


# Aurality in preaching: A text-centred rhetorical interpretation of 1 Corinthians 2:1–5

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This article examines the hermeneutical and exegetical art of preaching the gospel, focusing on 1 Corinthians 2:1–5 to explore Paul's rhetorical intent as transmitted aurally. Paul underscores that God chose societal outsiders, rather than nobles, to proclaim his message, thereby challenging Roman-Corinthian expectations. While considerable scholarship exists on Paul's theology of preaching, there remains a gap in the exploration of aurality within hermeneutical and rhetorical-exegetical studies. This research addresses this gap by analysing Paul's use of aural transmission in preaching. Employing a rhetorical-critical methodology, specifically text-generated persuasion-interpretation (TGPI), the study investigates how Paul's rhetorical strategies – particularly his deliberate distancing from *philotimia*, human wisdom and eloquence – served to enhance his persuasive impact. The study highlights that the transformative power of the gospel resides not in human wisdom, but in God's power, urging contemporary preachers to refrain from elevating their status through rhetoric and to instead embrace the aural nature of gospel proclamation.

**Contribution:** This article presents an innovative interdisciplinary contribution to New Testament studies by combining aurality and rhetoric within a TGPI framework. It offers a unique methodology for interpreting the intended meaning of 1 Corinthians 2:1–5, exploring how aurality functions as a persuasive tool in Paul's rhetorical strategy. This approach will deepen the understanding of Paul's 'wide proclamation', shedding light on how the auditory nature of his message plays a crucial role in the reception and impact of the gospel.

**Keywords:** aurality; rhetorical-critical; text-generated persuasion-interpretation; *philotimia*; gospel proclamation.

## Introduction

A scholarly analysis of the authorial intent of any biblical text begins with a thorough examination of the background and circumstances that prompted the composition of the book in which the text is situated. Virkler and Ayayo (2023:71) assert that the meaning of biblical texts is not relative or contingent upon the reader's perspective. Rather, the authorial intent is rooted in the text itself. They further argue (2023:73) that 'the meaning of a text cannot be interpreted with any degree of certainty without historical-cultural analysis'. To effectively conduct such an analysis, it is essential to establish key elements such as the authorship of the book, its date of composition, the socio-political circumstances of both the author and the recipients, and a deep understanding of the literary unity of the text.

The scholarly literature addressing issues within the Roman-Corinthian church is vast and diverse. Scholars have identified a range of problems afflicting the Corinthians, including divisions, disunity, quarrels, partisanship, patronage, sexual immorality, idolatry (particularly through the consumption of food sacrificed to idols), the desecration of the Lord's Supper, debates over gender roles, confusion regarding spiritual phenomena, misunderstandings about death and resurrection, the *Parousia* and the collection of financial support for other churches (Barrett 1971:41; Chow 1992:12,20, 83–87; Ciampa & Rosner 2010:20–21; Collins 2016:20; Cornelius 2024:165,169; Fee 2014:47; Garland 2003:25,51–67; Holladay 1979:27; Horrell 2000:126–199; Micaila 2009:1; Pogoloff 1992:127; Robertson & Plummer 1911:9; Schüssler-Fiorenza 1987:393; Sindo 2018:113).

These issues have been approached from various perspectives, with some scholars concentrating on specific problems, while others examining the broader context. However, a significant

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shortcoming in these interpretations is their failure to identify the root cause of the challenges facing the Corinthian church, as well as the method or approach Paul employed to address them. While the problems highlighted are undeniably valid, they remain symptomatic in nature. Consequently, the proposed solutions often fail to tackle the deeper, underlying issues that afflict the Corinthian community. Furthermore, the aural-persuasive approach that Paul utilised does not appear to be considered in the prevailing approaches to persuasion, nor is the rationale behind Paul's need to employ aural persuasion to address the Corinthian problem adequately explored.

