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THE PHENOMENON OF SOCIAL PRESENCE IN THE  
PAULINE EPISTLES AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR  
PRACTICES OF ONLINE EDUCATION

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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Doctor of Education

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by  
Christopher Dwight Jackson  
December 2014

**APPROVAL SHEET**

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PRACTICES OF ONLINE EDUCATION

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE .....	v
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Research Problem .....	5
Current Status of Research Problem .....	6
Research Question .....	8
Conclusion .....	8
2. REVIEW OF PRECEDENT LITERATURE .....	10
Online Theological Education .....	10
Pauline Epistolography .....	23
Social Presence .....	33
Definitions .....	38
Thesis Statement .....	40
3. PREMISES .....	41
Comparability of Pauline Epistolary Practice and Online Theological Education .....	41
Paul and Presence .....	46
4. INFERENCES .....	59
Inferences Concerning Pauline Epistolary Theory and Practice .....	59
Inferences Concerning Social Presence in Paul's Letters .....	65

Chapter	Page
5. CONCLUSIONS .....	69
Application of Results .....	69
Contribution of the Research to the Precedent Literature .....	76
Recommendations for Practice .....	80
Concluding Remarks .....	81
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	82

## PREFACE

Many thanks to all those who helped make this thesis a reality. These include the Lexington Public Library, Lexington Theological Seminary library, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis library, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary library, Concordia University Wisconsin library, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary library, Nashotah House Theological Seminary library, my research partners John Cartwright and Gabriel Etzel, Betsy J. Fredrick for editing assistance, Dr. Timothy Jones for guidance, and above all my wife, Mary.

Christopher Jackson

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In 2011, 65.5 percent of chief academic officers at institutions of higher education agreed that “online education is critical to the long-term strategy of my institution.”<sup>1</sup> In 2010, 31.3 percent of students at degree-granting postsecondary institutions were enrolled in at least one online class.<sup>2</sup> Online education is now a vital phenomenon that will likely become increasingly common. Many theological institutions have utilized online education.<sup>3</sup> However, theological institutions often adopt online formats without appropriate theological consideration. This study will examine the epistolary practice of Paul in order to provide theological guidance for online education.

This study is necessary for several reasons. As stated above, online education is a commonplace in the higher education community, including the theological education community. In 2013, 106 out of 270 of the schools in ATS offered at least six online courses.<sup>4</sup> And yet unique institutional contexts, including the theological and pedagogical commitments of institutional leaders, have resulted in diverse roles for online formats, as illustrated next by a few brief examples.

At one end of the spectrum is the Beeson Divinity School of Samford

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<sup>1</sup>I. Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman, “Going the Distance: Online Education in the United States, 2011,” Babson Survey Research Group, November 2011, 8, accessed September 19, 2012, <http://www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/reports/goingthedistance.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>3</sup>The Association of Theological Schools, “Schools Offering Six or More Courses Online,” accessed January 28, 2014, <http://www.ats.edu/member-schools/member-school-distance-education>.

<sup>4</sup>The Association of Theological Schools, “About ATS,” accessed January 28, 2014, <http://www.ats.edu/about/overview>; idem, “Schools Offering Six or More Courses Online,” accessed January 28, 2014, <http://www.ats.edu/about/overview>.

University, an independent, evangelical institution. Beeson currently has no online offerings leading toward a degree.<sup>5</sup> Informing this commitment is the theological perspective of Beeson's professor of divinity Paul R. House, who has written that face-to-face education best reflects God's biblically revealed commitment to in-the-flesh theological education.<sup>6</sup> Though House's perspective is pronounced and uncompromising, it is neither fringe nor extreme. Research indicates that reservations about online education persist among significant numbers of instructors in all fields. While chief academic officers at institutions of higher education generally view online educational favorably, many of them do not believe that their faculties have the same opinion. Sixty-eight percent of chief academic officers report that their faculties either were neutral or disagreed regarding the statement, "Faculty at my school accept the value and legitimacy of online education."<sup>7</sup> While his study does not detail the prevalence of faculty concerns regarding online education, Steve Delamarter has documented many of these concerns among theological faculty, some of which echo the concerns of House.<sup>8</sup> Daniel O. Aleshire, the executive director of ATS, does not even mention online education, let alone describe its role in the future of theological institutions in a thought experiment on what theological education might look like in 2032.<sup>9</sup> The views that inform the practice of Beeson must be taken seriously at least because they are common, and perhaps there are some legitimate theological concerns to be addressed as well.

