

The comforted comforter: The meaning of παρακαλέω or παράκλησις terminology in 2 Corinthians

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In the Pauline *homologoumena*, παρακαλέω or παράκλησις terminology is used almost two and a half times (in 2 Corinthians even six and a half times) as frequently as in the remainder of the New Testament. In the first part of this article, a survey of the use of παρακαλέω or παράκλησις in the undisputed letters and its three major meanings was given: to request strongly, to exhort and to encourage or comfort. In the second part of the article, the LXX background of the unprecedented use of παρακαλέω or παράκλησις in 2 Corinthians 1:3–7 and 7:4.5–13, where God is the subject, was discussed. The conclusion was that when writing 2 Corinthians 1:3–7 and 7:4.5–13 Paul made use of the prophet Isaiah's Book of Comfort and in his use of παρακαλέω or παράκλησις allows himself to be influenced by the way the LXX translator uses παρακαλέω to translate $\epsilon\upsilon\chi\eta$.

Introduction

In the field of Pauline ethics, παρακαλέω or παράκλησις terminology is well known. Next to parenthesis (Bjerkelund 1967; Hahn 1981; Kamlah 1964; Nieder 1956; Popkes 1996; Reinmuth 1985; Schrage 1961; Wolbert 1981), 'paraklēsis' has been used as a technical term to describe aspects of the Pauline imperative of salvation (Schlink 1956; Grabner-Haider 1968; Lewicki 2004). According to Otto Schmitz, in common Greek usage παρακαλέω has four meanings (Schmitz 1968:775):

- to call to
- to beseech
- to exhort
- to comfort.

In studies on Pauline ethics, the term 'paraklēsis' refers to παρακαλέω in the third meaning, 'to exhort'. In this article, the focus was on the fourth meaning, 'to comfort'. In recent ethical discussion, comfort or consolation was discovered as an important ethical theme. In what follows, this question will be investigated in the letters of Paul, with special attention to 2 Corinthians. Firstly, an overview of the usage of παρακαλέω or παράκλησις and of the semantic field of comfort in the letters of Paul and in 2 Corinthians in particular will be given. In a second step, the LXX background Paul may have been indebted to will be studied, especially Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah, and the implications for 2 Corinthians will be investigated.

παρακαλέω or παράκλησις and other words of the semantic field of comfort

In the New Testament there are 109 occurrences of the verb παρακαλέω and 29 of the noun παράκλησις. The Pauline *homologoumena* contain 40 occurrences of the verb and 18 of the noun. This terminology thus occurs once per 1000 words in the New Testament and 2.4 times per 1000 words in the *homologoumena*. According to BDAG, παρακαλέω is used in the following meanings in the New Testament (BDAG, s.v.:764–765):

- to ask to come, to call to one's side
- to urge strongly, to appeal to, to exhort, to encourage
- to make a strong request, to implore
- to instill someone with courage or cheer, to comfort
- to treat someone in an inviting or congenial manner.

The same dictionary lists three meanings for παράκλησις (BDAG, s.v.:766):

- encouragement, exhortation
- strong request, appeal
- lifting of another's spirits, comfort, consolation.

In 1 Thessalonians Paul uses παρακαλέω eight times and παράκλησις once. In 1 Thessalonians 2:3 παράκλησις is used in the context of λαλήσαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ in 1 Thessalonians

2:2 and λαλοῦμεν, οὐχ ὡς ἄνθρωποι ἀρέσκοντες ἀλλὰ θεῶ τῷ δοκιμάζοντι τὰς καρδίας ἡμῶν in 1 Thessalonians 2:4. Here παράκλησις obviously refers to the exhortation that is part of the gospel that Paul preaches. The content of this 'paraklēsis' is spelled out concretely by Paul in four contexts of 1 Thessalonians where he uses παρακαλέω. In 1 Thessalonians 2:12 Paul exhorts them to 'lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory'. This exhortation is marked as particularly important by the fact that Paul uses three more or less synonymous verbs (παρακαλέω, παραμυθεῖσθαι and μαρτυρέω in the meaning 'to insist') as an introduction. In 1 Thessalonians 4:1, where the actual parenetic (or paracletic) part of the letter begins, Paul exhorts his addressees 'that, as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God (as, in fact, you are doing), you should do so more and more'. Here the meaning of παρακαλοῦμεν is clarified in the parallel ἐρωτῶμεν and in the noun παραγγελία in 1 Thessalonians 4:2. The content of the 'paraklēsis' is spelled out in 1 Thessalonians 4:3–6. In 1 Thessalonians 4:10 Paul exhorts the Thessalonians concerning φιλαδελφία and adds a list of exhortations in infinitive constructions:

To aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we directed you, so that you may behave [περιπατήτε] properly toward outsiders and be dependent on no one.