To understand the intent that Paul seeks to convey, and the method he chose, this article argues that one must first comprehend the root cause of the problems within the Corinthian church. This context is crucial, as it likely informs both the composition of 1 Corinthians as a whole and, more specifically, the passage in 1 Corinthians 2:1–5. The article embarks on a journey behind the text, beginning by addressing how the socio-historical background of the Corinthian context contributes to discerning the authorial intent of the passage in question. It will then examine what Paul reveals about key socio-historical elements integral to his aural-persuasive strategy. Finally, this article introduces an innovative interdisciplinary methodology, aurality and rhetoric, for interpreting the intended meaning of 1 Corinthians 2:1–5, grounded in a text-generated persuasion-interpretation (TGPI) framework. This approach will further explore the role of aurality in Paul's 'wide proclamation' [καταγγέλλων] of 'the mystery of God' [τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ], as well as the rationale Paul provides in 1 Corinthians 2:2, marked by the explanatory post-particle 'because' [γὰρ].

## Socio-historical background on 1 Corinthians

Although much has been written on the socio-historical background of 1 Corinthians, the aim of this article is not to offer new contributions to this field, but to focus specifically on the socio-historical aspects that influenced Paul's rhetorical persuasion of the Corinthians, particularly through aural communication.

### Significance of the Pauline authorship of 1 Corinthians

The book of First Corinthians is widely acknowledged in scholarship as one of the New Testament epistles whose authorship is undisputed. The evidence for its authorship dates back to the 1st century and is supported by early manuscripts. Key codices, such as  $\aleph$ , A and B, consistently attribute the letter to Paul, and it is likely that P45 and P53 also bear this association (Schröter 2013:289–290). Schröter (2013:19–20) argues that the authenticity of 1 Corinthians is crucial for understanding its rhetorical impact, as its attribution to Paul is significant, given what is known about his persuasive techniques. Furthermore, Schröter's position

is reinforced by a strong scholarly consensus affirming the Pauline authorship of 1 Corinthians.<sup>1</sup>

Ehrman (2011:23–24) acknowledges the authorship of 1 Corinthians, but with a caveat. He asserts that the universally accepted Pauline letters play a significant role in the interpretive task of understanding this epistle. Ehrman (2011:23–24) contends that 1 Corinthians cannot be regarded as pseudonymous or pseudepigraphic, as its authorship is firmly established in antiquity.<sup>2</sup> He warns that hermeneutical and exegetical approaches that interpret the letter as non-Pauline risk being anachronistic. Thus, maintaining the authenticity of Pauline authorship is essential for any valid interpretive endeavour regarding this letter (Witherington 1995:71).

A key aspect of authorship that is often overlooked is whether Paul composed the entire letter of 1 Corinthians on his own, or if Sosthenes, mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:1, served as a co-author. Porter and Land (eds. 2012:7) explore the possibility of a collaborative effort, suggesting that Paul may have deliberately included Sosthenes to lend additional legitimacy to the message of the letter – one that was shared not only by Paul but also by someone like Sosthenes. While this view may seem somewhat speculative, as it posits that collaboration significantly impacts the authorial intent, this article, while dissenting, acknowledges the potential role of Sosthenes as a co-sender of the Corinthian letter. Such collaboration would likely have positively influenced the Corinthians, particularly upon hearing the name Σωσθένης [Sosthenes].

### Significance of Σωσθένης [Sosthenes] in 1 Corinthians 1:1 and letter crafting

Σωσθένης [Sosthenes] is mentioned by Paul in the salutation of 1 Corinthians 1:1, not merely as Sosthenes, but as Σωσθένης ὁ ἀδελφός [Sosthenes, our brother]. This designation combines both familial and affectionate motifs. By referring to Σωσθένης as 'ὁ ἀδελφός', Paul seeks to dismantle the barriers between Jews and Gentiles. In a predominantly Gentile church, he affirms that both Jews and Gentiles are part of the same family. Furthermore, by using the nominative noun 'ἀδελφός', Paul expresses a profound affection for Σωσθένης, subtly addressing one of the Corinthian church's issues – disunity and conflict (Grosheide 2019:22).

Porter and Land (eds. 2013:7) underscore the significance of Sosthenes as a symbol of the legitimacy of Paul's ministry, emphasising his shared commitment to collaborative efforts in ministering to the Corinthians. In addition, Sosthenes is recognised as an individual who likely had ties to the Corinthian church, and his inclusion in the epistolary prescript further serves to validate Paul's authority, thereby

1. Bender (2022:20), Thiselton (2000:45), Collins (2016:1–6,44), Keener (2005:6,20), Fee (2014:28–30); Garland (2003:27); Horsley (2007:226).

