

## A HELLENIST FORM OF EPHESIANS 1:3-14 SUBJECT-TYPE ISOLATION AND CATEGORIZATION IN THE PAULINE TEXTS

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Ancient poetic form functioned as more than simple artistic expression. Varied styles of classic literature, oral tradition, and drama also served as vehicles to reveal religious truth, philosophy, and even law or ethical standards.<sup>309</sup> Ancient literary art was a formidable communications device, equal in scope and purpose to today's Internet or modern telecommunications networks. The Hellenist world developed this system to an apex in prose, poetry, lyric, epic, and rhetoric. Artistic communication was ingrained in first century Mediterranean culture. Even the powerful, conquering Roman Empire was comparatively "intellectually, as also, artistically clumsy and immature."<sup>310</sup> Ultimately, Roman social communications yielded to the Hellenist arts. The Apostle Paul was a product and a producer of this ancient communications form. Accordingly, contemporary theologians must consider the pervasive melding of Hellenist art and communications when interpreting Paul's work. Paul existed and ministered in the Hellenist context. The nuances of his communication were most logically discovered in comparison with Greek poetic form. Thus, it is proposed that ancient Greek epic and lyric formulas may

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<sup>309</sup>Sibylline Oracles were in Greek poetic form and a famous collection of laws. Specially appointed Roman officials to whom the collection was entrusted consulted them in time of crisis. A large body of Jewish literature was written in Greek during the period 300 BC to 200 AD, including the Wisdom of Solomon, the works of Philo and Josephus, and several Greek versions of the Hebrew Bible. See John F. A. Sawyer, *Sacred Languages and Sacred Texts* (London: Routledge, 1999), 32.

<sup>310</sup>Reflecting the Roman occupation of Greece from 146 BC through the fall of the Western Empire in the 5th century AD, terms such as *Greco-Roman World* were coined by scholars to denote the geographical borders and longevity of the Hellenist culture's impact on the relatively unsophisticated Roman Empire. See John Boardman, Jasper Griffin, and Oswyn Murray, *The Oxford History of the Classical World* (Oxford, NY: Oxford Press, 1986), 435.

serve to characterize the passage under examination, i.e., Ephesians 1:3-14. This passage is one of Paul's most intriguing grammatical structures. Many seminary New Testament survey texts give only a cursory treatment to the influence of Hellenization on first century Christian writers. The bulk of such exploration is often dedicated to historic roots, pagan cults, and religious practices but not the arts. Bruce M. Metzger's classic seminary text, for instance, is void of any significant reference to Hellenist communications influence.<sup>311</sup> However, this article will demonstrate that the writings of Paul are illuminated in a detailed understanding of Classic Greek poetic form. Ancient Hellenist literature and oral tradition are defining elements of any comprehensive Pauline exegesis.

### THE TEXT AND CONTEXT

Without contest and by sheer volume, Paul's writings and biblical biography compile the greatest source for understanding the doctrine and direction of the early church. More than any other New Testament figure, the Apostle Paul, his instructions to believers, and his missionary example furnish the theological framework for the advancement of the gentile mission.<sup>312</sup> Paul's Hellenistic history and resultant classic Greek thinking style are transparent in his letters and serve as the perfect complement to his calling to the gentile world. However, Paul was more than merely a Jewish theologian acquainted with Greek culture and thought. His formative socialization was, in the main, Hellenistic. Paul was born in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Tarsus, a Mediterranean trade-route city and future capital of the Roman province of Cilicia. He was educated in the synagogues at Tarsus and Jerusalem. However, to compartmentalize the synagogue experience as totally Jewish belies any contextualization of religious practice. Factually, Greek-language Hellenist synagogues were present in both Jerusalem and Tarsus.<sup>313</sup> Accordingly, synagogue education was often administered with a Hellenist influence in structure and

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<sup>311</sup>Bruce M. Metzger, *The New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1965), 285.

<sup>312</sup>Glenn Barker, William Lane, and J. Ramsey Michaels, *The New Testament Speaks* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1969), 149.