(1 Th 4:10)

In 1 Thessalonians 5:14 Paul adds yet another exhortation consisting of four imperatives (νουθετεῖτε τοὺς ἀτάκτους, παραμυθεῖσθε τοὺς ὀλιγοψύχους, ἀντέχεσθε τῶν ἀσθενῶν, μακροθυμεῖτε πρὸς πάντας) and introduced by παρακαλοῦμεν. In the first three exhortations (1 Th 2:12; 4:1 [bis]; 4:12) Paul uses the verb περιπατέω to refer to the way of life that he exhorts them to lead.

When Paul uses παρακαλέω in 1 Thessalonians 3:2 together with στηρίζω to express the purpose of Timothy's mission to Thessalonica, he speaks about encouragement or comfort for the sake of their faith (ὑπὲρ τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν) and adds: 'so that no one would be shaken by these persecutions'. In 1 Thessalonians 3:7 Paul acknowledges that reciprocally he was encouraged or comforted ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ ἀνάγκῃ καὶ θλίψει ἡμῶν through the faith of the Thessalonians, of which Timothy had brought good news (3:6). The only two remaining uses of παρακαλέω are very similar in meaning. In 1 Thessalonians 4:18, at the end of an instruction about those who have died, 'so that you may not grieve (λυπέω) as others do who have no hope', Paul concludes: ὥστε παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους ἐν τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις. In this context, παρακαλεῖτε is best translated as 'comfort'. In 1 Thessalonians 5:11 Paul concludes his instruction about 'the times and seasons' with another invitation to comfort one another, this time paralleling the imperative παρακαλεῖτε with οἰκοδομεῖτε εἷς τὸν ἕνα.

It is, therefore, clear that in four of the nine occurrences of παρακαλέω or παράκλησις the context suggests that Paul intends the meaning 'encourage or comfort'. It proves difficult to determine whether in a particular context we should give preference to 'encourage' or to 'comfort'. A choice may also not be necessary, since it is likely that the

meaning of this Greek terminology cannot be partitioned in the same way as in English or other modern European languages. The other words from the same semantic domain (στηρίζω and οἰκοδομέω) suggest constitutive dimensions of what Paul means when he uses παρακαλέω. According to Furnish (1984):

'Comfort' ... must not be confused with the more subjective notions of sympathy or pity. The meaning is, rather, to 'comfort' in the strict sense, i.e., in the sense of the Latin confortare, to strengthen much, to encourage.

(Furnish 1984:109)

In 1 Thessalonians the only two Pauline occurrences of παραμυθεῖσθαι, another verb that belongs to the semantic domain of 'Encouragement, Consolation' was also met (Louw & Nida 1988, 1989:25. 153). In 1 Thessalonians 2:12 and 5:14 it is in the context used in the meaning 'to encourage'. No other terminology of the same semantic domain is used in 1 Thessalonians.

This analysis of Paul's use of παρακαλέω or παράκλησις in 1 Thessalonians has brought to light the meanings 'to exhort or urge' and 'to encourage or comfort'. According to Stählin (1968:779), 'theoretically distinction is made between consolation and admonition, as in the division, traced back to Posidonius and given by Seneca (Ep., 95, 65), into *praecipio*, *suasio*, *consolatio* and *exhortatio*'. On the basis of this analysis of the letters of Paul, it seems that this distinction is more than theoretical. It is striking that most of the time when Paul uses παρακαλέω in this letter, he uses it in parallel with other verbs which help clarify the meaning: παραμυθεῖσθαι and μαρτυρέω in 1 Thessalonians 2:12; στηρίζω in 3:2; ἐρωτάω in 4:1 and οἰκοδομέω in 5:11. When Paul speaks of 'to encourage or comfort', he gives preference to παρακαλέω.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul uses παρακαλέω only twice, namely in Philippians 4:2 at the beginning of a series of exhortations. He exhorts Euodia and Syntyche 'to be of the same mind in the Lord'. The noun occurs in Philippians 2:1 with a series of nouns of the same semantic domain: εἴ τις οὖν παράκλησις ἐν Χριστῷ, εἴ τι παραμύθιον ἀγάπης, εἴ τις κοινωνία πνεύματος, εἴ τις σπλάγχνα καὶ οἰκτιρμοί. Here παραμύθιον, σπλάγχνα and οἰκτιρμοί all illustrate that παράκλησις is used in the meaning 'encouragement or consolation'. Confirmation is also found in πληρώσατέ μου τὴν χαρὰν.¹ The joy that Paul refers to here is the joy of the consolation that he refers to in Philippians 2:1. Considering the fact that Paul mentions suffering and struggle in Philippians 1:29, it seems more likely that in 2:1 he means consolation than encouragement.

