However, the solution most favoured by Paul is that of totally renouncing one's right to revenge, refraining from venting reactive aggression, and rather suffering the loss (vv. 6–7) — which would be another example of the internalisation of aggression.²²

As if he wished to confirm the correlation between the *internalisation of aggression* and the adherence to *strict moral standards*, as mentioned above, Paul, in the immediate context (1Cor 6,9–11.18–20),²³ goes on to enumerate several rigorous rules of the Christian lifestyle. There seems to be a connection between the ethical rigour of Pauline Christianity and its advocacy of non-aggressive social relationships. Or, in other words, rigorous early Christian moral standards, especially concerning sexuality, and frequent internalisation of aggression, that is, a low level of vented aggression in social relations, seem to go hand in hand,²⁴ as modern psychology has also observed.

How one should interpret this correlation is another question. One could simply argue that the aggression internalisation is just another one of the strict norms that early Christians followed; and that all of these norms need to be considered to be on the same level and were *therefore* put side by side in the early Christian texts. Freud, however, interpreted strict moral behaviour as a *result* of the diversion of aggression towards one's own self as the replacement object. He thus tried to provide at least one explanation for the origin of the human conscience. In short, according to him, internalisation of aggression leads to a strict conscience which causes human beings to practise aggression against themselves; the *result* is strict moral behaviour.²⁵ Today, one certainly

22 See also Matt 5,43–48 (love of one's enemy) and 5,38f. (vengeful anger should not be vented, and thus vicious cycles of retaliating violence should be halted).

23 With regard to these high, often tendentiously ascetic standards in Pauline circles, see also 1Cor 5,9–13; 7,1–2a.7f.11.26–35.37f.40; 9,12.15.18.25.27; 10,6.8; 2Cor 5,4.8; 6,6; 7,1; 1Thess 4,3–8; Gal 5,13–26; Rom 1,24–27.29; 6,4.6.12.19; 7,5f.; 8,13; 12,1f.; 13,13f.; Col 3,5.

24 In a negative way, the same correlation is exemplified by misbehaving Corinthians who on the one hand are aggressive (1Cor 3,3) and on the other hand are reluctant to excommunicate the libertine fellow Christian of 1Cor 5. Positively — as in 1Cor 6 — Paul places both motifs, a low level of vented aggression and a high moral standard (esp. a carefully controlled sexuality), side by side in 1Thess 3,12; 5,15; 4,9–12 vs. 4,3–8, and also in Gal 5,13c–15.20.22f.26; 6,1 vs. 5,13b.16.19.21.23f. In both cases, the two strings of texts are tightly woven together. The same contextual closeness of the motifs can be observed in Col 3,5 vs. 3,8.12f., and in 2Cor 6,6; 12,20 vs. 12,21. See also Phil 1,9; Rom 1,29–31 vs. 1,24.26; as well as Rom 13,8b.9fin vs. 13,9; Rom 13,13a vs. 13,13b; and Matt 5,39–41.44–48 vs. the high moral standards of the remaining part of the Sermon on the Mount.

25 See S. Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, in: idem, *Studienausgabe* 9 (see n. 20), 191–270, esp. 250–256; idem, *Warum Krieg?*, in: *ibid.*, 275–286, esp. 286; see also

has to discount Freud's concept of aggression as a "drive". But does this automatically disprove the rest of the hypothesis? This problem is beyond the scope of this article.

III. Further Rhetorical Means Involving Emotions in the Letter to Philemon

Paul's rhetorical goal is clear, as well as part of his strategy. But how does he spell out the details? Paul's biggest trump card is, of course, the fact that Onesimus has become a Christian in the meantime, and therefore needs to be looked at with the new eyes of a brother, not those of a slave's master. But there are additional, more subtle motivations for Philemon to follow the path of aggression management that Paul lays out for him and thus to receive Onesimus back with love.