<sup>313</sup>F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 126.

content.<sup>314</sup> It is not curious that F.F. Bruce describes Paul as a not only a Hebrew of Hebrews but also a “Hellenist of Hellenists.”<sup>315</sup> It is the Greek influence in Paul’s communication that may be at the center of Paul’s curious single-sentenced introduction to Ephesians (1:3-14). The Hellenist Paul may have intended this unique sentence structure as a signpost to the Greco-Roman world, indicating a foundational theology contained within it. Furthermore, the passage provides a platform to simultaneously demonstrate the subject of the section, namely, worship.

### What is Noteworthy in Ephesians 1:3-14?

Ephesians 1:3-14 is a single-sentenced structure of over 200 words. The passage is sewn together in a patchwork series of relative clauses and phrases that require intense analysis to appreciate or even render intelligible. Scholars of note have offered contradictory positions on the clarity and meaning of this passage.<sup>316</sup> E. Norden terms these verses “the most monstrous sentence conglomeration that I have ever found in the Greek language.”<sup>317</sup> Less critical others refer to the section’s worshipful wondrous awe and poetic relevance as a solemn meditative style. Still, a radical minority, arguing authorship of the work, identify the passage to be ludicrous and part of a larger body of evidence against the authorship of Paul.<sup>318</sup> In fact, this sentence is evidence of Paul’s original authorship. His Hellenist core is revealed in the structure and category of this opening. Few other first century writers had the education or background to produce such proficient or prolific Hellenist wordsmithing as the Apostle Paul. Studying under Gamaliel, Paul was exposed to philosophical thought and expression beyond the experience of most other writers.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>314</sup>Jurgen Becker, *Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles*, Trans. O.C. Dean (Louisville, KY: Knox Press, 1993), 34.

<sup>315</sup>Bruce, 15.

<sup>316</sup>Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 90.

<sup>317</sup>*Agnostos Theos* is a thorough and methodical research, where the author explores divine knowledge in early Greek thought; hence the title reflecting the Athenian unknown god familiar to the Apostle Paul. E. Norden, *Agnostos Theos* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1913, accessed 27 February 2006), 253; available from Questia, <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=94434416>; Internet.

<sup>318</sup>Martin Kitchen, *Ephesians* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 6.

<sup>319</sup>Bruce, 126.

## HELLENIST POETIC FORM

Greek poetic form developed in two major directions, the epic and lyric formulae. These forms differed in structure and in the nature of delivery plus intent of impact. Lyrical poetry was intense, emotional, personal, and much shorter than its epic counterpart. Epic was often linked to other epic material creating sequel-like or cyclic writings. Because ancient lyric was more concise than epic poetry, it was often sung. Lyric was intended to immediately stir the listener, creating an emotive response through the use of narrative, rhythm, and even musical accompaniment on a stringed instrument (the lyre).<sup>320</sup> Contemporary music is a modern derivation of Greek lyric. Similar to its modern counterpart, ancient lyric was a common and pervasive art form, a short poem that conveys intense feeling or profound thought. Epic poetry was recited. Famous epic examples are Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.<sup>321</sup>

Elegies and odes were major subcategories of the lyric. Defined from classical Greek and Roman literature, elegies were metric but less structured than the ode. Elegies commonly addressed subjects including love, sorrow, and politics. The ode was more stately and complex in structure. Common themes for the ode were praise and glorification (for an individual or an event) or worship toward nature (the gods). The ode was an intellectual analysis, interpretation, or appreciation rather than emotional response. Ode was tightly structured logic.<sup>322</sup>

One of the identifying structures of logic in classical poetry is "recurrent phrases."<sup>323</sup> Milman Parry postulates that these repeating themes identified the traditional and foundational portions of the poem. Parry observes that these repetitive chunks of language were passed

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<sup>320</sup>Boardman, Griffin, and Murray, 435.

<sup>321</sup>K. J. Dover, E. L. Bowie, Jasper Griffin, and M. L. West, eds., *Ancient Greek Literature*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 29.

<sup>322</sup>Ibid.