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<sup>5</sup>Beeson Divinity School, "FAQs about Beeson," accessed September 19, 2012, <http://beesondivinity.com/faqsaboutbeeson>; idem, "A Biblical Pattern for Theological Education," accessed September 19, 2012, <http://beesondivinity.com/abiblicalpatternfortheologicaleducation>.

<sup>6</sup>Paul R. House, "Hewing to Scripture's Pattern: A Plea for Personal Theological Education," *Colloquy* 18, no. 2 (2010): 2, 6.

<sup>7</sup>Allen and Seaman, "Going the Distance," 17.

<sup>8</sup>Steve Delamarter, "Theological Educators and Their Concerns about Technology," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 8, no. 3 (2005): 131-43.

<sup>9</sup>Daniel O. Aleshire, "The Future of Theological Education: A Speculative Glimpse at 2032," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 50, no. 4 (2011): 380-85, doi:10.1111/j.1540-6385.2011.00640.x.



Further along the spectrum is Concordia Seminary, a denominational seminary of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS.) Historically, the residential preparation of ministers has been a strong commitment of the LCMS, which at one time even maintained a system of boarding schools for men as young as thirteen preparing to become pastors or teachers.<sup>10</sup> Though that system no longer exists, the LCMS's commitment to residential education finds expression in Concordia's M.Div.<sup>11</sup> being a fully residential program with no distance components offered.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, Concordia suggests that the "campus community" contributes to fulfilling the objectives of the M.Div.<sup>13</sup> Yet even in this institution online education has a presence. A number of certificate programs exist to provide theological education leading to ordination for students unable to attend a residential program.<sup>14</sup> These programs primarily utilize online formats, though they also involve short periods of residency.

Further along is Lexington Theological Seminary, a seminary with historical ties to the Disciples of Christ. In 2010, a number of circumstances, including financial pressures, led the institution to change its M.Div. program from a traditional residential format to a primarily online format, though the program still utilizes intensive residential periods.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Carl Stamm Meyer, *Moving Frontiers, Readings in the History of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1964), 213-24, 230-34, 389-90.

<sup>11</sup>"The purpose of the Master of Divinity degree is to prepare persons for ordained ministry and for general pastoral and religious leadership responsibilities in congregations and other settings." Association of Theological Schools, "Educational and Degree Program Standards," G-37, accessed January 30, 2014, <http://docs.ats.edu/uploads/accrediting/documents/educational-and-degree-program-standards.pdf>. For many Christian traditions, the M.Div. is the standard entry level degree to qualify for pastoral ministry. For other traditions, this degree often is not required but merely preferred.

<sup>12</sup>Concordia Seminary, "Academic Catalog 2013–2014," 19, accessed January 30, 2014, <http://www.csl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/AcademicCatalog2013-2014-FINAL.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 19, 35-46; Concordia Seminary, "Alt. Routes to Pastoral Ministry," accessed September 19, 2013, <http://www.csl.edu/admissions/academics/altrt/>.

<sup>15</sup>Lexington Theological Seminary, "About the Seminary," accessed January 30, 2014, <http://www.lextheo.edu/about-the-seminary/>; *idem*, "MDiv Overview—New August 2012," accessed September 19, 2012, <http://www.lextheo.edu/mdiv-overview/>; Linda B. Blackford, "University of

At the far end of the spectrum from Beeson is Rockbridge Seminary. Formed in 2004 as a completely online institution, Rockbridge has never had a residential component to any of their programs.<sup>16</sup> While Beeson grounds its commitment to face-to-face education in theological concerns, Rockbridge grounds its commitment to the online format on practical concerns. Their website indicates that there is a demand for this kind of education from ministers and churches; therefore a seminary must arise to fill the demand.<sup>17</sup>

The brief examples of Beeson Divinity School, Concordia Seminary, Lexington Theological Seminary, and Rockbridge Seminary illustrate not only the diversity of reception of online education among theological schools but also common motivations for adopting online formats. External rather than internal pressures, forces that are merely accidental rather than inherent to the life of the church, often motivate the adoption of online education.<sup>18</sup> Examples of internal pressures include biblical patterns of