1. Rhetorical Renouncement of Status and Reversal of Roles

Although Paul clearly stands hierarchically above Philemon (see above) and could give him orders (Phlm 8.14), he only subtly uses this authority — with a velvet glove. The weight of his authority is certainly present in the background, but it is well cushioned. How does Paul achieve this? Rhetorically, he does the opposite of being "bossy". Out of "love" (v. 9), he renounces the status of the superior, by repeatedly, if not monotonously, using egalitarian terms to describe his relationship with Philemon (brother [vv. 1.7.20]; co-worker [v. 1]; co-partner [v. 17]). Rhetorically he even puts himself into a position in which he is indebted to Philemon (v. 19b). He asks and petitions (*παρακαλώ*, even twice [vv. 9–10]) — as if he were the dependant and Philemon the patron!²⁶ This reversal of roles, almost a rhetorical "prostration", was designed to have its effect.²⁷ On receipt of the letter, Philemon probably felt embarrassed and hastened to comply with Paul's petition. In any case, this would have been the only way to avert the "shame" that was inherent in the situation craftily created by Paul, and to restore the "honour" of both the "real" patron and the "real" dependant, who in the social system was expected to be loyal to his patron.²⁸

idem, Das ökonomische Problem des Masochismus, in: A. Mitscherlich et al. (eds.), S. Freud, Studienausgabe 3: Psychologie des Unbewußten (FTB 7303), Frankfurt/Main 1982, 339–354, esp. 353f.

26 The phrase *διὰ τὴν ἀγάπην μᾶλλον* in v. 9 underscores that *παρακαλώ* is semantically far removed from *ἐπιτάσσειν* in v. 8. In addition, *μᾶλλον* indicates that *παρρησίαν ἔχων ἐπιτάσσειν* is an *adversative* participial construction.

27 See also 1Cor 9,19 (2Cor 4,5): Paul deliberately uses self-humiliation as a strategy to win over audiences.

28 The open renouncement of a strong argumentative trump ("I could command you" [v. 8]) is a rhetorical *antiphrasis*, as Steyn, Figures (see n. 11), 72, rightly points out.

At the same time, Paul's rhetorical self-humiliation exemplifies something that Philemon is expected to imitate. When, in the near future, Onesimus is back in Colossae, Philemon, too, will be expected to renounce the status of the superior and become a brother to his formerly pagan slave. It is as if Paul, between the lines, were repeating the "be an imitator of me!" found in 1Cor 4,16; 11,1; Phil 3,17 (1Cor 9; 1Thess 1,6; 2,14).

2. Freedom of the Audience

Paul's renouncement of status and of the right to give orders furthermore implies that he is leaving Philemon some freedom to make his own decisions. Philemon has to work out for himself what exactly "the good" (τὸ ἀγαθόν) is that he is expected to do (Phlm 6.14); Paul deliberately does not spell it out. On the one hand, what does Paul mean by saying that he could use Onesimus as another helper in Ephesus (v. 13, see vv. 23f.)? Does he mean that Philemon should send Onesimus back to Ephesus to serve Paul?

If Col 4,9 can be trusted, Philemon indeed sent Onesimus back to Paul — and thus gave up some of his power over his servant, hurting his own interests by not only renouncing recompensation for the damage done by Onesimus, but also by doing without Onesimus work in his household. It is this "hurt" that helps individuals to internalise the aggression that they cannot vent on the outside world (see above). If Philemon sent Onesimus back to serve the church then he can be compared to other internalising subjects who develop a higher pain tolerance than usual or burden themselves with self-sacrifices for the community. The psychological studies quoted above illustrate such ways in which aggression can be directed against the subjects themselves and thus overcome.

On the other hand, what is specifically implied by the exhortation to receive Onesimus as a brother with love? Does it even imply freeing this slave? The καὶ ἐν σαρκί(!) καὶ ἐν κυρίῳ in v. 16²⁹ may comprise a strong hint. V. 21, a little later, may constitute another one: "I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even *more* than I say." To ask for manumission was not such an excessive demand; normally slaves could count on being manumitted as they grew older, at the latest in their 30s.³⁰ But Paul deliberately leaves all options open. Psychologically, this is wise. People who are not directly pushed, but only subtly guided by the orator, comply much better and offer less opposition. Paul knows this; Quintilian knows this. In v. 14, the apostle even explains his tactic in plain language: "I preferred to do nothing without your *consent* in

²⁹ See also ὑπὲρ δούλων in v. 16.

³⁰ This can be inferred on the basis of the juridical and epigraphic sources; see G. Alföldy, Die Freilassung von Sklaven und die Struktur der Sklaverei der römischen Kaiserzeit, in: H. Schneider (ed.), Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte der römischen Kaiserzeit (WdF 552), Darmstadt 1981, 336–371, esp. 359.

order that your goodness might *not be by compulsion but of your own free will*.”³¹

A reading of Quintilian validates Paul’s approach as a sound rhetorical method. A hearer “believes in what he thinks he has found out for himself” (ei, quod a se inventum existimat, credat [Inst. 9.2.71 et al.]). He “takes pleasure in detecting the (merely insinuated, not expressly spelled out) meanings, applauds his own cleverness, and while the other one still speaks he compliments himself” (gaudet intelligere, et favat ingenio suo et alio dicente se laudet [Inst. 9.2.78]).