The letter to Philemon has the highest relative frequency of παρακαλέω or παράκλησις.² In verse 7 he uses παράκλησις with χαρά, which suggests that the meaning is 'encouragement or comfort' with the same kind of ambiguity we had already found in 1 Thessalonians. The reason for Paul's παράκλησις was that Philemon had refreshed the hearts of the saints.³

1.As we shall see, joy belongs to the paratactic relations of παρακαλέω.

2.The relative frequency of παρακαλέω or παράκλησις in Philemon is 9.1 per 1000 words. In 2 Corinthians, where we find half of all the occurrences of this terminology in the *homologoumena*, the relative frequency is 6.5 per 1000 words.

3.For a strikingly similar combination of terminology see 2 Corinthians 7:13.

Paul uses the verb παρακαλέω in verses 9 and 10 in a strong appeal to Philemon for Onesimus. It is important to note that in verse 9 Paul, in a rather unusual way of speaking, qualifies παρακαλέω with διὰ τὴν ἀγάπην. Here παρακαλέω expresses a strong request.

In 1 Corinthians παρακαλέω or παράκλησις occurs seven times. The noun is only used in 1 Corinthians 14:3: ὁ δὲ προφητεύων ἀνθρώποις λαλεῖ οἰκοδομὴν καὶ παράκλησιν καὶ παραμυθίαν. παράκλησις is in paratactic relation with παραμυθία (cf. 1 Th 2:12 where the cognate verbs are used together) and with οἰκοδομή (cf. 1 Th 5:11, where equally the cognate verbs are parallel). Considering the fact that οἰκοδομέω (twice in 14:4) and οἰκοδομή (14:5) are the central ideas of the subsequent context, it is likely that the idea of 'upbuilding' is also prevalent in the list of three nouns in 1 Corinthians 14:3, which is headed by οἰκοδομή. The noun παράκλησις thus here has again the meaning 'encouragement or comfort' with the connotation of strengthening and building up for which English does not have a fully matching term. It seems that the verb παρακαλέω is used in this sense in 1 Corinthians 14:31: 'For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all παρακαλῶνται', that is, are encouraged or comforted with a connotation of being built up' (cf. 14:4–5). In 1 Corinthians 4:13 Paul uses παρακαλέω as antonym of 'slander' [δυσφημέω] and thus means 'to speak kindly'. In 1 Corinthians 16:12 the apostle relates that he had strongly urged [παρακάλεσα] Apollos to visit Corinth. The remaining three occurrences of παρακαλέω in 1 Corinthians (1:10; 4:16 and 16:15) are exhortations where what Paul urges the addressees to do is expressed with a ἵνα clause (1:10 and 16:15–16) or with an imperative (4:16).

It is deduced that in Philippians, Philemon and 1 Corinthians the way Paul uses παρακαλέω or παράκλησις is similar to what we found in 1 Thessalonians. The prevalent meanings are firstly 'to exhort or urge' in epistolary exhortation, which express what the addressees are expected to do or how they are expected to live in imperatives or ἵνα clauses. Secondly, Paul also uses παρακαλέω to express a strong appeal or request. Finally there is also evidence in these letters of the meaning 'to encourage or comfort' with the connotation of building up.

Half of all the uses of παρακαλέω or παράκλησις in the Pauline *homologoumena* are found in 2 Corinthians. The noun occurs 11 times in this letter, the verb 18 times. In 8:4 and 8:17 the noun has the meaning 'strong request' (in v. 4 with δεόμενοι and in v. 17 as opposite to αὐθαίρετος). Similarly the verb παρακαλέω is used in 2 Corinthians 8:6 and 9:5 to express a strong request, the first addressed to Titus (similar 12:18), the second to 'the brothers'. Strong requests are also found in 2 Corinthians 2:8 (with infinitive: 'to reaffirm your love'), in 5:20 (with imperative: καταλλάγητε τῷ θεῷ), in 6:1 (infinitive: 'not to accept the grace of God in vain'), and 12:8 (with a ἵνα clause: 'that it would leave me').

In the remaining nine instances (besides 8:4 and 8:17), παράκλησις is generally translated as 'consolation or comfort'.