2. Despite this, Ehrman (2006:340), Gregory and Tuckett (eds. 2006:22–23), and Corley (2004:256–274) consider certain sections of 1 Corinthians, specifically those addressing the role of women in worship (1 Cor 11 and 1 Cor 13), to be non-authentic, attributing them to later scribal additions.

fostering a more receptive attitude among the Corinthians towards him (Garland 2003:42). This detail, located at the opening of the letter, is crucial. As this article argues, the mere mention of Sosthenes is likely to engage the aural senses of the Corinthians, strategically intended by Paul. This is not a haphazard inclusion, but rather a deliberate choice with a profound impact on how Paul crafted his letter to be heard, ensuring its persuasive effect upon being listened to.

White (1986:1730) observes that the history of the development of ancient letters has rarely been traced. A lack of understanding of epistolography may significantly affect one's comprehension of the genres and structures of ancient texts, including the New Testament corpus. White proposes a rectification of this issue by clarifying what a letter represented for its ancient audience and how letters were received, with particular emphasis on the auditory experience of hearing the words (White 1986:1733).

Created for literary purposes, letters contained the letter-opening and the letter-closing. The letter-opening typically commenced with well wishes for the recipients and the letter-closing ended with a farewell (White 1986:1734). In the letter-opening, with the greeting embedded, the author inserted her or his name to indicate to the audience who wrote it. In the letter-closing, the farewell may also contain a wish from the author; something to the effect of wishing the recipient to recover from an illness or some form of distress (White 1986:1735).

According to White (1986:1736), letters also contained the letter-body, which served two purposes:

- to request disclosure of crucial information
- to request adherence or compliance.

Seen this way, the conclusion that can be drawn from White (1986) is that there were typically three components that made up a letter: (1) the introduction; (2) the body; and (3) the conclusion. The shift from the introduction, to the body, and to the conclusion have transitory markers. It is against this background that White (1986:1739) applies his understanding of how letters were composed and compared that with Paul's composition of his letters.

Regarding the composition of letters, White (1986:1739) claims that Paul pioneered the formation of New Testament letters that became the standard of how other New Testament letters were written. Paul's letters are uniquely Pauline and differ from the form of Greek letters of that time. The reason why they were different could be attributed to the fact that they were longer than usual letters, and they were written to Christian congregations for liturgical purposes (White 1986:1739). For liturgical purposes, Paul's letters are marked by thanksgiving or prayer<sup>3</sup> in the letter-opening as opposed to well wishes. The letter-opening is followed by apostolic

3. If prayer were to be delivered orally, the audience would need to rely on their auditory faculties to absorb the message, while the person praying must communicate effectively, ensuring that those listening derive the maximum benefit from the prayer.

teaching which sometimes utilises authority based on scripture to substantiate the point. Finally, Paul closes his letters with a benediction. These are the components of Paul's letters that mark them as distinct from how other ancient letters were formed (White 1986:1739).

Paul's innovative adaptation of his salutation reflects his intent to fulfil specific rhetorical objectives. As Tolmie (2005:31) argues, Paul 'does not employ a static pattern for the opening salutation of his letters but rather adapts' them to achieve his goals. For example, Thiselton (2000:62–63) observes that while Paul's salutation may initially appear to follow the standard letter-opening of Greco-Roman culture, his insertion of 'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ' [χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ] (1 Cor 1:3) is a deliberate modification. Notably, the inclusion of 'and peace' [καὶ εἰρήνη] underscores that Paul's God is the same God the Jews revere, signalling a clear distinction from the Roman gods. Witherington (1995:79) suggests that Paul modified the greeting to affirm his allegiance to God and Jesus, in anticipation of those who might challenge his apostolic origins and authority. Furthermore, Snyman (2009:2) posits that the salutation and epistolary prescript are central to understanding the overarching purpose of the letter. Sindo (2018:18) concurs, arguing that the tone of the entire epistle is established within the first nine verses of 1 Corinthians.

The tone of communication cannot be fully conveyed through writing alone. Hence, Botha (2018:3–4) argues that for biblical interpretation to effectively communicate the authorial intent of a passage, communication systems such as rhetoric, oral and aural channels must be incorporated into the interpretive process. Botha (2018:4) further asserts that the 'oral-aural' modes of communication are fundamental to human interaction, thus forming an essential aspect of conveying the meaning of biblical texts. While biblical texts are primarily studied as written literary works, they are grounded in a substratum that necessitates the use of cognitive centrality, based on the 'oral-aural' transmission of meaning. This article will later argue that Paul's distancing of himself from the persuasive speech of wisdom in 1 Corinthians 2:1 should not be understood solely as a claim that the content of his preaching – God – does not require superior rhetoric (Cornelius 2024:182). Rather, it suggests that the preacher may employ oral-aural skills, which are intrinsic to human communication, to effectively convey the profound message central to God's people.

