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Review article

THE INTEGRITY OF THE FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

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Abstract

This article offers insights into the issue of the integrity of the First Letter to the Corinthians whose compositional unity has been challenged. On the one hand, we have supporters of the integrity and the compositional unity of the letter, and, on the other hand, we have supporters of various partition theories that view the letter as a compilation of many different original letters and emphasize its composite nature. The main goal of the article is to fortify the position of integrity and the notion that this letter is a unified literary composition that can be easily understood even without the divisive partition theories.

The structure of this work discloses an additional intention to differentiate between the issue of authenticity, which deals exclusively with the person of the author and the issue of the integrity, which is concerned with the composition of the letter. The first part provides a brief examination of the authenticity and supplies both external and internal evidence in its favour. Whereas Paul's authorship has not been seriously doubted, the unity of the letter has been questioned by many scholars, even though most of the modern scholars support the integrity (unity) of the letter. The second part lays down the main points of various partition theories that view the letter as a compilation of many letters and of a middle ground hypothesis that wishes to take a neutral stand by suggesting different editions of the letter. However, the latter hypothesis appears to be only a variant of the composite theory since the end-proposition suggests that First Corinthians is a twofold composite letter. Each of the two groups of proposals receive significant responses by the supporters of the integrity who refute the scarce evidence by the former and offer further evidence in favour of the literal unity of the letter. The third and final part synthesizes and expands the claims of the letter's integrity and underlines its unified composition. In addition, it conveys the results

of a literary-rhetorical analysis that provides a convincing rhetorical and epistolary structure of First Corinthians which demonstrates both thematic and rhetorical unity of the letter when regarded as a unified deliberative letter urging concord.

The concluding synthesis emphasizes the fact that the middle ground hypothesis is still in the search of its supposed neutral position and that the partition theories still lack convincing and conclusive evidence against the integrity and unity of the letter. The multitude of often contradicting partition hypotheses and similar attempts to explain the letter as a compilation of many letters or as a product of different editions, represents the best evidence against their validity. This article emphasizes that the present letter that we have at our disposal is not a compilation of many letters, but a single non-composite document that Paul the Apostle himself originally wrote, even if it was written over an extended period. In the final instance, as long as the First Letter to the Corinthians remains intelligible as a whole and as long as it successfully transmits Paul's authentic message of the Gospel of Christ, there is no need for partition hypotheses, they become obsolete.

Key words: The First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul the Apostle, Authenticity, unified composition, integrity, partition, composite letter, middle ground, rhetoric, unified letter

Introduction

As the title of the article states, our working hypothesis embraces the integrity of the letter, which means that we support the letter's unity and the fact that it is best understood when regarded as a unified literary composition offering logical and theological unity, and also displaying unified thematic and rhetoric. In other words, First Corinthians is not a compilation of two or more letters put together by the Apostle himself or one of his students, but a single non-composite unified and coherent letter. It is a unique document!

In order to understand the issue of the integrity or the unity of the letter, it is important to delimit its meaning. As a matter of fact, we must learn to differentiate this issue, which concerns the unity of the letter's composition, from other associated issues, such as the authenticity, which is concerned with the authorship of the letter, or, more precisely, with the person of the author and not the letter itself. Thereby, it should be noted that Paul's authorship of First Corinthians has not been seriously challenged so far, whereas the unity of the letter has been put to doubt as early as the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Although most modern scholars still support the integrity of the letter and defend its compositional unity, there have been serious attempts by renowned scholars to regard and explain this document as a composite letter,

consisting of two up to thirteen original letters that have been compiled by Paul or others into a single letter called First Corinthians. Some scholars try to find a middle ground between the supporters of the letter's unity and of those who opt for the composite nature of the letter. However, this proposal seems rather unconvincing as it ranges from the suggestion of various editions of the letter up to being a compilation of two different letters. In fact, the latter suggestion obviously loses the hypothetical middle ground and ultimately sides with the partition theories that view the letter as a compilation, even though its supporters try to save the middle ground by additionally explaining that Paul is the author of all editions of the letter. In the end, this manoeuvre only causes confusion since it introduces the issue of the authenticity and authorship that is not necessarily associated with the issue of the unity of the letter. In other words, the fact that Paul is stated as the author of various editions or of a compilation of many letters, preserves the authenticity, but it does not save the letter's integrity.

The vast number of various partition theories, their mutual contradiction or even exclusion, lack of irrefutable arguments for the composite nature of the letter, and the failure to explain the logic of the existing letter with these theories only fortifies majoritarian conclusion that the integrity of the letter is the best answer. In order to fully grasp the issue of the letter's integrity, it is important to consult not just its supporters, but also the representatives of a diverse group of partition theories who regard the letter as a compilation. Once their propositions are heard, it is much easier to offer counterarguments in favour of the integrity and to comprehend how unnecessary they are for the understanding of Paul's message to the Corinthian Christian community.

The goal of this article is not just to defend or prove the integrity of the letter but also to emphasize the value of the existing letter that has preserved Paul's authentic message of the Gospel for two thousand years. In addition, it is the common-sense logic or, more precisely, the common-sense logic of a believer in Christ that tells us that if the First Letter to the Corinthians, which we have in our hands today, is still easily understood and able to successfully convey the same message of the Gospel of Christ after two millennia, there is no need to summon various partition theories for explanation.

More recently, a literary-rhetorical analysis of the letter has further fortified the position of the integrity by adding new and convincing evidence to the traditional explanation of the letter as a unified literary composition. This analysis demonstrates that the entire letter can be seen as an appeal to unity of the Corinthian community and thus proves that besides literary and theological unity, the letter also shows thematic and rhetorical unity.

1. A brief examination of the authenticity of First Corinthians

Before dealing with the integrity of the First Letter to the Corinthians,¹ it is important to understand that the issue of integrity should be separated from the issue of authenticity. As previously stated, the authenticity of Paul's authorship of the letter has not been seriously doubted, since there is strong external and internal evidence to support his cause.

1.1 External evidence for the authenticity of the letter

Let us examine some of the most important external evidence from the first two centuries following the writing of First Corinthians. The oldest external evidence dates as early as the first century and comes from Clement of Rome around AD 95 in his letter to the Corinthian community, where he appeals to the First Corinthians as »the letter of the blessed Paul, the Apostle« (*Cor.* 47). After this testimony, we have less explicit evidence like the apocrypha, Epistle of Barnabas, and Didache. The last two are dated later than AD 95 and offer allusions to different passages from First Corinthians. Further on, we have Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna who both, especially Ignatius, offer a strong echo of Pauline language from First Corinthians, notwithstanding the lack of explicit quotations. Then we also have a passage from Hermas (*Mand.* IV. 4) that seems to point to 1Cor 7,39-40. In Justin Martyr (*Try* 35), around AD 147, and Athenagoras (*De. Res. Mort.* 18), around AD 177, we find quotations from 1Cor 11 and 1Cor 15. Furthermore, the Church Fathers with numerous quotations, for example Irenaeus (60), Clement of Alexandria (130) and Tertullian (400). There is also evidence that Basilides was familiar with the letter and Marcion included it in his rigorous and selective version of the canon of the Holy Scripture.