Six of the nine occurrences are concentrated in 2 Corinthians 1:3–7, in addition to four instances of the verb. These are the five verses of the New Testament with the highest density of παρακαλέω or παράκλησις terminology. In all the ten occurrences the verb and the noun are related to affliction (in 1:6 θλιβόμεθα and παρακαλούμεθα are antonyms) or suffering (σωτηρία is used in 2 Corinthians 1:6 as a paratactic relation of παράκλησις. In 2 Corinthians 7:4 the fact that χαρά and θλίψις are used together with παράκλησις suggests that here also the translation 'consolation or comfort' is correct. Paul speaks in 2 Corinthians 7:5–16 about a concrete experience of being comforted. In 2 Corinthians 7:7–13 παρακαλέω and παράκλησις are used six times altogether. In 2 Corinthians 7:5 Paul speaks about his not having ἄνεσιν in Macedonia, using θλιβόμενοι as a description of what it means not to have rest. Beginning in verse 6, the end of affliction and not having rest is described with παρακαλέω or παράκλησις terminology. As in 2 Corinthians 1:3–4, it is God who consoles Paul. This consolation is mediated through this-worldly events, here in the arrival of Titus. As in 2 Corinthians 7:4 (also in Phlp 2:1–2 and Phlm 7), Paul expresses his joy (7:7; cf. 7:9) parallel with his consolation. In 2:7, in his concern for the punished wrongdoer, Paul tells the Corinthians to 'forgive and παρακαλέσαι' him. In a consecutive clause he indicates what he means by παρακαλέσαι, namely 'so that he may not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow'.

In 2 Corinthians there are a number of expressions that belong to the semantic domain of comfort or consolation. In 2 Corinthians 2:13; 7:5 and 8:13 we read ἄνεσις (in 7:5 in antithesis to θλίβω⁴ and in 8:13 to θλίψις). Another word which belongs to the semantic domain is οἰκτιρμοί, which is used in a parallel construction in 2 Corinthians 1:3: ὁ πατὴρ τῶν οἰκτιρῶν καὶ θεὸς πάσης παρακλήσεως (cf. Phlp 2:1⁵). Paul uses the noun οἰκοδομή⁶ in 2 Corinthians 10:8; 12:19 and 13:10. 10:8 and 13:10 use almost literally identical clauses concerning the authority that the Lord gave Paul εἰς οἰκοδομὴν καὶ οὐκ εἰς καθαίρεσιν ὑμῶν. We already encountered οἰκοδομή as a paratactic relation of παρακαλέω or παράκλησις in 1 Corinthians 14 (see οἰκοδομή or οἰκοδομέω in vv. 3.4.5.12.17.26; cf. 1 Th 5:11). It has often been pointed out by defenders of partition theories that παρακαλέω or παράκλησις in the meaning 'comfort' is only present in 2 Corinthians 1–7 and not in 8–9 or in 10–13. In light of the previous findings it is, however, possible that παρακαλέω or παράκλησις is taken up again in the word οἰκοδομή, which has a prominent place in 2 Corinthians 10–13. Other vocabulary that belongs to the semantic domain of παρακαλέω or παράκλησις as, for instance, παραμυθέομαι or παραμυθία, παρηγορία, στερίζω is not present in 2 Corinthians.

In 2 Corinthians 10:1 παρακαλέω is used to introduce the exhortatory part of the letter, which is abruptly interrupted in 10:1b–12:18 by an excursus. Lambrecht (2001:137–143.148)

4. See also 2 Thessalonians 1:7.

5. The noun σπλάγγχνον that in Philippians 2:1 occurs together with παράκλησις and οἰκτιμός, is found in 2 Corinthians 6:12 and 7:15.

6. See also καταρτίζω or κατάρτισις in 2 Corinthians 13:9.11 (cf. 1 Th 3:10).

compares 2 Corinthians 10:1a to 1 Thessalonians 4:1 and Romans 12:1 and asks: 'Was 2 Corinthians 10:1a not originally intended as the beginning of the final parenthetical section of the letter, just like those two verses?'. The imperative παρακαλεῖσθε in 13:11 could either mean 'listen to my appeal' or 'encourage or comfort one another'. It is difficult to decide one way or the other, but the presence of the imperative καταρτίζεσθε ['put things in order'] and the following imperatives τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖτε and εἰρηνεύετε make it a little more likely that the meaning 'encourage or comfort one another' should be assumed. According to Lambrecht (2001:140–141), παρακαλεῖσθε in 2 Corinthians 13:11 means 'heed my appeal' and the content is found in the other imperatives of verse 11. He considers the use of παρακαλέω in 2 Corinthians 10:1a and 13:11 as an inclusion and asks: 'Is this perhaps the kind of moral exhortation which we were entitled to expect at 10:1?'