<sup>323</sup>G. S. Kirk, in his work, "*The Songs of Homer*" writes: "Düntzer and a few others had already recognized that the many recurrent phrases in Homer, most obviously the name-epithet formulas like 'divine Odysseus' and 'gleaming-helmeted Hector', were used in a way that was not just haphazard or unimaginative, but on the contrary was somehow essential to the poet. Parry first showed that such fixed phrases in Homer composed a system so tight and logical that it could only be the outcome of many generations of refinement." [book on-line] (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1962, accessed 27 February 2006), 60; available from Questia, <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=94373824>; Internet.

down to the performer (artist) from predecessors. The performing artist would tailor his oral elaboration of the performance around the repetitive chunks. Although inconsistencies were expected in the embellished portions of presentations, the repetitive material was sacrosanct, and a faithful representation was expected.<sup>324</sup> Faithfulness to traditional material was attained in a cyclic form of repeating the traditional sections (encircling and supporting). Parry calls these portions of repetitive language “formulas.”<sup>325</sup> The formulaic purpose was both mnemonic and artistic. Repetitive material was easier for the performing artist to remember and for the audience to retain. Therefore, the repeating sections were those of highest importance and consequence to the literary work.

The shorter nature of lyric requires less memorization, and though the lyric form was often musically accompanied to create a more memorable work, repetition was used in the same manner as in epic. Repetition focused the importance of the work. It is possible, therefore, to assess the theme and thrust of a Hellenist text by analysis of the repeating portions alone, noting any cycle or pattern that reflexively points to those repetitive chunks. In other words, interpreters should poetically diagram literature from this period for greater understanding of the author’s intent.

Ancient Hellenistic literature still yields fresh perspectives for the literary context of the New Testament. However, particulars and origins of formulaic practice are still uncertain.<sup>326</sup> The use of meter for

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<sup>324</sup>An interview by Lee Strobel with Craig Blomberg, Professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary and widely considered one of the country’s foremost authorities on the four gospels. He received his doctorate in New Testament from Aberdeen University in Scotland, later serving as a senior research fellow at Tyndale House at Cambridge University, England, and produced a series of acclaimed works on Jesus. See Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ: A Journalist’s Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998,) 21-54.

<sup>325</sup>Milman Parry died in 1935 while a young assistant professor at Harvard. Parry is now considered one of the leading classical scholars of the 20th century. See Adam Parry ed., *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry* (New York, NY: Oxford Press, 1999).

<sup>326</sup>Paolo Vivante, in the book, “*Homeric Rhythm: A Philosophical Study*,” writes, “As soon as we look at how the extant verses are articulated and stop asking what verse-structures were avoided, we shall realize how simple and transparent were the rules followed by the poets and how these rules contributed to an original and creative system whose significance by far transcends any metrical technique.... If we appreciate this nimble art, each verse will appear to take a new force of expression up to the point

emphasis is unequivocal, yet formular practice is neither confined nor controlled by rhythmical structure. Furthermore, it is considered that the rhythm and rhyme of ancient literature was a supplemental mnemonic vehicle rather than central to interpretation. While recognizing the potential of meter as a poetic interpretive device, for the purpose of this analysis, focus is placed on repetition without regard to any meter or rhyme found in the original languages.<sup>327</sup>

Parry observes that the classic Greek literary technique of emphasis through the presentation of “repetitive chunks of language” serves to establish traditional and foundational parts of the piece and to isolate the immutable elements of the message. As seen in the Sibylline Oracles, Greek literature is both poetic and pragmatic.<sup>328</sup> These oracles of law written in Hellenist poetic form represented literature that functioned to communicate cross-culturally at the highest levels of human interaction. Paul’s world was connected at every level with Hellenist communications. The presence of Greek literary thought in Paul’s philosophy and writing style cannot be understated. A Hellenist worldview was pervasive in Mediterranean Jewish culture. For Paul it was also reinforced and validated at the feet of Gamaliel, where Jewish tradition and religion collided with Greek philosophy and verbal art form.<sup>329</sup> As a Roman citizen, educated Jew, and world traveler, Paul was comfortable with multiple writing and communications techniques. For the task of communicating divine truth, Paul used the most effective, familiar, and impacting communication style available. This style was robust enough to amplify the significant elements of his message and carry those elements through time and distance. Consciously or unconsciously applied, that powerful and ubiquitous style was Greek poetic form.