1.2 Internal evidence for the authenticity of the letter

As for the internal evidence within First Corinthians, we can assert with certainty that despite various topics found in this letter, we can recognize a har-

¹ Cf. Margaret Mary MITCHELL, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation. An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians*, Tübingen, 1991, 2–5. This article offers a thorough presentation of the integrity issue, including a list of the most important authors who support various partition theories and of those who support the integrity. Most of the well-known scholars who are considered experts on First Corinthians support the unity of the letter; Barrett, Bruce, Collins, Conzelmann, Fee, Garland, Hurd, Kümmel, Merklein, Mitchell, Murphy-O'Connor, Robertson and Plummer, and others. Due to the limited space and time, only some of these scholars are consulted in this article.

monious language and character, both showing the originality and the determination of Paul the Apostle. Furthermore, this can be seen in numerous coincidences which utterly confirm that we are dealing with a genuine Pauline letter. It is also important to point out the fact that the contents of this letter are in harmony with general information on Corinth during the days of St. Paul.²

Taking into account the above external and internal evidence, there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the letter and the fact that Paul the Apostle himself is the author of the letter. The issue of authenticity is not without importance, inasmuch it opens the door to the vast world of Pauline studies. However, given this is not the main topic of the article, we shall limit our investigation to the issue of the integrity and unity of the letter.

2. Unified or composite nature of First Corinthians

Whereas the authenticity of First Corinthians has not seriously been questioned, the same conclusion does not apply to the integrity of the letter that has been challenged by many scholars. Nevertheless, this study assumes the integrity and remains dedicated to the goal of demonstrating the unity of the letter in question. Our decision is based on the opinion of most contemporary Pauline experts and a lack of convincing evidence for the supposed compilation of the letter.³ Although we are set to prove our initial working hypothesis of the letter's integrity, a serious effort has been made to provide at least partially objective analysis, allowing each potential reader to decide for himself on the issue of the unity or disunity of the letter in question. This process demands an earnest investigation of the counterarguments to the unity of the letter, as proposed by various partition theories that view First Corinthians as a compilation of many letters. The first step of the procedure is to present

² On external and internal evidence, cf. Archibald ROBERTSON – Alfred PLUMMER, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, Edinburgh, 1911, XVI–XVIII. In addition, cf. C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 11–12 and Joseph Augustine FITZMYER, *First Corinthians. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, New York, 2008, 48–51.

³ Cf. especially Charles Kingsley BARRETT, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, London, 1992; Raymond Francis COLLINS, *First Corinthians*, Collegeville, 1999; Gordon Donald FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Grand Rapids, 1987; Joseph Augustine FITZMYER, *First Corinthians. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, New York, 2008; Margaret Mary MITCHELL, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation. An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians*, Tübingen, 1991; Anthony Charles THISELTON, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians. A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Grand Rapids, 2000, and other.

a problem statement and the next step is to provide a credible answer to the issue in question.

1.1. *First Corinthians as a composite letter – various partition theories*

Starting from the end of the 19th century, with the important studies written by Hagge and Heinrici,⁴ and in particular following the work of J. Weiss in the early 20th century,⁵ there have been numerous proposals of partition theories which have attempted to explain First Corinthians as a composite letter. According to these theories, a starting point in support of their composite hypothesis is to be found within the letter itself, especially in 1Cor 5:9, where Paul says: »I wrote you in my letter«. They hold this to be the evidence that the Apostle wrote a so-called »Previous letter« prior to First Corinthians and instead of considering it lost, they tend to trace it either within First or Second Corinthians.⁶

In addition, the supporters of these partition theories suggest that certain tensions, inconsistencies and abrupt transitions, in conjunction with the repeated conclusions and a variety of topics that are sometimes re-introduced, provide tangible evidence that the Apostle wrote distinct letters dealing with distinct issues. These letters would be subsequently combined into First Corinthians by a later editor or even by the Apostle himself.⁷ This point of view

⁴ H. HAGGE, Die beiden überlieferten Sendschreiben des Apostels Paulus an die Gemeinde zu Korinth, in: *Jahrbücher für protestantische Theologie* 2 (1876) 481–532; Carl Friedrich George HEINRICI, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, Göttingen, 1896, 27–31.

⁵ Johannes WEISS, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, Göttingen, 1910.

⁶ For a possible reconstruction of the so-called »Previous letter«, cf. Jean HÉRING, *La première épître de saint Paul aux Corinthiens*, Neuchâtel, 1949, 10–12 and Alessandro SACCHI, *Una comunità si interroga. Prima lettera ai Corinzi*, Milano, 1998, 19–21. These authors offer a hypothesis, shared by most of the partition theories, that this unknown letter is spread throughout the entire First Corinthians (cf. 1Cor 6:12-20; 10:1-23; [11:2-34; 15:1-58; 16:13-24] and partly in Second Corinthians (cf. 2Cor 6:14–7,1). For the content of the letter, cf. Frederic Fyvie BRUCE, *I & II Corinthians*, London, 1971, 23–25, who suggests that it speaks about avoiding association with an immoral brother (cf. 1Cor 5:1-13) and calls it »Corinthians A«.

⁷ Cf. Joseph Augustine FITZMYER, *First Corinthians. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, New York, 2008, 48–51. The partition theories differ as to the number of different letters that may be found within First Corinthians (sometimes combined with Second Corinthians). Some scholars view this letter as a composite of two letters: Johannes WEISS, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, Göttingen, 1910, XL-XLIII and Jean HÉRING, *La première épître de saint Paul aux Corinthiens*, Neuchâtel, 1949, 10–12. For three letters, cf. Johannes WEISS, *Das Urchristentum*, Göttingen, 1917, 245–258, Walter SCHMITHALS, *Die Gnosis in Corinth. Eine Untersuchung zu den Korinthenbriefen*, Göttingen, 1956, 12–17, and Gerhard SELLIN, 1 Korinther 5–6 und der »Vorbrief« nach Korinth. Indizien für

is exemplified by Jean Héring, who challenges the integrity of the letter and believes that Paul sent at least four different letters addressed to the Corinthians, respectively the so-called »Previous letter«, First and Second Corinthians, and finally the so-called »Severe letter«, written in great affliction and alluded to in 2Cor 2:4; 7:8-9.12. This scholar is convinced that the most important argument against the integrity of First Corinthians is the fact (which we find debatable) that many parts do not fit well with one another, even if we consider possible delays in Paul's dictation. He also traces certain contradictions in the composition of First Corinthians with respect to the time of Paul's next visit to Corinth in chs. 4 and 16 (cf. 1Cor 4:19-21; 16:5-9), the permissibility of eating the meat sacrificed to idols in chs. 8 and 10 (cf. 1Cor 8:1-13; 10:23–11:10), the repeated discussion of his ministry (chs. 1–4 and 9), and the lack of transition between chs. 8 and 9. All the above would suggest that it is possible to find two coherent letters within First Corinthians. Therefore, editorial work would comprise mostly in gluing these two letters together with some minor adjustments and a combined closing in ch. 16. In accordance with this hypothesis, the Apostle would have first received oral news from Chloe's people, followed shortly by the Corinthian missive. Then, he would have written answers to both reports in the first letter »A« and sent it through Chloe's men. Upon receiving additional upsetting information from Stephanas and his delegation, he would have written the second letter »B« and dispatched it through this delegation.⁸

eine Mehrschichtigkeit von Kommunikationsakten im ersten Korintherbrief, in: *New Testament Studies*, 37 (1991) 4, 535–538. For four letters, cf. Wolfgang SCHENK, *Der erste Korintherbrief als Briefsammlung*, in: *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 60 (1969) 219–244 and Christophe SENFT, *La première Épître de saint-Paul aux Corinthiens*, Neuchâtel – Paris, 1979, 17–19. For nine letters, cf. Walter SCHMITHALS, *Die Korintherbriefe als Briefsammlung*, in: *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 64 (1973) 263–288 (Schmithals finally proposes 13 letters within 1–2 Corinthians). For a hypothesis of Paul as an editor, cf. Martinus C. DE BOER, *The Composition of 1 Corinthians*, in: *New Testament Studies*, 40 (1994) 2, 229–245 and Eduardo DE LA SERNA, *Los orígenes de 1 Corintios*, in: *Biblica*, 72 (1991) 2, 192–216.