By way of conclusion attention should be drawn to the fact that in 2 Corinthians παρακαλέω or παράκλησις terminology is mostly concentrated in two contexts, namely 1:3–7 and 7:4.5–13. Outside of these two points of concentration, the use of this terminology is more or less normal. In comparison to the other letters there is more emphasis on the use of παρακαλέω and παράκλησις as 'strong request'. This is the case in 2 Corinthians 2:8; 5:20; 6:1; 8:6; 9:5; 12:8 and 18. It is noteworthy that in 2 Corinthians 8:4 and 17, for the first time in Paul's letters two instances of the use of the noun παράκλησις in this meaning are found. Paul addresses his requests to the Corinthians (2:8; 5:20;⁷ 6:1), to Titus (8:6.17 and 12:18), to 'the brothers' (9:5) and to the Lord (12:8). In 2 Corinthians 8:4 Paul relates a request that the Macedonians address to him. The prevalence of the strong requests is not surprising when taking into consideration the character of 2 Corinthians. It is noteworthy that παρακαλέω or παράκλησις in the meaning 'strong request' is present in all the parts which the most common partition theories see as fragments of originally separate letters.

The most striking feature is the concentrated use of παρακαλέω or παράκλησις in 2 Corinthians 1:3–7 and 7:4.5–13 with the meaning 'consolation or comfort'. As seen previously, this meaning is not unique in the Pauline *homologoumena*. We already encountered it in 1 Thessalonians 3:2.7; 4:18 and 5:11; in Philemon 7; Philippians 2:1 and 1 Corinthians 14:3.⁸ But there are some characteristic features of Paul's use of παρακαλέω or παράκλησις in 2 Corinthians. In the verses mentioned previously, the subject of comfort was always a human person: Paul intends to comfort the Thessalonians by sending Timothy (1 Th 3:2) and the Thessalonians comfort Paul again mediated by Timothy (3:7). Paul invites the Thessalonians to comfort one another (4:18; 5:11). He also receives comfort from Philemon. According to 1 Corinthians 14:3, the prophet comforts the ἐκκλησία. This way of speaking is also present in 2 Corinthians 2:7 where Paul asks

7. Note that in 5:20 it is God who appeals to the Corinthians through Paul.

8. In this regard Paul is not unique in the New Testament. See also Matthew 2:18 (Gn 35:19); 5:4 (cf. Is 61:2–3); Luke 2:25; 6:24; 16:25; Acts 9:31; 15:31; 16:39 and 20:12.

the Corinthians to comfort the punished wrongdoer. In 2 Corinthians 1:3–4 and 7:6, there is, however, strong emphasis on God as the one who comforts (θεὸς πάσης παρακλήσεως, ὁ παρακαλῶν ἡμᾶς in 1:3b–4 and ὁ παρακαλῶν τοὺς ταπεινοὺς παρεκάλεσεν ἡμᾶς ὁ θεός in 7:6). We also note that Paul only uses the preposition ὑπό of God, when he speaks about human persons as agents of comfort he uses the preposition ἐπί (2 Cor 7:7; cf. 1 Th 3:7). In 2 Corinthians 1:5 Paul gives a Christological interpretation of comfort, using the preposition διά: ὅτι καθὼς περισσεύει τὰ παθήματα τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς ἡμᾶς, οὕτως διὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ περισσεύει καὶ ἡ παράκλησις ἡμῶν. In 2 Corinthians 1:3–7 there is also a strong emphasis on Paul as one who comforts others (εἰς τὸ δύνασθαι ἡμᾶς παρακαλεῖν τοὺς ἐν πάσῃ θλίψει in v. 4).⁹ However, as God is at the origin of Paul's comforting, Paul is a comforted comforter. Finally, as we had seen in the previous letters, it is difficult to find an adequate translation for παρακαλέω or παράκλησις when it is used in the sense which we paraphrase as 'encourage or comfort'. It is clear that παρακαλέω or παράκλησις implies psychological relief (ἄνεσις in 7:5) and peace of mind (cf. ἀναπέπται τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ in 7:13). It means an end to affliction (cf. θλίβω and θλίψις in 1:4.6 and 7:5), suffering (1:5.6.7) disputes and fears (7:5). In 2 Corinthians 1:3 Paul introduces παράκλησις as a parallel of οἰκτιρμοί. He adds the word σωτηρία as a parallel to παράκλησις in 2 Corinthians 1:6. This, together with the already mentioned theological and Christological focus suggests that in 2 Corinthians 1:3–7 (and 7:5–13) Paul develops a 'theology' of παράκλησις.

The letter to the Galatians is the only Pauline letter in which παρακαλέω or παράκλησις is completely absent. Moreover, the other terminology of the semantic domain 'encouragement or consolation' is also not found in this letter.