### Who were the Corinthians and why did they need to hear a central life-changing message of God?

Describing the Corinthians merely as a 'problem church' would be an understatement. Not only does one recognise the gravity of the issues Paul addresses, but it is also crucial to consider whether these issues point to a deeper moral and spiritual decline within the Corinthian church. Moreover, are these problems standalone issues to be studied in isolation,

or do they stem from a common root cause (Finney 2010:27)? While commentators have speculated about the nature of the Corinthian problems, few have sufficiently explored whether an underlying root cause exists – a significant omission in the scholarship. This root cause may have manifested in the various issues addressed throughout the body of 1 Corinthians.

Fee (2014:6) argues that interpreting 1 Corinthians through the lens of conflict, premised on the assumption that Paul wrote the letter in response to issues raised by the Corinthians, suggests that Paul significantly misread and failed to understand their concerns. His letter addresses theological matters that do not follow a sequential treatment of the *‘περὶ δὲ’*, but instead confronts those who challenged his apostolic authority, particularly in 1 Corinthians 9 and 1 Corinthians 14:37. These sections do not directly address the divisions and quarrels within the Corinthian community; rather, they are initiated by Paul to address the spiritual needs of the Corinthians.

Finney (2010:28) was among the first New Testament scholars to identify a single root cause for all the problems within the Corinthian church. While this study similarly supports this view, an important question arises: Does Paul offer the Corinthians a singular solution to address this root cause, which would, by default, resolve the various symptoms manifesting in different forms? Alternatively, could it be plausible to maintain that a single factor is responsible for the Corinthian issues while suggesting that Paul provides multiple solutions to address the symptoms? In addition, another crucial question remains: Does Paul confront the root cause, and if so, when and how does he do so? Answering these questions may provide deeper insight into the nature of the problems the Corinthians faced, how Paul addressed them, and what this means for contemporary hearers of 1 Corinthians.

## Rhetorical situation that occasioned the writing of 1 Corinthians

The understanding of the rhetorical situation that gave rise to the writing of 1 Corinthians intricately integrates both the rhetorical context and the socio-historical background. Ciampa and Rosner (2010:62) assert that comprehending the socio-historical context of 1 Corinthians is crucial for fully understanding the text’s meaning. This socio-historical lens plays a significant role in interpretation, standing in contrast to approaches that apply Tolmie’s rhetorical analysis to interpret the text. Genade (2007:56) argues that understanding the rhetorical situation – primarily oriented towards the text – is sufficient for analysing its rhetoric. Snyman (2016:2) more emphatically maintains that the rhetorical situation is contained within the text itself, and that only the text is necessary to address the issue at hand and persuade the audience to accept the author’s perspective. According to Snyman, historical background is not required for applying Tolmie’s methodology. While Cornelius and Kukuni (2024:1–9) partially agree with this

view, they emphasise the value of integrating both rhetorical and historical contexts to achieve a fuller understanding of the author’s intent, the audience’s circumstances and how the author addresses them. They ultimately advocate for an approach that considers the impact of the text on contemporary readers.

Regarding the composition of letters, White (1984:1739) asserts that Paul pioneered the development of New Testament letter writing, establishing a model that became the standard for later writings. Paul’s letters are distinctively Pauline, setting them apart from typical Greek letters of the time. Porter and Dyer (2016:108) argue that Paul was not influenced by Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions in letter writing. Written primarily for liturgical purposes, Paul’s letters often feature thanksgiving or prayer in the opening, unlike the customary well wishes found in other letters. Following this, Paul typically asserts his apostolic authority, as seen in his affirmations of divine authorisation for his ministry (Cornelius 2024:8; Garland 2003:41).