⁸ Cf. Jean HÉRING, *La première épître de saint Paul aux Corinthiens*, Neuchâtel, 1949, 10–12. For more details, cf. Alessandro SACCHI, *Una comunità si interroga. Prima lettera ai Corinzi*, Milano, 1998, 19–21. The latter scholar suggests that the first letter (»A«), containing the answer to the oral information from Chloe's family and to the missive from the Corinthians, can be found in 1Cor 1–8; 10:23–11:1; 16:1-4.10–14), whereas the second letter (»B«), responding to the oral report from Stephanas, can be found in 1Cor 9:1–10:22; 11:2–15:58; 16:5–9.15–24; Marcel GOGUEL, *Introduction au Nouveau Testament. Les Épîtres Pauliniennes*, IV/2, Paris, 1926, 72–86, who speaks of three different letters within First Corinthians; Victor Paul FURNISH, *The Theology of the First Letter to the Corinthians*, Cambridge, 1999, 7–9. The latter opts for at least three or four letters to the Corinthians and suggests that the so-called »Severe letter« (he calls it the Letter »C«) is the fourth letter, written during the second visit and partially traceable in 2Cor 10–13.

After evaluating the integrity of First Corinthians, A. Sacchi suggests that various sections of the letter seem to be so diversified in style and content, that they could easily function separately from the letter. This would lead to the conclusion that the lack of harmony and contradictions in these sections could be more intelligible if the letter is regarded as a fusion of different autonomous writings. Although this scholar is not completely in agreement with the partition theories, he is still convinced that the Apostle could have inserted some of the passages written previously, adapting them to the new context of the letter. This could be the case with the apology of his apostleship (ch. 9) and the passage popularly known as »the hymn of love« (ch. 13). There is also a possibility that some expressions or even short passages were added by Paul's disciples. One of these passages, suspected of interpolation by his successors, can probably be traced in 1Cor 14:34-36. Here we find a statement that women are not allowed to talk during assembly (cf. notably 14:34: »Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says«). Sacchi notes that this is a strange statement, if we have in mind the fact that the Apostle speaks of women who pray and prophesy, ordering them only to wear a veil in 1Cor 11:2-16 (cf. notably 1Cor 11:5-6: »But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head [...] then she should cover her head«).⁹

Besides the difficulties suggested by Héring and Sacchi, there is also the difference in Paul's stand on the issues of factions (cf. 1Cor 1-4; 11:18-19) and sexual immorality (cf. 1Cor 5), which is interrupted by the lawsuits in 1Cor 6:1-11 and taken up again in 1Cor 6:12-20. In addition, the Apostle himself mentions several different sources of information. Thus, we have a report from Chloe's people in 1:11, reports from various other people (cf. 1Cor 5:1; 11:18) and a report from Stephanas' delegation (cf. 1Cor 16:17). The latter was probably accompanied by the Corinthian missive (cf. 1Cor 7:1: »Now for the matters you wrote about«), which may be the source of various topics introduced by *περὶ δέ*, »concerning, regarding, about« (cf. 1Cor 8:1; 12:1).¹⁰

Furthermore, even the supporters of the letter's integrity find certain interpolations, respectively in 1:2c, 14:33b-36 and in ch. 13.¹¹ The problem is that

⁹ Cf. Alessandro SACCHI, *Una comunità si interroga. Prima lettera ai Corinzi*, Milano, 1998, 19-21.

¹⁰ Cf. Margaret Mary MITCHELL, Concerning ΠΕΡΙ ΔΕ in 1 Corinthians, in: *Novum Testamentum*, 31 (1989) 3, 229-256. This article refutes the arguments of the partition theories that the phrase *περὶ δέ* introduces only the topics from the Corinthian letter to Paul (cf. 1Cor 7:1).

¹¹ Cf. Archibald ROBERTSON – Alfred PLUMMER, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, Edinburgh, 1911, XVIII-XIX. These exegetes

they do not offer sufficient and convincing evidence for their claims on these interpolations. In fact, the evidence supports the authenticity of these passages because they are found in every Greek manuscript containing First Corinthians. Such and other passages with the supposed abrupt transitions and tensions could probably be explained by Paul's dictation to a scribe over an extended period of time and on different occasions. This leads to a conclusion that the letter could have been composed in different stages and not at one determinate point of time and still be considered a single unified composition.¹² In fact, the letter of this size and importance could hardly be dictated and written in a single day.

A. Robertson and A. Plummer, although themselves doubtful of few lemmas,¹³ criticize the partition theories which suggest that numerous interpolations have been inserted within the letter to bind together layers and fragments from the supposed distinct letters. The problem with this conjecture is that there are no such traces to be found in any of the four important Uncial manuscripts (Ⲙ A B D) containing the entire First Corinthians or in any other manuscripts. In addition, even the Church Fathers were familiar with the full extent of the letter, which fortifies our claim that First Corinthians is intelli-

are suspicious of interpolations in the case of Χριστοῦ (1Cor 1:8), Ἰησοῦ (1Cor 4:17), ἡμῶν (1Cor 5:4), and τὰ ἔθνη (1Cor 10:20), however they do not supply overwhelming evidence for their claim; Jerome MURPHY-O'CONNOR, Interpolations in 1 Corinthians, in: *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 48 (1986) 1, 81–94, who traces only two interpolations in 1Cor 4:6 and in 14:32–35, and offers a substantial argumentation for his hypothesis.

¹² Cf. Joseph Augustine FITZMYER, *First Corinthians. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, New York, 2008, 48–51. The above presentation is mostly based on Fitzmyer's discussion of the integrity of the letter. For additional information, cf. John Coolidge HURD, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, Macon, 1983, 43–47. This exegete suggests that the difficulties can be explained by Paul's adjustment to the Apostolic Decree (cf. Acts 15). This could be the case with Paul's view of marriage in ch. 7, on idols in 8:1–11:1, liturgy in ch. 11, spiritual gifts in chs. 12–14, the resurrection in ch. 15, and the collection in ch. 16. Unfortunately, there is no mention of this decree in Paul's writing or any other sufficient evidence to support this hypothesis. For further insights, cf. Alessandro SACCHI, *Una comunità si interroga. Prima lettera ai Corinzi*, Milano, 1998, 19–21 and in James Douglas Grant DUNN, *1 Corinthians*, Sheffield, 1995, 21–23. For additional explanation of abrupt transition and tensions, cf. Hans CONZELMANN, *1 Corinthians. A Commentary on the First epistle to the Corinthians*, Philadelphia, 1975, 2–4; W.G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 275–278, who attempts to explain some of the rough transitions by illustrating Paul's use of the literary device of excursus in chs. 2; 6; 9; 10; 13; Helmut MERKLEIN, Die Einheitlichkeit des ersten Korintherbriefes, in: *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 75 (1984) 153–183; Jerome MURPHY-O'CONNOR, *Paul. A Critical life*, Oxford, 1996, 252–253.