In Romans παρακαλέω or παράκλησις does not have a prominent place and it is removed from a specific situation. Paul uses the verb παρακαλέω only four times. παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί in Romans 12:1 is generally seen as the introduction to the epistolary exhortation. In 15:30 and 16:17 παρακαλέω expresses a strong request. In Romans 12:8 (εἴτε ὁ παρακαλῶν ἐν τῇ παρακλήσει) Paul combines the verb and the noun. The modern versions and commentators are divided as to whether to translate as 'exhort' or 'comfort'. This is probably a consequence of the previously mentioned lack of an English word to express this meaning of παρακαλέω or παράκλησις. It is, however, important that in Romans παρακαλέω or παράκλησις is presented as a charism in the same breath with prophecy, διακονία and teaching.¹⁰ The remaining two occurrences of παράκλησις are found in Romans 15:4–5 and both times the noun is used together with 'steadfastness' [ὑπομονή]. In verse 4 Paul speaks about the encouragement or comfort that comes from the Scriptures (cf. 1 Macc 12:9) and which is at the basis of hope. In Romans 15:5 Paul continues the theo-logical language that he had used for the first time in 2 Corinthians 1:3 and refers to God as the God of comfort or encouragement.

9. There is only one instance that is somewhat similar to this in the letters before 2 Corinthians, namely in 1 Thessalonians 3:2.

10. Compare also the single occurrence of συναπακαλέομαι in Romans 1:12.

In this overview of Paul's use of παρακαλέω or παράκλησις, it was seen that Paul uses this terminology in three meanings:

- to request strongly
- to exhort
- to encourage or comfort.

The second meaning is used to signal the exhortative section of a letter. The third meaning is emphasised in a special way in 2 Corinthians 1:3–7 and 7:4.5–13, where it also acquires theo-logical and Christological status. The syntagmatic and paratactic relations of παρακαλέω or παράκλησις already gave an idea of the meaning of this terminology and caution against assuming that one English word could adequately express the meaning. Interpreters do not agree on whether παρακαλέω or παράκλησις implies that one is given strength to endure a difficult situation or whether one is rescued from it. In 2 Corinthians 1:8–10 Paul relates an experience of rescue and deliverance, whereas in 2 Corinthians 12:7–10 he refers to an experience of strength from God in suffering which continues. For a better understanding of how Paul's use of παρακαλέω or παράκλησις compares to earlier and contemporary usage we now turn to an investigation of the terminology in common Greek usage and in the LXX.

παρακαλέω or παράκλησις in common Greek usage and in the LXX and its implications for 2 Corinthians

As a compound of καλέω that implies an intensification of the meaning, παρακαλέω is a rather common word in the Greek language that precedes the time of Paul and is contemporary with him. The meaning 'to call to one's side', 'request' and 'exhort' is frequently used. However, the instances where this word means 'to encourage or comfort' are rather infrequent. In the few occurrences of this meaning, the verb refers to words spoken to those who are mourning. Schmitz (1968:775) pointed out that 'it is noticeable how few and often only tentative are the instances of παρακαλέω for "to comfort"'.¹¹ He also noted that in the books of the LXX which are not translations from Hebrew, παρακαλέω (occurring 60 times) is used with a variety of meanings, but not as 'comfort or console':

In view of this wealth of meaning it is the more striking that in these portions of the LXX there is never the sense of divine or human consolation found in the LXX as a translation.

(Schmitz 1968:778)

In this investigation, some evidence was found that contradicts these claims. For the use of παρακαλέω or παράκλησις in a way similar to the meaning 'encourage or comfort' in the Pauline letters is also found in 1 Maccabees 12:9 (see Rm 15:4), 2 Maccabees 7:6 (bis), 7:21; 11:32 (see 1 Th 3:2); 15:17; 3 Maccabees 1:6; 3:8 and 16:24. In all these places παρακαλέω conveys the connotation of strengthening and building up in the context of threat, danger and affliction.

11. LSI s.v. only mentions examples from LXX and New Testament for the meaning 'comfort or console'.

In the books of the LXX that are translated from Hebrew, παρακαλέω is the translation of 15 different Hebrew verbs (Hatch & Redpath 1987, ⁵1991, s.v.). Out of the 78 occurrences in these books, in 61 cases παρακαλέω translates דָּן (see Davies 1953:37). We also note that in a number of places in Isaiah the dictionaries suggest a vast number of meanings for this verb, the two most important being 'to repent' for the niphal and 'to comfort' for the piel. The LXX occurrences of the noun παράκλησις are with one exception translations of cognates of דָּן.