### The 1<sup>st</sup> Century Oral Tradition

At the time of Paul, the oral tradition of Hellenist epic and lyric literature was a communication system with centuries of longevity.

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at which we can really hear and see all at once its sound and movement.” (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997,) 144.

<sup>327</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>328</sup>John F. A. Sawyer, *Sacred Languages and Sacred Texts* (London: Routledge, 1999), 32.

<sup>329</sup>Some scholars consider Simeon ben Gamaliel, the grandson of Gamaliel I and a philosopher in his grandfather’s tradition, a teacher of equal parts of Greek philosophy and Jewish tradition. See Ibid.

Accordingly, oral tradition was a natural medium for the epic story of the gospel. The primitive gospel was committed to written form decades after the resurrection. The first reason for this delay was the church's eschatology of imminence. For early believers, Christ's return was near. There was a unifying sense of the impending coming of Christ. There is obvious church solidarity at the conclusion of the second chapter of Acts. Subsequent dealings with communal malcontents, Annanias and Sapphira illustrate a unified community. The "maranatha" cry, (our Lord, come, or our Lord is come) was also indicative of a church eminently prepared to meet the Lord in the air and begin their reign of peace, justice, and abundance. The church embraced a form of millenarianism and the belief that the Parousia would usher in the 1,000-year kingdom on earth.<sup>330</sup> Consequently, putting the gospel message in written form for future generations would belie the immediacy of that early doctrine.

The earliest gospel was oral. It was the proclamation, by the apostolic church, of the message of salvation . . . . It is clear, both from the speeches in Acts 1-12 and from what is presupposed in the New Testament, especially in the letters of Paul, that the primitive gospel was essentially an eschatological proclamation. The salvation it announced was future--but in the near future. Like the Old Testament prophets, the church fixed its gaze upon coming events.<sup>331</sup>

The second reason for delay in moving past an oral presentation of the gospel message was less philosophical and more pragmatic. Although Judaism had an extended history of scribe transcription, the bulk of these trained writers were not available to the early church. Furthermore, the Jewish tradition of sharing the written word was very oral in presentation with public readings in Christian homes and synagogues.

Finally, the early church's home-church setting had little access to the wealth of Jewish written Scripture. So, before the earliest written gospel was circulated among the churches (50-60AD), memorized messianic Scripture supplemented an oral presentation of the gospel and was the main sacred tradition. Paul had to consider the probability that his letter to the Ephesians would be transmitted orally, supplementing any copies of the written epistle.

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<sup>330</sup>Bruce, 67.

<sup>331</sup>Frederick C. Grant, *The Earliest Gospel: Studies of the Evangelic Tradition at Its Point of Crystallization in Writing* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1943), 15.

### Paul's Writing Task

Paul was writing to an audience of Christians who were accustomed to Hellenist poetic form. As a gifted communicator, he was not targeting sophists or poets with his letter. However, he made use of the creation philosophers and poet artisans, because it was the communications medium of the day. Paul used the opening verses of Ephesians to craft a lyrical, cyclic rationale that illuminated his teaching repeatedly. That form is a combination of epic formulaic practice and lyric theme.

Paul used the "formulaic practice" which Parry describes as repetitive chunks. With these repetitions, Paul emphasized the essential and immutable material that is foundational in his proposition. Paul selected a form similar to the ode, because the dominant theme of the ode corresponds to the theme of Paul's introduction. The Greek ode is complex in structure with common themes of praise and glorification or worship. If Paul's theme were praise, it would be consistent to utilize the ode form in communication of that theme. The classic ode also has a stately component. The opening verses of the book of Ephesians are regarded as religious, regal, and stately, having the form of a benediction.<sup>332</sup> The royal nature of the opening verses has been credited to be part of the earliest church liturgy and established Paul as a propagator of early liturgical traditions. Moreover, the most common benediction in the contemporary church is still recited from the book of Ephesians (Eph 3:20-21). This stately opening, convoluted complexity, and poetic organization combine to resemble the classic Greek ode form. Because of the presence of this familiar poetic form, Paul's first century listeners would assume that important information was present within the lyric.