¹³ Cf. Archibald ROBERTSON – Alfred PLUMMER, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, Edinburgh, 1911, XVIII–XIX. The questionable lemmas include Χριστοῦ in 1Cor 1:8, Ἰησοῦ in 1Cor 4:17, ἡμῶν in 1Cor 5:4 and τὰ ἔθνη in 1Cor 10:20.

ble and quite fluent as we read it today. Thus, until there is strong evidence to the contrary, we must assume that it was passed down to us in the same form and content as it was dictated by St. Paul himself.¹⁴

2.2 Responses to the partition theories on literary grounds

Various partition theories have provoked numerous responses and counter-arguments by many relevant Pauline scholars. One of these scholars, G.D. Fee, responds to partition hypothesis in four points. The first point emphasizes that the disagreement between these theories makes their reconstruction unconvincing. The second point explains that the supposed contradictions in First Corinthians can be resolved exegetically. This scholar gives an example of the seeming tension between 8:1-13 and 10:23-33 and explains that Paul speaks of two different, even though related issues. Thirdly, this means that the partition theories fail to recognize the fundamental ABA' chiastic pattern of Pauline argumentation in the letter. Section A provides a general theological perspective to the issue involved, whereas section B introduces an explanatory digression which is important for the general argument. Finally, section A' provides a specific answer to the issue in question. Fourthly, the fact that this letter is intelligible and sensible as it is makes the partition theories redundant, particularly since they lack solid evidence against the integrity of the letter.¹⁵

After examining the letter's composition, R.F. Collins, for his part, finds no real evidence for the partition theories. This scholar defends the integrity of the letter and points out that one of the important arguments in its favour is the fact that almost the entire letter (missing only three verses; 9:13; 14:15 and 15:16) is present in Papyrus Chester Beatty II (p⁴⁶). This is a Greek manuscript dating from AD 200, thus 150 years after the letter was written and around

¹⁴ Cf. Archibald ROBERTSON – Alfred PLUMMER, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, Edinburgh, 1911, XVIII-XIX. For further analysis, cf. C.S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 8 and M. T. Finney, *Honour and conflict in the ancient world*, 69 (n. 1). The latter exegete presents a brief history on the beginnings of partition theories from J. Weiss (1910) up to W. Schmithals (1973) and other scholars. However, Finney concludes that the arguments for the unity and integrity of the letter outweigh such theories. This scholar also supplies a list of scholars who support the unity of the letter that includes the majority of contemporary scholars; Barrett (1971), Conzelmann (1975), Fee (1987, 1999), Mitchell (1991), Hays (1997), Thiselton (2000), and others. We especially agree with Finney that the most successful work in proving the integrity of First Corinthians comes from M.M. Mitchell (1991), who demonstrates, through strong rhetorical proofs, that this letter should be read as a unified (wholesome) letter.

¹⁵ Cf. Gordon Donald FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Grand Rapids, 1987, 15–16.

200 years older than the manuscripts containing the entire volume of at least one of the Gospels (the 4th/5th century). Collins considers a possibility that the Apostle extended his letter upon receiving additional information. However, the language of the letter points towards a single composition, although probably dictated and composed over an extended period of time, as the length of the letter would suggest.¹⁶ He believes that the answer to the issue of the letter's unity lies in the stylistic features of the letter, especially in Paul's use of deliberative rhetoric and the chiasmic ABA' pattern or parallelism in his argumentation that can be seen throughout the entire letter. In the case of deliberative rhetoric, the appeal to the unity of the Corinthian community made by the Apostle (cf. the main thesis in 1Cor 1:10) dominates the entire letter and therefore makes an excellent argument for the unity of First Corinthians. The chiasmic structure offers an explanation for seemingly difficult and somewhat illogical transitions between and within different sections (cf. the unity of the community in 1Cor 1:10–3:23; the responsible use of sexuality in chs. 5–7; food offered to idols in chs. 8–10, and spiritual gifts in chs. 12–14). Collins emphasizes the Semitic influence on the ABA' structure and elaborates further (than Fee) that the digression (B) serves as a rhetorical figure that supports Paul's argument and enlightens the situation further by offering a criterion (A) for evaluating a particular issue (A'). Understanding Paul's use of deliberative rhetoric and chiasm patterns helps us to comprehend better First Corinthians as a unified composition.¹⁷

G. Barbaglio highlights further the literary composition of the letter as the basis of the unity and suggests that the unity of the letter lies in the epistolary character and formal techniques employed especially for remote communication. By recognizing the epistolary elements and their role in Paul's

¹⁶ Cf. Raymond Francis COLLINS, *First Corinthians*, Collegeville, 1999, 10–14.

¹⁷ Cf. Raymond Francis COLLINS, *First Corinthians*, Collegeville, 1999, 14–16. This exegete also gives a detailed history of partition theories from J. Weiss (1910, 1914), who regards First Corinthians as a compilation of two or even three letters, assembled by a later anonymous editor, up to W. Schmithals' extreme theory that Paul wrote 13 letters to the Corinthians, of which 5 can be found within the canonical First Corinthians. Then there are other authors, such as E. de la Serna (1991) and M. De Boer (1994), who search for a middle ground between the supporters of the letter's integrity and those who support partition of the letter. They offer a hypothesis that Paul's first draft was expanded upon receiving additional information in order to answer new issues at hand. Collins refutes these theories, since they turn First Corinthians into a two-in-one lengthy letter, composed on two different and separated occasions and over a long period of time. We certainly appreciate Collins' proposal, especially the part that emphasizes the unifying function of deliberative (persuasive) rhetoric. More on this topic is said in the third and final section of our article.

argumentation and ordering of the text, we are able to recognize that First Corinthians represents a unified literary composition. Accordingly, the unity of First Corinthians comes neither from a unified thematic and theological discourse nor from the rhetorical *dispositio*, but mostly from the formal literary character of the letter.¹⁸

If we were to evaluate the representative ideas of the partition theories and counterarguments from the supporters of integrity, we would realize that there is still a prevailing body of evidence for the letter's integrity that outweighs any attempt to turn First Corinthians into a compilation of many different letters. In other words, the composite hypotheses fail to deliver convincing arguments against the unity of the letter. We can only agree with J.A. Fitzmyer, who wisely states that: »the very multiplicity and the diversity of the theories about the composition of the letter are the best evidence of its improbability«.¹⁹

2.3 A middle ground proposition

We continue our research on the issue of the letter's integrity with a brief examination of a more recent proposal from the last decade of the 20st century, which attempts to find a middle ground between the view of integrity and partition of First Corinthians. A well-known representative of this hypothesis that wishes to avoid a unilateral decision is M. De Boer. What is factual for him is that First Corinthians is occasioned by two separate events, respectively the arrival of Chloe's people (cf. 1Cor 1:1) and a later visit by Stephanas' delegation (cf. 1Cor 16:7). They both supplied the Apostle with oral information, along with the Corinthian missive (cf. 1Cor 7:1), carried by the second group. This exegete finds support for his claim in the epistolary form and structure which he considers to be consistent with the fact that the letter is occasioned by two different events and written in two different stages. He gives the example of a structural break and a change in topic emerging between chs. 4 and 5. Thus,