By leaving the addressee some freedom of decision,³² the speaker helps him to keep face (“honour”) and thereby increases the likelihood of winning a compliant listener.

3. Honour and Shame in the Light of Group Norms

In v. 8 Paul reminds Philemon that the renunciation of reactive aggression is a Christian group norm, something that is a “duty” (τὸ ἀνήκον).³³ In other words, it would be embarrassing for Philemon to deviate from this collective standard. The fellow Christians who will observe Philemon’s reactions on receipt of the letter would not understand such a deviation. His honour is at stake, his excellent reputation, of which Paul cleverly reminds both him and the other readers (vv. 4–7).

4. Mild Provocation

Phlm 17 and 18 are two parallel εἰ clauses, both full of rhetorical ruse. They are almost teasing, toying with Philemon’s feelings, in order to stir him up and nudge him in the direction in which Paul wants him to move.

31 According to J.P. Heil, *The Chiastic Structure and Meaning of Paul’s Letter to Philemon*, Bib. 82 (2001) 178–206, who tries to find a chiasmic structure in the letter, v. 14 can even be regarded as the centre and pivotal point of the entire letter. Heil, however, too one-sidedly interprets the wishful thinking of v. 13 as the objective of the letter. In fact, Paul aims at much more in this letter; v. 13 does not reflect its only purpose.

32 See also 1Cor 6,1–11: Paul gives the Corinthians two options. The same is true in 1Cor 7: Asceticism represents only one option among other legitimate ones.

33 See also ἀγαθοῦ τοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν εἰς Χριστόν in v. 6: “good” does not refer to what is deemed good in general, but to what applies specifically in the context of the Christian congregations. The fact that the renunciation of reactive aggression represents a group norm is also confirmed in 1Thess 5,15, where the congregation as a whole is exhorted to be watchful that nobody “repays evil for evil”. Furthermore, see the texts referred to in n. 22 and n. 24.

εἰ οὖν με ἔχεις κοινωνόν, προσλαβοῦ αὐτὸν ὡς ἐμέ.

If you consider me a co-partner (and I leave the question open as to whether or not you do),³⁴ welcome him as you would welcome me!

Paul teasingly questions their partnership, although in reality he does not doubt it. Philemon's reaction can only be: "Of course, we are co-workers and partners in Christ's mission. How can you doubt it? I will prove it to you!" "But then," Paul implies, "in that case you have to accept the consequence, namely that you must receive Onesimus just as you would receive me, now that he is a fellow-Christian." Likewise v. 18:

εἰ δέ τι ἠδίκησέν σε ἢ ὀφείλει, ...

If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything (and I leave the question open as to whether or not he does), ...

Paul teasingly questions Philemon's material loss, although in reality he does not doubt it.³⁵ Philemon's reaction can only be: "Of course, he wronged me! How can you doubt it?" "All right, then," implies Paul's text, "then you will have to accept the consequence that I myself take over Onesimus' debt — which in the end will mean that you must suffer the loss."

5. Praise with an Ulterior Motive

In v. 7, Paul lauds Philemon, "the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you". Later on, it turns out that this praise contained a hidden agenda. In v. 20, Paul adds a twist to the praise. In plain language, this subtle verse implies: As much as you refreshed the saints (v. 7), also refresh me — you probably owe it to me (v. 19) even more than to others.

Again, Philemon could only respond, "Of course, Paul, you are right!" Any other response would shame him. Nobody desires to fall back below their own standards. Philemon could never treat the apostle with less caring and consideration than other Christians. In other

34 This kind of conditional clause (εἰ + indicative, plus indicative or imperative in the main clause) is often falsely labelled "realis". In fact, it is an "indefinite". The reality of the if-clause content, for a moment, is in abeyance. It would be wrong to consider such if-clauses to be mere equivalents of causal phrases. The rhetorical impetus would be lost. — For M. Wolter, *Der Brief an die Kolosser. Der Brief an Philemon* (ÖTBK 12), Gütersloh/Würzburg 1993, 231f., the if-clause in v. 18 indicates that Onesimus believed himself to be innocent, which, however, is read into the text. Greek if-clauses exclusively reveal what the *speaker* himself thinks about the reality of the if-clause content.