### ANALYSIS OF THE PASSAGE

The works of Parry and other Hellenist scholars show that a text written from Paul's context must be reviewed for "formulaic practices,"

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<sup>332</sup> The epistle is concerned with the "church's self-understanding, and the importance of Paul is that he is the mediator of this religious tradition." The liturgical atmosphere of the letter, particularly its opening with a Benediction in 1.3-14 is evidence of Ephesians original value as liturgy. Ephesians is a letter of principles and praises. See Martin Kitchen, *Ephesians* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 29.



quantifying repetitive chunks into an ordered structure of meaning.<sup>333</sup> The bulk of Parry's work was with Greek epic. In epic repetitive chunks produce a mnemonic network, simplifying the memorization process. These repeating segments also preserve the essence of a piece, identifying overriding truths or the essential philosophies.

### Oral Tradition in the New Testament

Paul's literary context was oral as well as written. The culture and tradition communicated truth over vast expanses of time and distance. Longevity and long-distance were accomplished through the use of easily remembered poetic form. Organized, memorable poetic form is the core of oral tradition and Hellenist literary art. Through the gospel writers, Jesus demonstrated the essence of enduring communications using the Hellenist norm. Eighty to ninety percent of Jesus' words occurred in recognizable poetic form.<sup>334</sup> In communicating the greatest epic every told, Jesus used poetic form.

### Getting Organized

In the Ephesians opening, it is imperative to determine whether Paul used any formular practices that existed in other Greek classical works. The formular practices were familiar communications mechanisms to first century listeners throughout the Roman world. Both macro (epic) and micro (lyric) examples of formular practices (repetitive chunks) occurred in classic Greek literature. In order to determine any repetitive language in Paul's work, analysis of the passage must begin by identifying any similar subject-types. After identification of similar material, subject-types can be codified in the order of occurrence.

The following is a simple categorization of passage segments by material subject-types, using the *King James Version Bible*. As an English word-for-word translation, the *KJV* readily renders an outline of repetitive material.

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<sup>333</sup>After Parry's work in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, "Homeric poems, more and more, appeared to be made up of clichés, or elements very like clichés? By and large, as Parry's work had proceeded and was carried forward by later scholars, it became evident that only a tiny fraction of the words in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were not parts of formulas, and to a degree, devastatingly predictable formulas" (Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* [London: Routledge, 2002], 23).

<sup>334</sup>Strobel, 43.

**EPH 1:3-14**

- 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: **(PRAISE)**
- 4 According as he hath chosen us in him **(REDEMPTION)** before the foundation of the world **(PLAN)**, that we should be holy and without blame **(CLEANSED)** before him in love: **(PRAISE)**
- 5 Having predestinated **(PLAN)** us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, **(REDEMPTION)** according to the good pleasure of his will, **(PLAN)**
- 6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, **(PRAISE)** wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.
- 7 In whom we have redemption through his blood **(REDEMPTION)**, the forgiveness of sins, **(CLEANSED)** according to the riches of his grace; **(PRAISE)**
- 8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;
- 9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:
- 10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times **(PLAN)** he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:
- 11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, **(REDEMPTION)** being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: **(PLAN)**
- 12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, **(PRAISE)** who first trusted in Christ.
- 13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,
- 14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption **(REDEMPTION)** of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. **(PRAISE)**

Figure 1

**Subject-type A: praise material**

Material type A is praise-oriented material but not necessarily overt God-ward praise as seen in verse 3. Verse 3 is most often viewed as a form of benediction.<sup>335</sup> Further, this subject-type does not differentiate between the means of praise (here named: *tropos*) and the end product praise (here named: *telios*). *Telios* praise is any end product or completed expression of Christian praise, a completed declarative statement or act of God-ward worship. *Tropos* praise is any system, structure, means or framework with the purpose of producing praise. Solomon's Temple may be labeled as, "to the praise of His glory," in a *tropos* sense. However, the phrase, "to the praise of His glory," is also a declarative expression of directly God-ward worship. Accordingly, for

<sup>335</sup>Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 90.