¹⁸ Cf. Giuseppe BARBAGLIO, *La prima lettera ai Corinzi. Introduzione, versione e commento*, Bologna, 1995, 44–58. This exegete supports the integrity of First Corinthians but offers an interesting presentation of proposals against its unity. Similarly, to Fee and Collins, Barbaglio recognizes that Paul's use of the chiasmic ABA' structure can account for apparent incongruities in the letter itself. This can be said especially for chs. 5–6, 8–10 and 12–14, sometimes suspected of interpolation in their middle sections (B), respectively in 6:1–11, in ch. 9 and in ch. 13. In these sections, the Apostle sets an example or *digressio* to explain better the issue at hand and to underline more clearly what is at stake.

¹⁹ Joseph Augustine FITZMYER, *First Corinthians. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, New York, 2008, 49.

Paul would have first written a self-contained letter found in chs. 1–4 as an answer to the information received from Chloe’s people, concerning the apostolic divisions. Just as he was about to finish writing the letter, he would have received additional oral and written information related to various behavioural issues from the Stephanas’ group. That is when the Apostle could have written chs. 5–16, answering first to the oral report in ch. 5–6 and then to the missive in chs. 7–16.

One of the pieces of evidence in support of the hypothesis that chs. 1–4 is a self-containing letter can be found in the closing section of the body of the letter. In this sense, the elements of the concluding section of the letter in ch. 16 could also be found in ch. 4. These elements include autobiographical references (cf. 1Cor 16:1-2 and 4:14-15), a recommendation of Paul’s messenger (cf. 1Cor 16:10-11 and 4:17), an announcement of Paul’s visit (cf. 1Cor 16:3-9 and 4:18-21), and a parenetic section (cf. 1Cor 16:13-18 and 4:16). This case-scenario suggests that Paul was concluding the body of the letter in 4:14-21 (cf. 16:1-18) and was preparing to give an epistolary closing, as he did in 16:19-24. De Boer admits that there are also points of continuity, such as the fact that chs. 1–4 and 5–16 deal with the same community and that all the problems can be traced to the same root in spiritual enthusiasm. Even so, he believes that First Corinthians is a composite of two letters written on two separate occasions, in two different periods and circumstances, and answering two different sets of topics, however this was all done by Paul the Apostle, who remains the author and the editor of the letter.²⁰

We find a similar proposal in the work of de la Serna who maintains that Paul wrote to the Corinthians in order to respond to their written questions (cf. 1Cor 7:1), each starting with *περὶ δέ*, »concerning, regarding« (cf. 1Cor 7:1.25; 8:1; 12:1 and 16:2.12). In the meantime, the Apostle would have received an oral report on the deteriorated situation in Corinth. This would have propelled Paul to issue a »second edition« of the letter, expanded with the sections on unity and love (cf. 1Cor 1–6; [9:1–10:22]; [10:23; 11:1]; 11:2-34; 12:31b–14:1a; 15; 16:13-24).

²⁰ Cf. Martinus C. DE BOER, »The Composition of 1 Corinthians«, in: *New Testament Studies*, 40 (1994) 2, 229–245, who holds that First Corinthians, which he calls »Corinthians B«, was dispatched in the end as a 16–chapter letter by Stephanas’ delegation. For a similar explanation but with different conclusion in favor of the letter’s integrity, cf. Frederic Fyvie BRUCE, *I & II Corinthians*, London, 1971, 23–25. The latter safeguards the integrity of First Corinthians by claiming that it was written in different stages within a larger time span. This would explain various difficulties and problems, such as a different stand on Timothy’s arrival in 1Cor 4:17 and in 16:10f and Paul’s own arrival in 1Cor 4:19 and in 16:5-9.

This suggestion makes an honest and acceptable attempt to build a middle ground between the integrity position and the partition theories, because it recognizes the unity of the letter and simultaneously explains the lack of internal uniformity, including various (seeming) inconsistencies.²¹ However, the hypothesis of a »second« edition does not appear convincing, given there is no factual evidence that could corroborate its existence.

A brief examination of the two middle ground proposals indicates that this hypothesis suffers from the same issue as the partition theories; namely, it fails to offer a unified stand on the issue of the integrity. This hypothesis ranges from an imaginary middle ground to the second edition (de la Serna) and finally towards a view of First Corinthians as a compilation of two distinct letters (De Boer). The next section of the article delivers a response to the middle ground (and partition) hypotheses and offers further proposals for the integrity of the letter.

2.4 *A response to the middle ground hypothesis*

One of many interesting proposals that rebukes both the middle ground hypothesis and the view of First Corinthians as a compilation of at least two letters is offered by A.C. Thiselton. This exegete finds weakness in De Boer's argument in his contrast between the theology of the cross in chs. 1–4 and the practical behaviour in chs. 5–16. In fact, even chs. 5–14 are concerned with living the identity under the criterion of the cross and its implications of self-renunciation for others and the community. Otherwise, chapters such as 8–11 and 12–14 lose their theological bases. Thiselton finds the arguments of Fee, Collins and Mitchell more convincing than those supplied by De Boer and the middle ground hypothesis. He explains that partition theories are needed only if exegesis fails in proving the coherence of the letter. Fundamentally, the question is whether the supposed tensions between 11,18-19 and 1,10-12, the ones within chs. 8–10 and those between the so-called different sources of information are such that we are forced to accept one of the various partition theories? In this sense, M.M. Mitchell's study of First Corinthians²² has successfully demonstrated the rhetorical and logical coherence of the letter, thus overthrowing all the partition theories. However, Thiselton finds the weakness of

²¹ Cf. Eduardo DE LA SERNA, »Los orígenes de 1 Corintios«, in: *Biblica*, 72 (1991) 2, 192–216.

²² Cf. Margaret Mary MITCHELL, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation. An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians*, Tübingen, 1991.

this rhetorically based study in the fact that it underestimates the theological basis of the unity. In this sense, the proposed appeal of deliberative rhetoric »for advantage« comes as a vague category, particularly because the logic of the cross overturns the meaning of advantage into concern for others and building a community as a whole. Therefore, Thiselton believes that a unifying theme can be identified within Paul's systematic and coherent re-proclamation of grace, the cross²³ and resurrection. This proclamation appeals to the Corinthian Christians to leave their secular ethics behind and adopt a new Christian value system, which must be applied in their practical behaviour.²⁴

After reviewing the middle ground proposition and a brief response to this theory, we have reached a conclusion that this hypothesis is not as neutral as the name would suggest. Respectively, after the initial premise of a one lengthy letter occasioned by two different events and written in two different stages and an associated idea of a second edition or different editions of the letter, the concluding synthesis (of De Boer's work, to be precise) states that First Corinthians is a compilation of at least two letters, although edited and compiled by Paul himself. It seems that this hypothesis and associated theories neglect or even cross the line between the issue of authenticity of the author, which has not been seriously challenged and the issue of the compositional integrity of the letter, which has been doubted since the end of the 19th century. Admittedly, these two issues can be seen as interconnected, because Paul is the author of First Corinthians after all. However, the fact remains that the main debate in expert circles, and in our modest study, revolves around the issue of integrity of the letter itself. Therefore, and with great respect to the middle ground hypothesis, we believe that the matter of the letter's unity does not allow for a middle ground. A decision can only be made between two possible solutions: the position of various partition theories that view First Corinthians as a compilation of different letters or the position of integrity that

²³ For the proclamation of the cross, cf. also Alexandra R. BROWN, *The Cross and Human Transformation. Paul's Apocalyptic Word in 1 Corinthians*, Minneapolis, 1995. This work underlines Paul's Gospel as the word of the cross that transforms and reconciles the Corinthians, and the Apostle as the authority that asserts the wisdom of the cross as a key for the resolution of the variety of issues found throughout the entire letter.