As one divinely authorised by God to speak with authority, Paul provides passages offering glimpses into the situation that prompted the writing of 1 Corinthians. Scholars examine these passages to uncover the circumstances that led Paul to write (Kennedy 1984:87; Pogoloff 1992:273–274; Schüssler-Fiorenza 1987:395; Snyman 2009:132):

- 1 Corinthians 1:11 is the first indication of the situation in Corinth. Paul writes, ‘For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among you’ [ἐδηλώθη γάρ μοι περὶ ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί μου, ὑπὸ τῶν Χλόης ὅτι ἐριδες ἐν ὑμῖν εἰσιν]. This highlights the division, rivalry and discord within the Corinthian community, which Paul had been made aware of.
- 1 Corinthians 7:1 serves as the second indication of the Corinthian situation. Paul writes, ‘Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman’ [περὶ δὲ ὧν ἐγράψατε, καλὸν ἀνθρώπῳ γυναικὸς μὴ ἆπτεσθαι]. This phrase clearly indicates that the Corinthians wrote to Paul about certain issues, providing context for his response. Scholars such as Witherington (1995:170), Biatoma (2010:27), Collins (2016:78) and Cornelius (2024:165) interpret the phrase *περὶ δὲ* as Paul’s response to various issues raised in the Corinthians’ correspondence.

With the exception of 1 Corinthians 7:1, interpreting *περὶ περὶ δὲ ὧν ἐγράψατε* as a direct response to the Corinthians’ written questions is challenging. The specific matters they wrote to Paul about remain unclear, and this understanding seems to imply that Paul was guided or constrained by the Corinthians’ questions in his writing. Scholars remain divided on whether *περὶ δὲ* refers to the Corinthians’ queries or introduces a new topic. Micaila (2009:191), Ciampa and Rosner (2010:160) and Mitchell (1989:229) argue that in ancient Greek literature, *περὶ δὲ* functions primarily as a transitional marker, signalling a shift to a new topic. Thus, it should not be understood as a strict response to one issue after another.



What is clear from the text of 1 Corinthians is that the Corinthians were deeply divided, quarrelling and partisan. They engaged in and tolerated behaviour that warranted Paul's stern rebuke. This includes the incestuous relationship and its tolerance in 1 Corinthians 5:1–13, lawsuits between Christians over matters that could have been settled within the church (1 Cor 6:1–8), general immorality (1 Cor 6:9–20), violations of marital purity (1 Cor 7), idolatry (1 Cor 8:1–11:1), the abuse of spiritual gifts and disorderly conduct in worship (1 Cor 11:2–14:40) and a false understanding of the resurrection (1 Cor 15).

### Effective methodology as a response that deals with a problem Church

Notwithstanding the complexities outlined precedingly, the aim of this study is to interpret Paul's dominant rhetorical strategy in the section of 1 Corinthians 2:1–4. Paul's dominant rhetorical strategy may reveal more of how he dealt with the Corinthian problem(s). The dominant rhetorical strategy is interpreted using the adapted rhetorical frameworks of Tolmie (2005) and Genade (2015), with Kukuni's (2025:1) TGPI providing the adaptation. To apply this methodological framework, two interpretive questions are addressed:

- *What is the primary rhetorical strategy in this section?*
- *How does the author achieve the intended rhetorical strategy?*

The key elements of this process involve identifying the types of arguments the author employs to enhance persuasion, as well as the rhetorical techniques used to strengthen that persuasion. These arguments and rhetorical techniques are stylistic devices that the author utilises to increase the effectiveness of their persuasive communication. They are employed by the exegete to elucidate the text-generated and text-centred interpretation, conveying the original authorial intent of the passage and exploring its potential application to contemporary audiences. The peroratio of rhetorical-critical interpretation aims to determine the meaning of the text and how the author and speaker employed rhetorical ideas and tools to persuade the audience to embrace his or her meaning (Cornelius 1998:8).

The rhetorical interpretation employed is termed 'TGPI', which derives persuasive-rhetorical tools directly from the text itself. As such, this model is considered 'text-centred', assuming that the text does not depend on any particular rhetorical model or require compliance with it to be regarded as rhetorical (Genade 2007:52). It is an adapted rhetorical model that presupposes the author of a biblical text has intricately integrated rhetorical strategies within the text, without resorting to external rhetorical systems or frameworks. As a masterful and skilled rhetor, the author of 1 Corinthians wove rhetorically persuasive stylistic devices into the text in such a manner that the reader can identify and describe these rhetorical tools from the text itself. In this way, the reader allows the text to 'speak for itself', placing trust in the text and its internal logic (Meynet 1998:177).