“subject-type A,” *telios* and *tropos* praise are included are designated under one category.

Subject-type A also represents less overt praise-oriented references such as the simple phrase, “before him in love” (verse 4c). Perhaps the weakest segment categorized as praise, the verse gains credibility by relating it to the commensurate phrase in the first chapter of Colossians (the sister work of Ephesians).<sup>336</sup> One third of the content of Colossians is present in Ephesians.<sup>337</sup> In Colossians the parallel text is 1:22b, “to present you holy and unblameable and unreprougeable in his sight,” Christ is presenting his church as an offering (a praise) before the throne of God. Similar language exists in Ephesians 4b-c, “holy, without blame, before him in love.” The correlating content of Colossians and Ephesians is mutually supportive. Looking at this parallel language in the opening of Colossians validates the worship quality of Ephesians 1:4c. It is obvious that the purpose in Colossians is a presentation or an offering of praise at the throne of God. Having established the weakest reference (Eph 1:4c) as praise, all other references to praise, are clearly manifested. Ephesians 1:4c and the remaining subjective appearances of worship, both *tropos* and *telios*, are represented as “subject-type A.”

### Subject-types B and B<sup>1</sup>: redemptive material and cleansing

Subject-type B regards all segments of reconciliation, the act of being redeemed. Such segments contain reference to adoption, gathering, inheritance, chosenness, acceptance, and redemption.

Subject-type B<sup>1</sup> is a subcategory of redemptive material. This subject-type is cleansing. Cleansing is a necessary portion of reconciliation. If sin causes separation from God, then the cleansing of sin is a necessary precursor to reconciliation with God. Yet, humanity cannot be cleansed without first desiring reconciliation with God. Consequently, there exists a *now-and-not-yet* tension between cleansing and redemption.<sup>338</sup> Because of the preconditioned and yet simultaneous relationship between cleansing and redemption, cleansing

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<sup>336</sup>Barker, Lane, and Michaels, 225.

<sup>337</sup>Kitchen, 6.

<sup>338</sup>Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible*, [book on line] [http://bible1.crosswalk.com/Commentaries/MatthewHenryComplete/mhc-om.cgi?book=isa&chapter=1#Isa1\\_17](http://bible1.crosswalk.com/Commentaries/MatthewHenryComplete/mhc-om.cgi?book=isa&chapter=1#Isa1_17), Internet; accessed 1 March 2006.

material is labeled as subject-type B<sup>1</sup>. This subject-type includes holiness, blamelessness, and forgiveness of sins. Because of the integrated nature of materials B and B<sup>1</sup>, these two are assessed to be synonymous and are treated as a single subject-type, “Subject-type B.”

### Subject-type C: plan material

Plan material is any reference to: (a) the will, the purpose, or self-counsel of God. Segments citing the good pleasure of God are included. Inclusion of God’s good pleasure is based in a presumption that God plans what will bring him pleasure; (b) Divine time is a subcategory of God’s plan that corresponds to a linear timeline (plan). Though commensurate with linear planning, divine time is a non-linear planning structure. Divine time cannot be understood in terms of history or chronology and is not subject to the transient elements of earthly time. This model of time includes references to divine forethought, pre-creation, and eschatological events.

## DIGESTING THE RESULTS

An oral tradition of communicating Christian truth was established well before the writing of Ephesians. At the writing of this epistle, gospel material (the life of Christ) is presumed to have been in oral circulation.<sup>339</sup> First Century oral tradition in Hellenist environs was replete with formular practice. This mnemonic device preserved data transmitted over distance, cultures, and time. Repetitive formulas served as safeguards against the loss of important philosophical, legal, or spiritual truth and provided a poetic framework that engaged the listener.

Operating in the Hellenist context, Paul crafted his letter both from and for the Hellenist mind. The essence of Paul’s epistle would carry far beyond the church located at Ephesus. What literary device was used to ensure that the fundamental truths remain memorable?