²⁴ Cf. Anthony Charles THISELTON, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians. A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Grand Rapids, 2000, 36–41. In addition, cf. David E. GARLAND, *1 Corinthians*, Grand Rapids, 2003, 14–17, who supports the letter's unity and holds that various partition theories have been convincingly refuted by Merklein (1984), Belleville (1987) and Mitchell (1993). Garland notes that Paul's letters cannot be constrained or enclosed within rhetorical or epistolary boundaries, since the Apostle did things his own way.

regards the letter as a unified literary composition, which has been both the traditional and the majoritarian stand up to date.

In sum, even if we allow for the possibility that First Corinthians was written in a longer period of time and in different moments, this would only suggest that the composition of the letter had taken some time (which is not so unusual for such an extensive letter) and thus included a process in which it is hard to pinpoint the exact time of composition. However, this does not diminish the fact that we are still dealing with the same coherent and unified letter, written by Paul the Apostle himself to his beloved community in Corinth. In this sense, we agree with C. Tomić, who gives a straightforward answer to those who attempt to divide First Corinthians in two distinct letters based on the two sets of occasions: »However, you cannot deny the unity of the epistle [...] You cannot divide it in two letters: first, A-letter, carried by Chloe's (people), and second, B-letter, carried by Stephanas and friends. The complexity of the situation in Corinth and the questions being asked require a difference in approach to certain (specific) issues, but the internal connection in the epistle is obvious«.²⁵

3. The integrity of the Letter

The third and final part of this article introduces further stronger arguments in favour of the unity of the letter. Our goal is to offer new insights into the issue of the integrity that are not necessarily tied to the debate with the partition theories but to an overall and self-oriented analysis of the letter. The concluding reflections on the integrity include the evidence from a specific literary-rhetorical analysis of the letter that puts greater accent on Paul's disposition of the argument and views the letter as an example of a convincing rhetoric.

3.1 *First Corinthians as a unified composition*

Even if we set aside the overpowering evidence in favour of the integrity, the fact remains that various theories that partition First Corinthians into a compilation of different letters, or in different editions, are unnecessary if the letter itself can be understood as a coherent, logical and unified composition. In this sense, D.J. Lull rejects the possibility of separating the section 1:10–4:21 from the rest of the letter based only on sub-section 1Cor 4:19-21, which contains

²⁵ Celestin TOMIĆ, *Savao Pavao. Vrijeme, život i djelo Apostola Pavla*, Zagreb, 1982, 84.

Paul's travel plans. This is used as evidence that the letter originally ended with 1Cor 4:21 and it was later expanded with additional material. The argument for this hypothesis relies on the fact that in his other letters, Paul's travel plans come at the end of the letter (except for Rom 1:9-15). According to Lull, the issue with this conjecture is that First Corinthians can be understood even without being a composite of separate letters. The letter shares the main structure of an ancient letter featuring an introduction (cf. 1Cor 1:1-9), a body of the letter (cf. 1Cor 1:10–15:58) and a conclusion (cf. 1Cor 16:1-24). The body of the letter does not allow for the separation of the Gospel statement (cf. 1Cor 1:1–4:21) and the exhortations to its practical application in Christian life since the latter is also found in first four chapters within the appeal against division and a call to unity. In fact, the doctrinal and practical sections show an amazing interdependence that can be found throughout the letter.²⁶ The body of the letter finishes with a doctrinal section on the Resurrection (ch. 15) that also has practical consequences for each individual believer. In sum, First Corinthians is a coherent letter that can be regarded as a unified composition even with an occasional digressions in the middle of certain topics, as is the case in chs. 5–6; 8–10; 12–14. Each issue and each piece of Paul's advice or admonition can be understood in the light of keeping the community in unity and living according to the Gospel of Christ.²⁷

Finally, we have an excellent proposal by C.K. Barrett, who simultaneously offers evidence against the compilation position of various partition theories and makes a strong case for the position of integrity. This scholar states that there is a higher probability that Paul wrote the entire letter from the first until the last chapter, rather than being compiled and edited, as suggested by different partition theories which often stand in contradiction.²⁸ That is why

²⁶ For an explanation of Paul's approach, cf. Celestin TOMIĆ, *Savao Pavao. Vrijeme, život i djelo Apostola Pavla*, Zagreb, 1982, 67: »Kod njega nema odijeljenosti dvaju područja: vjera i praksa života. Ona se stalno isprepliću u njegovoj vatrenoj obrani svoga evanđelja, kao i u mirnim razmatranjima o otajstvima vjere«.

²⁷ Cf. David J. LULL, *1 Corinthians*, St. Louis, 2007, 6–10.

²⁸ Cf. Charles Kingsley BARRETT, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, London, 1992, 12–14. This author notes the contradiction between Héring's theory of two letters within First Corinthians, glued together by a later editor, and J. Weiss' theory of at least three letters, sent either together or separately by the Apostle himself. We disagree with Barrett that Paul could have changed his mind on a certain topic simply because a short amount of time had passed in between dealing with the same topic. If we know anything about Paul, we know it took him years to change his approach on a certain matter. For example, a misguided view of the justification by Law instead by faith in Christ, which provoked Paul's radical answer in Galatians, required many years to pass before addressing the same issue calmly and diplomatically in Romans. Hence, we believe that it was

he still holds to the integrity of the letter and offers counter evidence to the claims that certain inconsistencies in the letter automatically demonstrate its composite character. Firstly, this is a long letter which probably took a great deal of time and energy to write, of which the Apostle had little to spare in the course of his preaching.²⁹ Therefore, it is probable that First Corinthians was written over an extended period of time, with possible intervals in between. This fact could account for the inconsistencies and change of his perspective on a given topic in different passages. There is also the possibility that during the writing of the letter new information came and the situation changed, which required a new standpoint on Paul's part. Secondly, differing statements about his travel plans in chs. 4 and 16 could be explained not just by the time span between writing the two chapters, but also by the difference in approach. On the one hand, in ch. 4 we have a warning against those who misbehave as though the Apostle did not intend to come and mend the situation himself. On the other hand, in ch. 16 we have an actual announcement of his intention to come to Corinth. Thirdly, on the matter of the uncertainty of Timothy's arrival to Corinth (cf. 1Cor 4:17 and 16:10), the solution could be that he was sent to Macedonia with the possibility of going to Achaëa. The fourth issue involves the question of re-opening the theme of apostleship in ch. 9 and its connection to ch. 8, which deals with the topic of food sacrificed to idols, taken up again in ch. 10. This can be explained by the fact that Paul wants the Corinthians to distinguish between merely eating the food as a regular meal and its consumption in the context of idolatry. He also calls them to limit their freedom like he does with his apostolic rights, all in the light of Christian love. This would certainly explain the inconsistencies in his treatment of food sacrificed to idols and the reintroduction of the apostleship theme in ch. 9. This is an important chapter which serves as a digression that offers a new perspective from which the consumption of idol food should be judged. In syntony with other scholars, Barrett concludes his analysis of the letter by stating that as long as the letter which we have in our hands today is well understood in its

the difference in situation and in perspective that compelled the Apostle to adjust his view on the same problematic issue, because for a true pastoral worker, the needs of his brothers and sisters always came first, even before himself and before a blind consistency on a certain matter.