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Kentucky to Buy Campus of Lexington Theological Seminary,” *Lexington Herald-Leader*, May 13, 2013, accessed January 30, 2014, <http://www.kentucky.com/2013/05/13/2639159/university-of-kentucky-purchasing.html>; Jim Warren, “Online Classes Bring New Era to Lexington Seminary,” *Lexington Herald-Leader*, January 28, 2011, accessed January 30, 2014, <http://www.kentucky.com/2011/01/29/1614853/online-classes-bring-new-era-to.html>; Valarie Honeycutt Spears, “State Court of Appeals Upholds Dismissal of Lawsuits against Lexington Theological Seminary,” *Lexington Herald-Leader*, July 27, 2012, accessed January 30, 2014, <http://www.kentucky.com/2012/07/27/2273779/state-court-of-appeals-upholds.html>.

<sup>16</sup>Rockbridge Seminary, “About Rockbridge Seminary,” accessed September 19, 2012, <http://www.rockbridgeseminary.org/about-us>.

<sup>17</sup>“First, **churches are more likely to look within their congregations for ministry staff rather than hiring** them from a list of recent seminary graduates. . . . Second, more churches today challenge members to find purpose through ministry. . . . Third, younger ministers are more likely to distrust seminary training, viewing it as irrelevant and unnecessary. . . . Each change means that ministry education through the traditional seminary is less attractive than before.” *Ibid.*, emphasis original.

<sup>18</sup>While he does not discuss online education in his article, this “internal vs. external” dichotomy owes to Daniel O. Aleshire: “[Change] will come as a consequence more of external factors than of internal factors. . . . Endowments, tenured faculty members, historically significant buildings, a significant heritage to hold up and live out of—all of these contribute to a kind of internal gradualism. These factors have no influence, however, as soon as you walk off campus. The world around the seminary is not beholden to these factors—often does not even value them—and is much more subject to fundamental shifts, often across very short periods of time. These external shifts form relentless pressures on schools to change.” Aleshire, “The Future of Theological Education,” 381. One could argue that demand from churches and institutions for online theological education constitutes an internal pressure. However, this does not apply to my definition of an internal pressure as a force inherent to the life of the church rather

theological education, theological commitments, and even long-standing traditions such as Sunday morning worship. Examples of external pressures are more recent demands of students and individual churches, financial pressures, current trends in education, etc. From Beeson to Rockbridge, primarily external pressures and institutional attitudes and responses to such external pressures have influenced the adoption of online formats by theological schools.

### **Research Problem**

This lack of equilibrium between external and internal pressures creates a problem. Despite somewhat slowed growth in online education in recent years and despite the views of many that online formats are inappropriate for theological education, evidence indicates that theological institutions will increasingly utilize online formats.<sup>19</sup> Adopting online formats primarily because of external pressures threatens institutional integrity. The “Educational and Degree Program Standards” of ATS explains, “Each school must determine the kind of opportunities that are appropriate to its institutional and religious commitment.”<sup>20</sup> In other words, the means of instruction must flow from an institution’s identity, those aforementioned inherent, internal pressures.

However, a vacuum exists instead of these internal pressures in the adoption of online formats. As the four institutional examples illustrate, external pressures mostly influence the adoption of online education. Moreover, little biblical and theological guidance has informed practices of online education. This study addresses this problem,

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than one which is merely accidental. Churches and students may demand online formats today, but not tomorrow. Such a demand is not as permanent as doctrine, biblical precedent, or longstanding tradition.

<sup>19</sup>Allen and Seaman, “Going the Distance.” Admittedly, this document discusses educational institutions in general and not theological institutions in particular. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to conclude that theological institutions will mirror the trends among the wider educational community.

<sup>20</sup>Association of Theological Schools, “Educational and Degree Program Standards,” G-24. ATS is a prominent accrediting institution for Christian and Jewish theological schools with over 270 member institutions. The Association of Theological Schools, “About ATS.”

providing some biblical and theological guidance in an area where there has been too little.

### **Current Status of Research Problem**

Despite the prevailing deficiency in theological guidance for online education, some theologians have broached the topic.<sup>21</sup> Their studies have dealt mainly with theological loci, for example the nature of God, and from these loci have extended advice to the field of online education.