An easily discernable pattern of repetitive subject-type material is revealed in Figures 1 and 2. The clear simplicity of these repetitive subject-types is possible evidence of Paul’s intentional organization. The poetic form represented in Eph. 1:3-14 is Paul’s assurance of accurate retention and communication of the material central to his message. The Hellenist world, including the Ephesians church, would

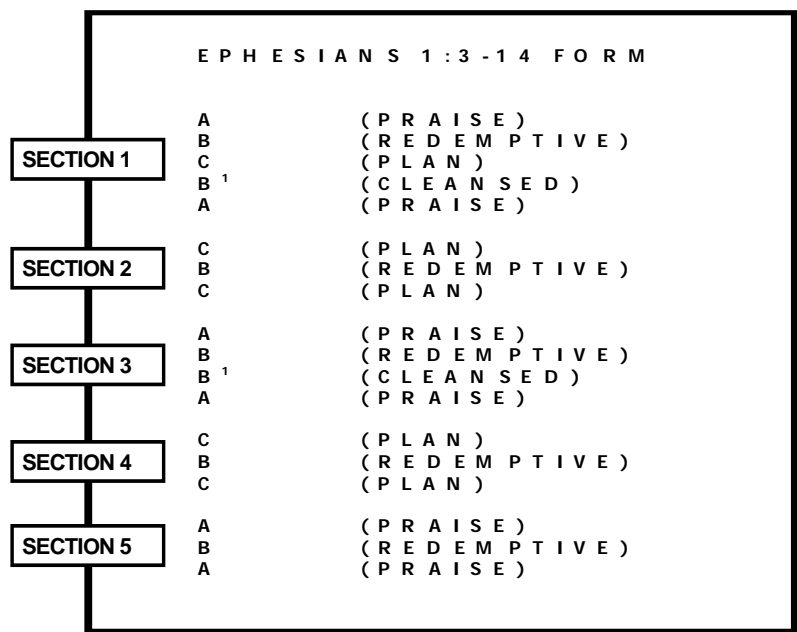
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<sup>339</sup>Strobel, 43.

assume such organized repetition represented a foundational part of Paul's letter, particularly since it is found in the introduction. Any oral transmission would be built upon this foundational poetic form. Parry argues that repetitive and cyclic language is the fabric of Hellenist poetic communication. He claims that the use of such style usually indicates the presence of traditional, foundational, or imperative elements of a message.<sup>340</sup> It must be considered that Paul's single-sentence signpost is clearly pointing to a foundational truth of Christianity in the opening of this letter. The passage's organization can be analyzed in several ways. But using only subject-type categorization without deference to the complexities of other exegetical disciplines, the resulting pattern is clear. Insights gained from the subject-type organization method cannot produce a stand-alone theology. Rather, the resulting patterns demonstrate one of many mechanisms and criticisms necessary for fuller understanding in a legitimate interpretive effort.

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<sup>340</sup>Parry's work, *The Making of Homeric Verse*, rated number 69 on the list of the 100 best non-fiction books of the century. "Genuine discoveries in literary study are rare. Parry's discovery of the oral formulaic basis of the Homeric epics, the founding texts of Western literature, was one of them." See, "The 100 Best Non-Fiction Books of the Century," *National Review*, 3 May 1999, 46; available from Questia, <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5002314484>; Internet; accessed 1 March 2006.



REDEMPTION TO PRAISE (ABCBA). At the outset of the passage, this double book-ended form places all three major subject-types in accentuated positions. God's praise is ultimate, occupying both beginning and end positions. His plan is central. However, his plan is filtered through human need for redemptive cleansing. The divine plan for praise is impossible without cleansed worshippers. Two theological statements summarize this ABCBA form.

- a. Praise is the beginning and end of God's redemptive plan.
- b. God's plan operates through redemption to His praise.

Observation A proceeds from outer structure to inner structure, and Observation B moves from the center outward. In both cases, God's plan is central, and redemption is positioned in support of praise. The mirrored or cyclic pattern of ABCBA may operate as a linear representation of Paul's multilateral and infinite principle: In all ways and at all times, God's plans proceed in all directions toward his praise, glory, and worship.