²⁹ Paul was probably able to write or dictate his letters only in the evenings, if there were no liturgical assemblies and if he was not exhausted from his daily work and preaching. This is clearly evidenced in the work of Celestin TOMIĆ, *Savao Pavao. Vrijeme, život i djelo Apostola Pavla*, Zagreb, 1982, 69–70.

historical and theological senses, without partition theories, we are compelled to believe this is the same letter Paul had written in the mid-first century.³⁰

We share the opinion of the above-mentioned scholars who defend the integrity of the letter that it is impossible to separate chs. 1–4 from the rest of the letter. The entire letter is concerned with the same Corinthian community and with keeping the purity of the same Gospel preached by Paul during his founding visit to Corinth. The Apostle is trying to help the Corinthians grasp and delimit their Christian identity which is based on the communal life. If there is no community amongst the Corinthian Christians themselves (cf. especially chs. 1–4), there is no community with Christ. In this situation, the Gospel cannot survive various challenges imported from the pagan society. Thus, throughout the letter and when dealing with a particular issue, Paul repeatedly demonstrates a zealous commitment to the unity. Therefore, the pastoral masterpiece called First Corinthians does not allow for a rigid separation and a division into the doctrinal (cf. 1Cor 1–4) and practical sections (cf. 5–16), nor can we speak of a compilation of two distinct letters, seeing that this letter is best understood only as a whole.

3.2 *First Corinthians as a unified deliberative letter*

During our investigation on the integrity of First Corinthians, we have determined that most of the contemporary commentators support the unity of the letter. After we have taken into consideration different proposals with respect to the integrity of the letter, both unity and compilation, it is time to conclude the discussion with a proposal deemed by most scholars to be the most convincing. This is the work of M.M. Mitchell, who has successfully proven that the entire First Corinthians could be seen as an attempt to fight the divisions and unify the Corinthian community. This scholar finds *propositio generalis*, the principal thesis of unity of the entire letter in 1Cor 1:10: »I urge you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same purpose«. The Apostle employs the tools of delibera-

³⁰ Cf. Charles Kingsley BARRETT, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, London, ²1992, 14–17. For further insights, cf. Santi Grasso, *Prima lettera ai Corinzi*, Roma, 2002, 11. This scholar sustains that it is possible to find a certain ordering in Paul's treatment of the communal topics and that First Corinthians is not a dogmatic letter, but a letter that responds to the various problems which this community was facing.

tive rhetoric,³¹ used to persuade the audience to take a certain action or withhold from one. In this particular case, we have an appeal to live in harmony and unity, and to cease any type of behaviour that causes division. Mitchell's study, *Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, explains that we are dealing with a specific argumentation that aims to reconcile the opposed groups or parties and achieve unity. The source of this *topoi* comes from the political ambience concerned with ending the factions and advocating *homoia* or concord which is to their mutual advantage. This study respects the epistolary elements of First Corinthians but analyses the document in the form of a rhetorical speech. It successfully demonstrates that Paul uses a unified and a coherent rhetorical strategy throughout the letter, seeking to convince the Corinthians that it is to their advantage to maintain the unity of the community. By using a literary-rhetorical analysis, Mitchell has demonstrated that First Corinthians shows both thematic and rhetorical unity when regarded as a unified deliberative letter urging concord.³² This scholar offers a convincing rhetorical and epistolary structure of First Corinthians that underlines Paul's organization of the argument, his *dispositio rhetorica*.³³

1. **Epistolary Prescript (1:1-3)**
2. **Epistolary Thanksgiving (*Exordium*):**
Introduction into the Argument and the Body of the Letter (1:4-9)
3. **(Epistolary) Body of the Letter – Deliberative Argument (1:10–15:58)**

³¹ For the explanation of its meaning and the importance of examples in deliberative rhetoric, cf. Margaret Mary MITCHELL, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation. An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians*, Tübingen, 1991, 20–64. For more detail on ancient Greek rhetoric and a threefold division of rhetoric speech in deliberative, forensic and epideictic (book I, chapter 3, section 5), cf. ARISTOTLE, *Ars Rhetorica*; English trans., J.H. FREESE, (ed.), *Rhetoric*, Perseus (Accessed 2022).

³² Cf. Margaret Mary MITCHELL, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation. An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians*, Tübingen, 1991, 20–192. For an opposing view, cf. R. Dean ANDERSON, *Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Paul*, Leuven, 1999, 264–265. This scholar holds that First Corinthians cannot be analyzed in terms of a sustained rhetorical argumentation. For a brief explanation and a fair list of commentators investigating Paul's use of rhetoric, cf. Marinko VIDOVIĆ, *Pavao i njegova misao. Uvod i osnove tumačenja i teologije Pavlovih i deuteropavlovskih poslanica*, Split, 2010, 32–40.

³³ Margaret Mary MITCHELL, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation. An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians*, Tübingen, 1991, 184–186. Many exegetes have accepted this structure and identified in the call for unity either a partial or a general unifying theme of the letter (cf. 1Cor 1,10). For a different structure, with six rhetorical demonstrations or proofs, cf. Raymond Francis COLLINS, *First Corinthians*, Collegeville, 1999, VII-X. On ancient *dispositio rhetorica*, cf. QUINTILIAN, *Institutio Oratoria*, English trans., H.E. BUTLER, (ed.), *Institutio Oratoria*, Perseus (Accessed 2022).

- a. *Propositio generalis* — Principal Thesis that Announces the Topic:
The Call for Unity and an End of Divisions (1:10)
- b. *Narratio* — Exposition (Statement) of the Facts (1:11-17):
Description of the Present Situation and Possible Corrections
- c. *Probatio* — Proof:
Advice for Seeking and Maintaining Concord in the Church (1:18–15:57)
 - i. *Censure against the Corinthian Factionalism* (1:18–4:21)
 - ii. *The Integrity of the Corinthian Community against the Outside Defilement* (5:1–11:1)
 - iii. *Manifestations of Divisions during the Liturgical Assemblies* (11:2–14:40)
 - iv. *Resurrection and the Final Goal* (15:1-57)
4. *Peroratio* — Conclusion and Summary of the Argument and of the Body of the Letter:
Appeal for Building the Unity in Tradition, in Lord (15:58)
5. **Epistolary Closing** (16:1-24)

This structure demonstrates that the entire letter can be regarded as a unified composition, both as an epistolary literary composition and as a rhetorical speech. This is visible from the initial call for unity and an end of divisions (1:10), which is the principal thesis of the entire letter. The principal thesis is further demonstrated throughout the evidence section that offers advice on how to seek and maintain unity (1:18–15:57) and confirmed by the closing appeal to build that unity in tradition, in our Lord Jesus Christ (15:58).