Pioneered by Tolmie (2005), modified by Genade (2015) and adapted by Kukuni (2025), this methodology has proven fruitful in enhancing the understanding of the text's meaning, interpretation and application. While Tolmie developed the methodology, he does not claim that it enables the analyst to interpret or analyse the text in a completely objective manner (Tolmie 2004:36). What Tolmie refers to is the rationale behind his decision not to follow conventional trends of rhetorical criticism when analysing the text. He argues that these trends lack consistency, particularly among those who assert that ancient texts, especially Pauline texts, adhered to classical rhetorical categories. Scholars who follow Tolmie's methodology have similarly identified shortcomings in classical rhetoric, making it difficult to impose ancient rhetorical categories on the text. Consequently, Tolmie's methodology has been embraced for its approach, which allows the text to 'speak for itself', conveying its intent based on a rhetorical strategy that can only be determined if the text itself serves as the sole starting point for rhetorical interpretation (Genade 2015; Prinsloo 2024; Snyman 2009; Van Der Merwe 2013).

Tolmie (2005) developed a rhetorical-critical methodology that he chose not to name, referring to it as a 'minimal theoretical framework'. Genade (2015:25–26) argues that the user of this methodology, by opting to use it, presupposes knowledge of Greco-Roman rhetoric, although it is not actually employed. To adopt Tolmie's (2005) methodology is to explore the new opportunities it offers. Breaking allegiance with classical or Greco-Roman rhetoric does not result in the loss of a valuable interpretive lens. Scholars who have employed Tolmie's methodology thus far have generally adhered to the terms 'minimal theoretical framework' or 'text-centred rhetoric', with appropriate qualifications (Prinsloo 2024; Snyman 2015; Van Der Merwe 2013). However, this approach appears to leave the methodology vulnerable to being misunderstood or misconstrued as ambivalent, modern or transmodern (Genade 2015:22). Acknowledging these concerns, Genade (2015:22–26) contends that two things are necessary to safeguard the methodology from ambiguity, because rhetorical criticism holds different meanings for different scholars, whereas Tolmie's methodology retains a consistent meaning among those who use it.

The first solution that Genade (2015) proposes, amid the state of flux and the ever-evolving forms of rhetorical criticism, is to modify the methodology by assigning it a name. The name Genade (2015:26) gives to the methodology is 'text-generated persuasion analysis'. This designation implies that the author intended to persuade and that the text itself is sufficient to construct the persuasive intent. Not only is the text sufficient, but it is also prioritised above ancient rhetorical models that are imposed upon it for interpretation. The premise of this approach is that the text is capable of explaining itself. The audience is able to comprehend the rhetorical persuasion, grasp its meaning and application, without needing to have studied formal rhetoric (Kukuni 2025:2). The author will elaborate on this point in the section that follows. The second solution proposed by Genade (2015:5) is the systematisation of the methodology, with clear

steps to be followed when employing it. These steps follow sequentially, logically and systematically in a manner that will be outlined later in the study.

Following Genade's (2015) modification of Tolmie's (2005) methodology, Kukuni (2024:1) has aptly named it TGPI. In contrast to traditional approaches, Kukuni (2024:2) refrains from applying Aristotelian or classical rhetoric to interpret the text, nor does he impose such frameworks upon it. Echoing the sentiments of Genade (2015:22), it is imperative that this methodology be clearly defined and delineated, so that it is not misconstrued as a mere adaptation of 'modern' rhetoric. Furthermore, this methodology does not merely depart from classical rhetoric, nor can it be categorised as another variant of the many forms of 'rhetorical criticism' that abound. Nor is it to be confused with a form of 'literary criticism' or 'discourse analysis' masquerading as rhetorical-critical interpretation. Rather, it represents Tolmie's original rhetorical methodology, designed by him as the first South African New Testament scholar to break allegiance with classical or Greco-Roman rhetorical models in 2005. To avoid further confusion, it may be prudent to continue referring to it as Tolmie's (2005) rhetorical analysis.