## Sections Two and Four

The CBC (PLAN-REDEMPTION-PLAN) sections are a reemphasis that the ultimate plan of God is inextricably connected to the redemptive cleansing of humanity. However, in this form, redemptive cleansing and divine plan have exchanged positions. The first ABCBA section established redemption to be functionally connected to the plan of God. The CBC arrangement reaffirms the same integral association. Again, the bookending of subject type C (PLAN) demonstrates its primary importance. In this combination, the plan of God is the beginning and end. Continuing the theme that beginning and end material is ultimate, B material is secondary to C material. Redemption is of central importance to the accomplishment of God's plan, yet penultimate to the object of the plan of God.

## Sections Three and Five

The ACA (PRAISE-PLAN-PRAISE) sections again demonstrate the superiority of praise in God's plan. God's plan proceeds multilaterally toward praise. His plan, his will, and his purpose, move with one central theme, permeating every aspect of providence, coordinating all things together for his glory. It may also be considered that God is not capricious but purposed in worship, and his worship has plan and structure. From the sacrifice of Abel through the tabernacle in the wilderness to contemporary praise offerings, God has a plan for his praise. Worship within the parameters of his plan is accepted, but offerings from outside the scope of God's plan are rejected (Isa 1:11ff).

A combination of ranking from Sections Two-Five reveals:

Sections Two & Four:	Plan	>
Redemption		
Sections Three & Five:	Praise	> Plan
If	Plan	>
Redemption		
And	Praise	> Plan
Then	Praise	>
Redemption		
Overall Ranking of Importance:		

Figure 3

The poetic formula ranks praise material as ultimate, the beginning, and end. The plan of God is central but not higher than the actualization of the plan, the praise of God. Finally, the redemption of humanity is a third-ranked inevitability to facilitate God's plan. The entire convoluted 200-word sentence reveals God's ultimate plan is to be praised, and redemption is simply a means to that end.

### CONCLUSION

The above theological observations (based solely in subject-type isolation and categorization) are postulations to be validated by further exegetical study. Observations are submitted as examples of artistic representations of established theological directions and not as new information. Subject-type isolation and categorization is valuable when used as additional evidence and graphic poetic support of academically interpreted passages.

The poetic representation in Paul's opening to the Ephesians is best revealed in a combination of socio-historical, redaction, and forms criticisms. The resulting model of subject-type isolation and categorization enhances the meaning of the passage as a communicating device, revealing the forethought and intentionality in Paul's mega-sentence. Although the passage cannot be interpreted solely by subject-type isolation and categorization analysis, the above findings validate contemporary thinking concerning Paul's influences. Historically, Pauline texts were considered primarily Jewish with significant Greek background. Though the product of a multicultural environment, Paul was considered fully a Hebrew with a Hellenist understanding. However, more scholars are proposing that Paul's writing was principally Hellenist.<sup>341</sup> From a Hellenist perspective, subject-type isolation and categorization untangles the convoluted opening of Ephesians into an organized and artful presentation. To the

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<sup>341</sup>Troels Engberg-Pedersen, ed. *Paul in His Hellenistic Context* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1995), xiv.



first century Hellenist Christian, the Ephesians opening was not unintelligible. Paul's form and focus were clear. Ephesians 1:3-14 was a heralding of doctrinal significance, a single-sentence signpost pointing to a major biblical reality, a familiar poetic form that repeatedly articulated an immutable theological truth.

Paul was not creating a work of art to be appreciated and critiqued. Neither was he rendering a simple truth in an enigmatic form. Any attempt to compromise the simplicity of the gospel with Hellenistic complexities counters Paul's Corinthian declaration on wisdom and words. Paul valued the simplicity of the gospel message and disdained the detractors found in professional speaking circles (1 Cor 2:1-2). Accordingly, the form used in his Ephesians opening was simple to the audience. Ephesians 1 reveals a deeply profound Hellenist impact on Paul's communication theory. At least intermittently, Paul communicated poetically in a somewhat classic form. Consequently, it is incumbent on true Pauline scholars and New Testament theologians to become Hellenists scholars as well, expanding the exegetical quest for accuracy and insight.

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