One example of theologically informed discussion on the topic of online education is the previously mentioned article by Paul R. House, “Hewing to Scripture's Pattern: A Plea for Personal Theological Education.” While this article claims that online education is inappropriate for theological education, some of his insights are certainly appropriate to consider when institutions deem it necessary to pursue online programs. Of particular interest is the insight that God displays a commitment to in-the-flesh theological instruction throughout Scripture, most strikingly displayed in his ultimate act of self-revelation in the Incarnation of his Eternal Word. Other concerns, like the depersonalization of student-teacher relationships, the undercutting of student relationships, and the marginalization of community worship all merit consideration in the formation of online theological instruction.

Steve Delamarter has offered a phenomenological study outlining the concerns of theological faculty regarding online education.<sup>22</sup> While his study does not engage directly in theological reflection, it reflects the concerns of theologically-minded educational practitioners when it comes to online education. Especially important to this study is his third set of concerns listed, theological and philosophical. Some prominent concerns are the necessity of character formation, community building, and the loss of

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<sup>21</sup>I owe a significant debt to my collaborator, John Cartwright, for much of the material in this section. I have heavily utilized his evaluation of many of the resources cited.

<sup>22</sup>Delamarter, “Theological Educators,” 131-43.

the richness of face-to-face interaction that theological educators feel is vital for theological education.

John Gresham has sought to theologically ground the practice of online education.<sup>23</sup> Gresham contends that adaptation is a central characteristic to the divine pedagogy and that online education can be seen as a representation of that characteristic. Online education adapts by humbly condescending to students within their own contexts who for practical or cultural reasons may not be able to attend residential programs. Gresham's article deserves attention especially given his Roman Catholic context, which so heavily emphasizes character and spiritual formation in its theological education.

The above shows that there has been some theological discernment regarding practices of online theological education. However, the scope of such reflection has been limited. Moreover, there has been little investigation as to how scriptural patterns of theological instruction might inform practices of online theological education. While House is certainly correct that the predominant model of theological instruction in the Bible reflects face-to-face instruction, there are some prominent examples where instruction took place at a distance. Both the establishment of liturgical traditions like the Passover and the Feast of Booths (Deut 16) and the writing of the Torah testify to God's use of various means for the preservation of theological knowledge for those separated by time from revelatory events like the Deliverance and Preservation of Israel. Jeremiah provided instruction to the Babylonian exiles (Jer 29), and Ezekiel spoke prophecies from his exiled location to Israelites in the homeland (Ezek 21). However, the greatest potential example from whom to gain insight on the issue of face-to-face versus distance formats is Paul, who displayed both an intense desire to be in the presence of those to whom he offered theological instruction but who also was willing to utilize the letter and the emissary in dispatching his apostolic mission.

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<sup>23</sup>John Gresham, "The Divine Pedagogy as a Model for Online Education," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 9, no. 1 (2006): 24-28.

## **Research Question**

This study asks, “How can Paul’s epistolary practice inform online theological education?” It examines his attitudes concerning the various means available to him in dispatching his apostolic mission. These observations are then applied to online education.

Several sub-questions are addressed in the process. First, “What kind of theological and biblical guidance have been offered for practices of online theological education?” This introduction has briefly sketched out a few such offerings in order to demonstrate this study’s necessity. However, a more thorough analysis of this body of literature is necessary in order to demonstrate how this work will contribute. Second, this thesis asks, “What are some of the findings of Pauline epistolary studies that are pertinent to this study?” Pauline epistolary theory and practice is examined from a unique perspective through some primary source work. However, as an interdisciplinary study it depends more upon well-established work from scholars of Pauline epistolary theory and practice. Third, this thesis asks, “Are Pauline epistolary theory and practice sufficiently comparable to contemporary theory and practice of online education in order to provide insight into the use of online formats by theological institutions?” Fourth, this thesis asks, “How does contemporary theory regarding social presence allow for meaningful translation of Pauline epistolary theory and practice to the theory and practice of online theological education?” It is demonstrated that contemporary notions of social presence are highly comparable to Paul’s beliefs concerning the ability of the epistle to project his persona. Fifth, this thesis asks, “How ought Pauline epistolary theory and practice influence theory and practice of online theological education?”