Conclusion

After examining three different types of proposals on the compositional unity of First Corinthians, specifically partition theories of a composite nature and compilation of distinct letters, the traditional integrity stance of a unified letter and, finally, representative examples of a middle ground hypothesis, we have come to several conclusions. Firstly, we have noticed that the middle ground attempt is the least convincing one since the idea of different editions of the letter either gets too close or actually ends up taking compositional side and losing the supposed neutrality. An additional drawback of this hypothesis is that it builds the middle ground between the integrity and partition based on Paul's authorship of all possible editions and compilations of the letter. In the process, it mistakenly exchanges (or even replaces) the issue of integrity

with the issue of authenticity. In other words, even if the Apostle is the author of both editions and of both originally distinct letters, glued into a two-letter compilation called First Corinthians, it would still be a composite letter. Thus, we do not speak of a middle ground but of a variant of the partition theory that explains the composite nature of the letter from another editorial angle.

Secondly, the above said leads to another conclusion, posited throughout our article, that there are only two possible ways to regard the letter: a unified or a composite one. We believe that our initial working hypothesis of integrity has been proven throughout the letter, whether with the rebuttal of the partition theories or with the actual positive propositions that offer valuable arguments in favour of the letter's integrity, still supported by most contemporary scholars. This is especially the case with the literary-rhetorical analysis that in addition to compositional and literary unity, successfully demonstrates thematic and rhetorical unity of the letter, which can also be regarded as a deliberative speech, based on Paul's continuing appeal for unity of the Corinthian community.

Thirdly, even if we could avoid a clear-cut decision between the unity and compilation of the letter, thus setting aside a substantial amount of argumentation in favour of the integrity, it would still be difficult to avoid the most important argument for the unity of the letter that follows from common sense. This is the fact that the letter remains intelligible and easily understood in its whole even without the multiple partition hypotheses. Incidentally, various compilation or partition theories doom themselves to a failure because of their mutual and often irreconcilable differences, including a vast number of incongruent proposals that fail to deliver convincing and irrefutable evidence against the integrity of First Corinthians.

The fact remains that this initial research must be further elaborated, expanded and documented, and, finally, oriented towards providing an updated and evidence-based analysis of the integrity of the letter, from which others could benefit. Nevertheless, a solid examination of the letter's integrity, executed in this article, could be a good starting point for other scholars investigating this aspect of First Corinthians³⁴ and even for attentive readers interested in knowing more about the literary composition and rhetoric of the letter.

³⁴ For a brief examination of the integrity (and of the main literary characteristics) of First Corinthians in the Croatian biblical circles, cf. Marinko VIDOVIĆ, *Pavao i njegova misao. Uvod i osnove tumačenja i teologije Pavlovih i deuteropavlovskih poslanica*, Split, 2010, 238–240.

Sažetak

**PITANJE CJELOVITOSTI (INTEGRITETA) PRVE POSLANICE
KORINĆANIMA**

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Ovaj članak nastoji upoznati čitatelja sa pitanjem cjelovitosti (integriteta) Prve poslanice Korinćanima u kojem se raspravlja kompozicijsko, tj. strukturalno jedinstvo poslanice. S jedne strane, imamo zagovornike cjelovitosti i jedinstva poslanice, dok, s druge strane, imamo razne teorije koje zagovaraju stav da se radi o poslanici koja je sastavljena od više izvorno različitih pisama. Upravo je glavna svrha članka učvrstiti stav o cjelovitosti poslanice kao jedinstvenog književnog djela, a ne kompilacije više dokumenata. Poslanica koja se nalazi pred nama je ista ona poslanica koju je izvorno napisao Apostol Pavao i koja je najvjerojatnije sastavljena kroz duže vremensko razdoblje. U konačnici, ovaj rad ima za cilj dokazati kako su sadašnja poslanica i Pavlova poruka Evanđelja shvatljivi i bez objašnjenja raznih teorija podjele koje nisu neophodne za njezino razumijevanje.

Struktura rada stavlja naglasak na potrebu razlikovanja između pitanja autentičnosti (vjerodostojnosti), koje se bavi isključivo osobom autora, i pitanja cjelovitosti (integriteta), koje zanima sastav i struktura same poslanice. Prvi dio rada na temelju vanjskih i unutarnjih dokaza ustrođuje vjerodostojnost Pavlovog autorstva nad Prvom poslanicom Korinćanima, koje još uvijek nije dovedeno u pitanje, za razliku od jedinstva poslanice, koje se ozbiljno propitkuje, makar većina današnjih stručnjaka još uvijek zagovara cjelovitost poslanice.

Drugi dio rada u glavnim crtama objašnjava zajedničke točke raznih teorija podjele koje promatraju ovu poslanicu kao složeni dokument sastavljen od više pisama. Zatim se predstavljaju glavne značajke teorije srednjeg puta koja nastoji ostati nepristrana te umjesto različitih pisama govori o različitim izdanjima jedne te iste poslanice. Međutim, njezin završni prijedlog ide u smjeru viđenja Prve Korinćanima kao složene poslanice od dva izvorno neovisna pisma, čime se pretvara u samo jednu od varijanti teorija podjele koje zagovaraju nejedinstvenu i složenu narav poslanice. Nakon izlaganja o teorijama podjele i srednjeg puta, slijedi odgovor zagovornika cjelovitosti Prve Korinćanima koji uspijevaju dokazati neuvjerenost prethodnih dokaza o podjeli te ih pobijaju bez poteškoća značajnim argumentima u korist književnog i svekolikog jedinstva poslanice.

Treći i posljednji dio rada sažima i proširuje tvrdnje o cjelovitosti poslanice te još snažnije naglašava njezin jedinstveni sastav i strukturu. Osobito je stavljen naglasak na ishod literarno-retoričke analize u vidu uvjerljive retoričko-epistolarne strukture koja naglašava retoričko i tematsko jedinstvo poslanice kada se promatra kao deliberativno pismo ili govor koje poziva na slogu i jedinstvo unutar kršćanske zajednice u Korintu. Zaključak objašnjava da teoriji srednjeg puta, koja još traga za vlastitim identitetom, i različitim teorijama podjele nedostaju uvjerljivi i nepobitni dokazi protiv cjelovitosti i strukturalnog jedinstva Prve poslanice Korinćanima. Mnoštvo proturječnih teorija koje nastoje objasniti poslanicu kao složenicu različitih pisama ili kao plod različitih izdanja iste poslanice, zapravo predstavljaju najbolji dokaz protiv takvih teorija. U konačnici, sve dok je poslanicu moguće razumjeti i objasniti u cijelosti bez raznih teorija podjele i sve dok ona vjerodostojno prenosi izvornu Pavlovu poruku Evandjelja Isusa Krista, takve teorije su suvišne i nepotrebne.

Ključne riječi: Prva poslanica Korinćanima, Apostol Pavao, vjerodostojnost, ujedinjeni sastav ili struktura, cjelovitost, podjela, složeno pismo (poslanica), srednji put, retorika, jedinstvena poslanica