The most important and most influential texts are found in the Book of Comfort in Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah (see Bieringer 2008) and in some psalms. Otfried Hofius (1989) pointed to the parallels between Paul's use of παρακαλέω or παράκλησις in 2 Corinthians 1:3–7 on the one hand and Isaiah 49:13, 51:3 and 52:9 on the other. He sees, however, an even closer parallel of 2 Corinthians 1:3–7 in Psalms 71 (70), 86 (85) and 94 (93). There are two reasons why Hofius considers the psalms to be the most immediate source of Paul. Firstly, in the psalms not the entire people of Israel, but the individual is the recipient of the consolation. According to Hofius (p. 246) this is also confirmed by the eulogy in 2 Corinthians 1:3–7 (εὐλογητός): 'Damit steht die Eulogie des 2. Korintherbriefes ganz nahe bei den alttestamentlichen Lobsprüchen' [This means that the eulogy of the Second Letter to the Corinthians is very close to the sayings of praise in the Old Testament]. Secondly, the proclamation of the consolation that the individual received from God is in the service of the community, as a witness to God's deliverance, so that the members of the community may set their hope on God.

Margaret Thrall (1994) sees a relationship between Paul and the Isaian texts:

In Deutero-Isaiah (e.g., Is 40:1; 51:12) the Hebrew verb (rendered by παρακαλέω in the LXX) is used in the context of the message of the dawning time of salvation, when God himself will 'comfort' his people. In Judaism, these scriptural passages led to the use of 'comfort' as a means of reference to this time of salvation. Hence, it is possible that the 'comfort'-words in the NT might contain an allusion to the realization of the messianic hope, should the context allow. In the present passage it could be that Paul sees his own experience 'as part of the total messianic comfort and deliverance'.

(Thrall 1994:104)

The starting point is taken in the fact that in 2 Corinthians 6:2 Paul quotes the LXX version of Isaiah 49:8. This quote uses the word σωτηρία that in 1:6 Paul had already used in parallel with παράκλησις. If a little further is read in Isaiah 49, the verb παρακαλέω is encountered in verses 10 and 13, which ends as follows: καὶ τοὺς ταπεινοὺς τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ παρεκάλεσεν. This is a close parallel of 2 Corinthians 7:6. Hofius (1989:248, n.24) supposes that 'Auf diese LXX-Stelle geht m.E. die Gottesprädikation 2 Kor 7:6 ... zurück. Sie dürfte von Paulus selbst geprägt sei' [In my opinion the predicate used of God in 2 Corinthians 7:6 ... is based on this reference in the LXX. It is probable that it is coined by Paul himself].¹²

12. But see also Isaiah 40:1–4; 51:18–21; 54:11 and Psalms 118 (119):50: αὕτη παρεκάλεσεν ἐν τῇ ταπεινώσει μου ὅτι τὸ λόγιόν σου ἐξήσεν με.



TABLE 1: Semantic Domain of παρακαλέω or παράκλησις (New Testament).

| | Words with similar meanings | | Antonyms | |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| | Verbs | Nouns | Verbs | Nouns/adjectives |
| | παρακαλέω συμπαρακαλέομαι Rm 1:12 | παράκλησις | λυπέω θλίβομαι 2 Cor 1:6 ταπεινώνω 2 Cor 12:21 πάσχω 2 Cor 1:6 | λύπη 2 Cor 2:7 θλίψις 1 Th 3:7; 2 Cor 1:4.6 ανάγκη 1 Th 3:7 ταπεινός 2 Cor 7:6 παθήμα 2 Cor 1:6.7 |
| Synonyms | παραμυθέομαι 1 Th 2:12, 5:14 | παραμυθία 1 Cor 14:3 | | |
| Words with similar meanings | ἀναπαύομαι τὸ πνεῦμα 2 Cor 7:13; Phlm 7 στηρίζω Ac 15:32; 1 Th 3:2; 2 Th 2:17 οἰκοδομέω 1 Th 5:11 ῥύομαι 2 Cor 1:10 (bis) καταρτίζω 2 Cor 13:11 (cf. 1 Cor 1:10) | οἰκτιρμός 2 Cor 1:3 ἀνάπαυσις ἄνεσις 2 Cor 2:13; 7:5 οἰκοδομή 1 Cor 14:3 2 Cor 10:8, 12:19, 13:10 σωτηρία 2 Cor 1:6 κατάρτισις 2 Cor 13:9 | καθαίρεσις 2 Cor 10:8, 13:10 | |
| Words occurring in the same contexts but with different meanings | μακροθυμέω cf. 1 Cor 13:4 1 Th 5:14 (in the context of παραμυθέομαι) προφητεύω 1 Cor 14:3 χαίρω 2 Cor 7:13, (13:11) | μακροθυμία προφήτης Ac 15:32 (1 Cor 14:31) καρδία Col 2:2, 4:8; 2 Th 2:17 χαρά 2 Cor 7:4 | | |