## **Conclusion**

The foregoing material has argued that online education trends indicate that online theological education will grow in importance. However, too little theological attention has been given to the task of online theological education, and this is a danger to

the fidelity of the programs. By examining how Paul's epistolary practice might inform online theological education, it is hoped that online theological education will develop a better theological grounding.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF PRECEDENT LITERATURE

The previous chapter highlighted the need for greater theological groundings for online theological education. However, a more thorough review of previous work on this topic is necessary in order to legitimately contribute to the literature base on the subject. This chapter accomplishes this goal by first examining the appropriate literature on the subject under three categories. First, it will more deeply examine the literature concerning online theological education, examining common views on theological education in general, exploring criticism of online theological education, and surveying attempts to answer these criticisms. This portion of the review in part justifies the appeal to Pauline epistolary practice to inform online theological education, an appeal that begins to be carried out in the next section of the review. This section on Pauline epistolary practice explores the idea that Paul intended to provide theological education through his epistles and that these could serve as proxies for his presence. Finally, a section on the idea of “social presence” is included. This section is necessary because a major component of this thesis is the argument that one’s ethos or persona can be projected through media, that Paul understood and utilized this in his epistles, and that the thoughtful utilization of social presence can compensate for some of the perceived weaknesses of online theological education.

#### **Online Theological Education**

What are the objectives of theological education, and can online formats accomplish them? This section sketches out commonly held opinions regarding these



questions with a focus on basic preparation to pastoral ministry and particularly on the Master of Divinity degree.

### **Objectives of Theological Education**

The objectives of theological education vary greatly between theological traditions and among institutions within those traditions. However, efforts have been made to promote a general standard. Most notable among these efforts are those of ATS, as found in their “Educational and Degree Program Standards.”<sup>1</sup> This document acknowledges the great diversity in educational approaches yet promotes four areas of study that should guide an institution: “Knowledge of religious heritage, understanding of the cultural context, growth in spiritual depth and moral integrity, and capacity for ministerial and public leadership.”<sup>2</sup> The area of religious heritage is designed to increase a student’s identification with Christianity as a whole and his theological tradition in particular, goals met primarily by study of Scripture and history. The area of cultural context is designed to help students understand both the local and global character of the church. “Personal and spiritual formation” is intended to help students mature in the Christian faith, perhaps the most challenging of the areas: “The program shall provide opportunities through which the student may grow in personal faith, emotional maturity, moral integrity, and public witness.”<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, most doubts concerning the capacities and appropriateness of online formats are associated with this area because many believe that these goals are best met with residential education. Finally, “capacity for ministerial

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<sup>1</sup>Association of Theological Schools, “Educational and Degree Program Standards,” accessed January 30, 2014, <http://docs.ats.edu/uploads/accrediting/documents/educational-and-degree-program-standards.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., G-37.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., G-38.

and public leadership,” is intended to accomplish just what the title of that area recommends.<sup>4</sup>

“Educational and Degree Program Standards” specify that the M.Div. retain “at least one year of full-time academic study or its equivalent . . . at the main campus of the school awarding the degree or at an extension site of the institution.”<sup>5</sup> ATS justifies this requirement on the belief that strong student and faculty interaction is necessary to achieve the goals of the M.Div. degree, though it does not state why these interactions are so important.<sup>6</sup> Yet, ATS does allow for some exceptions if an institution can prove that the learning outcomes can be met without this residential period.<sup>7</sup>

### **Suspicion of Online Formats among Theological Educators**

“Educational and Degree Program Standards” indicate a hesitancy among theological educators in fully embracing online formats. Steven Delamarter more fully exposes this hesitancy. Delamarter surveyed educators at forty-five theological institutions in the United States and found repeated expressions of concern regarding online theological education in three categories: Practical and Personal, Pedagogical and Educational, and Philosophical and Theological. Under each category he supplies a common concern with some discussion, including actual comments from respondents. While Delamarter’s practical and personal evaluation is important, the second two categories are the most pertinent to this study. “Pedagogical and Educational Concerns” includes the thought that students might develop fake online persona and therefore hinder

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., G-40-G-41.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., G-39.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

the work of character formation that is considered to be part of theological education.<sup>8</sup> Educators were also concerned that the unique environment of face-to-face education, the spontaneity, the exhilaration of conversational repartee, and the like would be lost.<sup>9</sup> Some felt that certain courses like preaching were impossible to teach online, and some felt that theological education as a whole was not suitable to being taught online.<sup>10</sup> Delamarter's reported concerns become even more pronounced within the Philosophical and Theological category.