35 If he did, he would devote more time to arguing that Philemon wrongly accused Onesimus. Moreover, in v. 11, he admits that Onesimus was "useless" in the past.

words, his own good behaviour in the past (v. 7) is rhetorically used to move him in the desired direction.³⁶

6. Identification and Wordplay

V. 12, finally, adds an additional impetus to v. 20. In v. 12, Paul identified Onesimus with his own “innermost self” (τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα). In v. 20, he asks Philemon to refresh his “innermost self”. Thus, in the light of v. 12, this also means: “Refresh *Onesimus!*” Or in other words, “By refreshing Onesimus upon his return, you will refresh me.” Because of v. 12, there is a double entendre in the expression ἀνάπαυσόν μου τὰ σπλάγχνα ἐν Χριστῷ in v. 20.

7. *Delectatio* by Means of Wordplays

Paul uses wordplays to please, if not entertain, his audience. Besides his teasing εἰ clauses, and besides the twists that he gives to the expression τὰ σπλάγχνα ἀναπαύω in vv. 7.12.20, Paul engages in wordplay with δέσμιος – δεσμοῖς in vv. 9–10 and with the name Onesimus, “the useful, the profitable”. Because of his wrongdoing, Onesimus was useless (ἄχρηστος), but now he is useful again (εὐχρηστος [v. 11]). Paul mentions the slave’s name (v. 10) only in connection with this wordplay.

V. 20 adds another twist to the wordplay, thereby investing it with an additional flourish: “It is from you, Philemon, that I now would like to *profit* (ἐγὼ σου ὀναίμην). This is really what interests me today – not only Onesimus’ profitability.”

Furthermore, vv. 18–19 comprise a play on the words ὀφείλει and προσοφείλεις (“he owes”, “you owe”); the change of subjects turns Philemon’s weapon against himself.

All of this shows wit. It will amuse – if not Philemon, at least the other recipients of the letter. According to Quintilian, enjoyment convinces an audience (Inst. 12.10.43–48: delectatione persuadent). Positive feelings are evoked by entertaining and delightful elements, provided that this kind of rhetorical ornament is not used too frequently (see Inst. 12.10.46³⁷).

Rhetorical ornament contributes not a little to the furtherance of our case. For when our audience finds it a pleasure to listen, their attention and their readiness to believe what they hear are both alike increased, while they are generally filled with delight, and sometimes even transported by admiration (Inst. 8.3.5; see 5.14.35; 4.2.46; 1.8.11).

36 The *prooemium*, therefore, stresses those of Philemon’s qualities upon which the success of the letter depends; see F.F. Church, *Rhetorical Structure and Design in Paul’s Letter to Philemon*, HThR 71 (1978) 17–33, here: 22.

37 If such rhetorical ornaments are used too frequently, they “mutually destroy the effects that they were designed to produce.”

With regard to anger management, Quintilian gives the following advice: If you want to dampen and extinguish angry feelings and hatred in your audience, do not shy away from joking a little (Inst. 6.1.46; 6.3.9f.; see 4.1.29).

8. Rhetorical Vigour through Passionate Style

Quintilian knows that the speaker's passion can be expressed by means of a staccato style. In this way, thoughts can be expressed energetically, with verve, with vividness (Inst. 9.3.50–54). Quintilian knows this; Paul knows this. In Phlm 12, where he first identifies with Onesimus (see n. 11 above), he says: ὄν ἀνέπεμψά σοι, αὐτόν, τοῦτ' ἔστιν τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα. Try to enunciate this phrase! The speaker has to break it up into portions, because the accusative object is repeated: ὄν — αὐτόν — τοῦτ' ἔστιν. Paul feels passionately about this identification. It is a pillar of his argumentation.

Passion is also shown in the exclaiming vocatives of vv. 7 and 20. "Yes, brother (ναὶ ἀδελφέ)! In the Lord, I want to profit from you! Refresh (imperative) my innermost self in Christ!" (v. 20). Not coincidentally, the vocative ἀδελφέ consistently occurs in the same verses as the emotional τὰ σπλάγχνα.

9. Soliciting Pity

According to Quintilian, "There is a great deal to be gained by ... stirring our audience's emotions" (Inst. 5.8.3).

As soon as they begin to ... *pity*, they begin to take a personal interest in the case ..., the judge, when overcome by his emotions, abandons all attempt to inquire into the truth of the arguments, he is swept along by the tide of passion ... (Inst. 6.2.6; see 6.2.3; 12.10.62).

Pity (*miseratio*) alone may even move a strict judge (Inst. 4.1.14).