In 2 Corinthians 7:5 Paul describes a situation of personal distress and affliction. In 2 Corinthians 7:6 he bursts out into an announcement and an implicit praise of the God who comforts the downcast and who comforted Paul. The reason for the relief from the distress and the comfort is the arrival of Titus and the comfort by which Titus was comforted from the Corinthians. A historical event which Paul reflects in comfort language is interpreted by Paul as God comforting him. The result of this experience of being comforted by God mediated through Titus' arrival, which in itself mediates the good news of the μετάνοια of the Corinthians, is Paul's exceeding joy (ὥστε με μᾶλλον χαρῆναι in 7:7 and ἐπὶ δὲ τῇ παρακλήσει ἡμῶν περισσοτέρως μᾶλλον ἐχάρημεν ἐπὶ τῇ χαρᾷ Τίτου in 7:13). This structure of distress, historically mediated comfort from God, and joy is present in Isaiah 49:8–13 (see also 51:4; 66:10.13–14). The participial construction ὁ παρακαλῶν used for God is found in Isaiah 51:12.

On the basis of these observations it is suggested that Paul's experience of Titus' arrival in Macedonia led him to use παρακαλέω in a way that he had not before. As we saw previously, Paul was familiar with the meaning 'encourage or comfort' and used it several times in 1 Thessalonians and a few times in Philemon, Philippians and 1 Corinthians. In none of these cases God is the subject and in none of these cases does his use of παρακαλέω have a clear theological connotation. It is suggested that Paul, in an unreflected way, continues to use the verb in this way in 2 Corinthians 2:7. In the deeply moving experience of meeting with Titus in Macedonia, Paul borrows from the Book of Comfort in Isaiah. This implies that Paul's focus is on the saving intervention of God. παρακαλέω thus does not mean comfort in affliction, but comfort and thus deliverance from affliction. Thus παρακαλέω here not only implies the negative aspect of relief (cf. ἄνεσις in 7:5 and ἀναπέπαιται τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ in 7:13), but also

positively the aspect of σωτηρία and upbuilding [οικοδομέω]. In Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah God's comforting action is supplemented with a large number of metaphors including:

- the gentle encouragement of a shepherd for the vulnerable (40:11)
- the protection of a leader (40:11)
- the restoration of deserts to fruitful gardens (51:3)
- healing (57:18)
- peace (57:18)
- the rebuilding of ancient ruins (61:4)
- the renewing of destroyed cities (61:4)
- the nursing of a mother (66:11).

Calling to mind the historical and theological context of Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah, Paul is underlining the magnitude of the event. He sees God's liberating and saving action at work. Using παρακαλέω in the Deutero-Isaiah sense, Paul also suggests that the conflict between him and the Corinthian community had a devastating effect on their relationship and required παράκλησις and οἰκοδομή, a sustained effort at reconstruction, encouragement, strengthening and rebuilding. It is to be wondered whether the prominent references to οἰκοδομή in 2 Corinthians 10:8; 12:19 and 13:10 describing Paul's God-given task and to κατάρτισις (13:9) and καταρτίζω (13:11) could not be interpreted along these lines.

On the basis of these observations and interpretations, it is suggested that the developed theology of comfort in 2 Corinthians 1:3–7, with which Paul begins the letter that was written immediately after the arrival of Titus in Macedonia is occasioned and shaped by the experience of comfort and its interpretation on the basis of Deutero-Isaiah's Book of Comfort. This section has in common with 2 Corinthians 7:5–13 that Paul puts the emphasis on God as the comforter. It differs from 2 Corinthians 7:5–13 in so far as it is more abstract and general. The connection with a concrete situation of distress is lost and will only be given in 2 Corinthians 1:8–11, when Paul speaks about his affliction in Asia. Moreover, Paul interprets his experience of being comforted (that the informed reader can read as an implicit reference to the Macedonian experience) as an enabling experience that prepares him to comfort others, including the Corinthians, to become a comforted comforter. Finally, Paul gives a Christological interpretation to comfort by linking this concept to the sufferings of Christ and paralleling it with σωτηρία. The most prevalent function of 2 Corinthians 1:3–7 seems to be to use the experience and theology of comfort to deepen the communion (cf. κοινωνοί in 1:7) with the Corinthians.

Conclusion

The meaning of the Greek terms παρακαλέω or παράκλησις seems to have been expanded to include 'comfort or

consolation' as a result of the LXX translation of נחם. This translation was based on the meaning 'speak encouraging words to someone' and thus not completely new in the Greek language. Many parts of the New Testament were influenced by this Septuagintism. However, in 2 Corinthians 1:3–7 and 7:4.5–13 something more specific happens, which is influenced by Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah. This leads Paul to the brink of developing a theology of comfort in the concrete experience of being relieved at the occasion of the good news of the Corinthians' reaction to his letter of tears. This theology of comfort is an integral part of the way Paul writes the text which is known in our Bibles as the Second Letter to the Corinthians.

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