Related to the previously expressed concern that students might adopt fake persona online, many theological educators thought that mentoring, character development, and spiritual formation were impossible to do online.<sup>11</sup> Delamarter seems sympathetic to this concern as he notes that development of the whole person within theological education has been of recent concern and effort among theological institutions. This concern especially pertains to this thesis's discussion of Paul's efforts to effect spiritual development through his epistles. Another concern under this category was the viewpoint that theological education is primarily focused on helping create ministers who will bring together communities. It only makes sense then that their theological education would take place in community.<sup>12</sup> Respondents appealed to the words "incarnation" and "incarnational," indicating a feeling that face-to-face community is related to central doctrines of Christianity.<sup>13</sup>

David Diekema's and David Caddell's article, "The Significance of Place:

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<sup>8</sup>Steve Delamarter, "Theological Educators and Their Concerns about Technology," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 8, no. 3 (2005): 135.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 135-36.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 136.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 137.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 138.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

Sociological Reflections on Distance Learning and Christian Higher Education” was published several years before Delamarter’s article. Nonetheless, it stands as a prime example of the concerns some have with the use of online formats in Christian education, and it echoes many of the concerns outlined by Delamarter. First, the authors are concerned that the use of online formats does not allow for the character formation that they believe occurs within residential educational programs.<sup>14</sup> Second, they are concerned that the use of online formats is not consistent with what they consider to be God’s embrace of face-to-face education and rejection of distance education:

Is not the incarnation of Jesus Christ ultimately God’s rejection of distance learning? If relationship was an unnecessary component, would Christ’s physical manifestation have been necessary? . . . distance learning is not simply bad sociology, it is also inherently less than effective in assisting the Christian college or university to fulfill its mission.”<sup>15</sup>

They believe, in other words, that a commitment to residential education flows from a core doctrine of the Christian faith: the Incarnation. It should be noted that Diekema and Caddell do not completely rule out the use of online formats in Christian education, though they do believe that the online formats should play a supporting role to Christian liberal arts education as traditionally understood.<sup>16</sup>

After surveying these concerns regarding the adoption of technology in theological institutions, Delamarter then discusses how these concerns are addressed differently among schools in three different stages of adoption of technology, based upon a typology he had previously developed.<sup>17</sup> Stage 1 are those schools that use technology primarily for the management of information. Stage 2 schools are those that have

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<sup>14</sup>David Diekema and David Caddell, “The Significance of Place: Sociological Reflections on Distance Learning and Christian Higher Education,” *Christian Scholars Review* 31, no. 2 (2001): 171–79.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 182.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 169.

<sup>17</sup>Steve Delamarter, “A Typology of the Use of Technology in Theological Education,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 7, no. 3 (2004): 134–40.

explored and experimented with alternative forms of instruction via technology.<sup>18</sup> Stage 3 schools are those schools that readily utilize online instruction to the point that it has even influenced classroom instruction.<sup>19</sup> As he describes each stage's different approaches to concerns regarding online education, he focuses solely on practical, personal, and pedagogical concerns. For example, Delamarter discusses how Stage 3 institutions rely upon solid research regarding the challenges of online education rather than on hearsay and conjecture.<sup>20</sup> Delamarter does not discuss how schools might deal with the more fundamental issues like philosophical and theological concerns, and by his own admission these are the issues that will cause schools to completely opt out of online theological education.<sup>21</sup>

### **Parties in the Debate Arguing from Different Categories**

A point/counterpoint feature in the Spring 2010 of *Colloquy*, the semiannual publication of ATS, illustrates these two distinct approaches and concerns. Paul R. House frames the argument against online theological education in rather absolute terms derived from theological principles. He argues that online theological education is inappropriate mainly because God is committed to face-to-face, physically proximate education:

God sent his son, not just his Word. Moses, Elijah, Huldah, Jesus, Barnabas, Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla mentored future servants of God. They did so face-to-face in community settings. They did so individually and in groups. They ate together. They prayed and worshiped God together. They suffered and shared together.<sup>22</sup>

House does admit that the writers of the Scriptures utilized such media as the letter, but

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 136.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 138.

<sup>20</sup>Delamarter, "Theological Educators," 140.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 138.