Paul does not refrain from using this rhetorical instrument. Six times he mentions his imprisonment (Phlm 1.9.10.13.22³⁸.23), which, of course, evokes pity, as does the reference to his old age (v. 9³⁹). As a humble petitioner, he begs twice (vv. 9.10). Nobody turns down an old, wrongfully imprisoned man who is suffering for the common Christian cause (vv. 1.9b.23)!

Nevertheless, in vv. 8–9, Paul seems to have neglected one piece of advice that Quintilian gives his students: If a speaker who wishes to evoke pity shows too much self-assurance in the same sentence, the effect of the pity-soliciting elements might fall flat (Inst. 11.1.50,52,54). Self-confidently, in Phlm 8, Paul has just hinted at his authority. Should

38 See n. 10 above.

39 See n. 11 above.

he have rather brought up this reminder somewhere else in the context, farther away from vv. 9 and 10, to allow the pitying feelings to unfold? He might have become aware of this flaw and hastened to add another facet to vv. 9–10, in order to boost the effect of these verses:

10. Emotional Family Language

Into the *mélange* of pity-soliciting images of “prison”, “old age”, “to beg”, Paul mixes the term “love” and the emotional metaphors of “child” and “to become a father”. All of these images in vv. 9–10 create an emotional atmosphere that the hearer will not easily escape; this atmosphere is likely to win him over and to further his compliance with the speaker’s wishes.

11. Kindling of Fear

An effective means of convincing a hearer is to kindle feelings of fear. This method is even more effective than the evocation of hope, as Quintilian (Inst. 3.8.39f.; see 4.1.21) and Aristotle (Eth. Nic. 10.9.4) point out.

(a) At the end, in Phlm 22,⁴⁰ Paul indicates that he expects to visit Philemon soon. It is tacitly understood that such a visit will also comprise an ideal opportunity to check on whether or not Philemon has complied with Paul’s requests. Philemon cannot escape without being monitored, not only by a dozen people involved in this communication, but also by the apostle himself.

(b) The fear of disappointing somebody is a strong motivation. Who would wish to disappoint Paul’s prayers (vv. 4.6), Paul’s trust (v. 21), and Paul’s other positive feelings that he has had for Philemon for quite some time (vv. 1.4–5.7.9; see above)? The mention of these feelings, of Paul’s trust in the addressee, and of the prayers, adds another unobtrusive nudge to set Philemon in motion.

(c) Finally, the letter not only mentions other “co-workers” (v. 24) *besides* Philemon (v. 1); it also states that Onesimus has grown very close to Paul as his “child” and his “beloved brother” (vv. 10.16). Does Philemon need to fear losing his closeness to Paul? Has Onesimus replaced him? Should he fear the loss of Paul’s genial proximity? Does he have reason to feel jealous? Certainly not, if he complies with Paul’s letter! We do not know whether Philemon reacted to the text’s signals in

40 According to Quintilian, the best place to kindle emotions is at the end of the speech. The second best place is the *prooemium*, where the speaker needs to access the audience’s heart and make them kindly disposed. In Phlm, the *prooemium* is the emotionally warm *captatio benevolentiae* in vv. 4–7 (see above), which climaxes in the vocative “brother!” See Quint., Inst. 4.1.5; 6.1.9–14,51f.; 7.1.10; see also 6.4.22; 11.3.170; 4 Prooem. 6; 4.1.14,28; 4.2.112,115,120.

the way that has been described here. But these feelings were at least within the realm of possible responses of the reader.

12. Common Grounds

The common Christian cause, faith, and ethos (κοινωνός [v. 17]; κοινωνία τῆς πίστεως [v. 6]; θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν [v. 3]; ἀγαθοῦ τοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν [v. 6]) are strong cohesive factors, and thus a powerful motivation to comply with the speaker's goals.

13. Insinuated Syllogisms

As a final point, Paul's rhetorical renunciation of a hierarchical status is meant to suggest a syllogistic inference to Philemon. Paul calls himself the "beloved brother" of Philemon (v. 1); at the same time, Onesimus is labelled Paul's "beloved brother" (v. 16). This leaves only one logical conclusion: Philemon himself is a "beloved brother" to Onesimus (v. 16).

The same conclusion is suggested when Paul's higher status is factored back into the equation. Just as Paul won Philemon for Christianity (v. 19b), so he "fathered" his "child" Onesimus (v. 10). Consequently, they are both Paul's children, both brothers.⁴¹

41 A syllogism is also insinuated by vv. 20 and 12. See part III.6, above.