## Towards rhetorical-aurality-centred preaching

In honour of Mazamisa, and following in his footsteps, the main focus of this article is on the methodological design, which takes into account existing methodologies aimed at understanding the meaning of the text. In his Doctor of Philosophy dissertation, Mazamisa (1987) devoted a considerable amount of effort to outlining his methodology for interpreting biblical texts. While Luke 10:25–37 was his focus text, his intention was not to provide a detailed exegesis of the section (Hombana 2023:5). Similarly, this article does not aim to provide a detailed exegesis of 1 Corinthians 2:1–5. Mazamisa's contribution to South African exegetical-hermeneutics was a beacon of light, paving the way for future scholars to remain committed to wrestling with the text of the Bible, critically engaging with the diverse interpretations that abound, while striving to ultimately advance and contribute to South Africa's New Testament interpretation.

Mazamisa's approach to New Testament interpretation, however, made a substantial contribution to the study of exegesis and hermeneutics, areas which some scholars tend to approach with a tendency to divide the two. Similarly, Tolmie's rhetorical methodology, which has been adapted by this author, seeks to bridge the gap between rhetorical interpretation, the methodological study of New Testament texts, exegesis, hermeneutics and the application of scholarly work for the people of God.

### Brief text-generated persuasion-interpretation of 1 Corinthians 2:1–5 and aurality

First Corinthians 2:1–5 is understood as Paul presenting the Corinthians with a text that, when read, enables those who hear it to perceive the oral expression of Paul's dominant

rhetorical objective. In his speech, delivered orally, and in the reception by the Corinthians, cognitively and aurally, Paul's primary rhetorical aim can be summarised as *persuading the Corinthians to reflect upon the content of his preaching, so that they may understand that their faith rests solely on God's power*. They were to do so by:

- thinking about its witness
- thinking about its content
- thinking about its power
- thinking about what it displays
- thinking about its contrast
- thinking about its conviction
- thinking about its anchor.

In the first instance, Paul comments on the character of his preaching, emphasising that it should not be attributed to any eloquence or superiority of wisdom. He rejected those unethical strategies that focus on showcasing the preacher and elevating their oratorical skill, which the Corinthians would have heard (Cornelius 2024:176). Instead, in 1 Corinthians 2:1, he argues that he made God the focus and proclaimed only his witness: 'And when I came to you, brothers, I did not come with superiority of word or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the witness of God' [Κἀγὼ ἐλθὼν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, ἦλθον οὐ καθ' ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἢ σοφίας καταγγέλλων ὑμῖν τὸ μαρτύριον τοῦ θεοῦ]. As the Corinthians reflect further, they are urged to consider the content of what he preached, which is Jesus Christ alone. Paul then employs the rhetorical technique of contrast (Snyman 2008) and self-humiliation, shifting away from referencing his apostolic authority, yet making it clear that he is not the authority himself. The power lies with God and the work of the Spirit:

And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my word and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power

[κατὰ τὸ ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ καὶ ἐν φόβῳ καὶ ἐν τρόμῳ πολλῇ ἐγενόμην πρὸς ὑμᾶς, καὶ ὁ λόγος μου καὶ τὸ κήρυγμά μου οὐκ ἐν πειθοῖ σοφίας ἀλλ' ἐν ἀποδείξει πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως]. (p. 213)

In terms of conviction, Paul sought to persuade the Corinthians that what they were hearing was the very word of God. He emphasised that it was not he who should be remembered, but the convicting message itself, which, when heard, moved them emotionally and prompted them to embrace it. Paul was able to exalt God without shame, remaining humble, and thus ensuring that the Corinthians were firmly anchored in God. All these persuasive words were intended to be communicated orally, in the 'aural' hearing of the audience to whom any preacher God sends to proclaim Christ crucified. They may employ rhetorical techniques such as contrast, logos, and pathos, but the core message remains divine wisdom, not human wisdom, in explaining the gospel orally to the aural audience.

## Conclusion

The finding of this article is that Tolmie's rhetorical methodology proves to be a fruitful choice for the rhetorical

interpretation of Paul's letters. It is an interdisciplinary methodology that, much like Mazamisa's *Dialectica Reconciliae*, can be adapted to advance exegetical-hermeneutical studies of the New Testament. By using 1 Corinthians 2:1–5, this article demonstrates that auralty can serve as a means of persuasion, encouraging the hearers to embrace the gospel of God.

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### Author's contribution

T.J.K. is the sole author of this research article.

### Ethical considerations

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### Data availability

The author declares that all data that support this research article and findings are available in the article and its references.

### Disclaimer

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