<sup>22</sup>Paul R. House, "Hewing to Scripture's Pattern: A Plea for Personal Theological Education," *Colloquy* 18, no. 2 (2010): 2, 6.

he explains that these were used to supplement face-to-face education. The response to this viewpoint given by Mary Macleod, on the other hand, is not at all rooted in theological or biblical reflection. She simply says that there are a number of strategic benefits for theological schools pursuing online theological education, benefits like learning-centered course design and student assessment, the facilitating of student body diversity, and preparation of students well-adapted to the technological demands of present day ministry.<sup>23</sup> This pattern again prevails: those who are concerned with online theological education base their objections on theological and biblical grounds. Those more open to online theological education base their approval on practical grounds.

This dynamic is also demonstrated in a response to Diekema and Caddell's article by Van B. Weigel. Weigel argues against Diekema's and Caddell's article by citing ways in which online formats can enrich the educational experience.<sup>24</sup> Such benefits include, for example, the opportunity to more easily rearrange learning sequences according to different educational models.<sup>25</sup> While online formats may indeed offer such an opportunity, using such an argument does not answer the fundamental philosophical and theological concerns held by Diekema and Caddell. Weigel offers a pragmatic defense to a theological objection, just as Macleod offered a practical response to House's theological concerns.<sup>26</sup> Weigel attempts something of a theological defense of

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<sup>23</sup>Mari Macleod, "The Case for Distance Learning in Theological Education: Six Strategic Benefits of Interactive Web-Based Distance Learning," *Colloquy* 18, no. 2 (2010): 7.

<sup>24</sup>Van B. Weigel, "Reflection: Place in the Digital Age: Familiar Dichotomies No Longer Apply," *Christian Scholars Review* 32, no. 1 (2002): 14–18.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 14–16.

<sup>26</sup>For other examples of those who base their support for online theological education primarily on pragmatic grounds, see Stephen Haar, "E-Constructing Theological Education for Ministry in a www World," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 42, no. 1 (May 2008): 18-29; M. E. Hess, "Attending to Embodiedness in Online, Theologically Focused Learning" (paper presented at the Going the Distance: Theology, Religious Education, and Interactive Distance Education, University of Dayton, 1999); Macleod, "The Case for Distance Learning"; Matthew C. Ogilvie, "Teaching Theology Online," *Australian EJournal of Theology* 13, no. 1 (2009): 66.

using online formats in theological education by citing Paul as a distance educator, though this thought is not much developed.<sup>27</sup>

### **Attempted Theological and Biblical Justifications of Online Formats**

Some have noticed this dynamic of each party debating by using different categories and have therefore attempted a theological defense of online theological education, which has taken two routes. The first is the attempt to demonstrate that the desired outcomes of theological education in general, as described for example in ATS's "Educational and Degree Program Standards," do actually occur through online theological education, and they often attend to the most commonly heard objection: the character and spiritual formation of students cannot be done through online theological education. On the one hand there are those who are cautiously optimistic about the ability of character and spiritual formation to occur through online formats. Maddix and Estep represent this perspective in their journal article entitled "Spiritual Formation." They promote the idea that spiritual development can occur within online environments, though they acknowledge that the capacity of online environments to foster spiritual development is greatest for more individualized practices (Bible study, for example) and lowest for intrinsically communal practices (church worship, for example).<sup>28</sup> Yet, they believe that spiritual development through online media should take a supplemental rather than a dominant role within the Christian's life.<sup>29</sup> Mary Lowe takes a quantitative

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<sup>27</sup>Weigel, "Reflection," 16. Diekema and Cadell offer a response to this article that was important for this thesis to address as they question the use of Paul to justify and guide the use of online formats in online theological education. David Diekema and David Caddell, "Response: The Chimera of Virtual Place: False Dichotomies Never Apply," *Christian Scholars Review* 32, no. 1 (2002): 19–30. However, this article is taken up in later sections.

<sup>28</sup>Mark A. Maddix and James Riley Estep, "Spiritual Formation in Online Higher Education Communities: Nurturing Spirituality in Christian Higher Education Online Degree Programs," *Christian Education Journal* 7 (September 1, 2010): 429.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 433.

research approach to the issue, examining whether or not students feel that they have experienced spiritual development through online courses.<sup>30</sup> Her line of research suggests that students can indeed feel like they have experienced spiritual development in online classes, but her study has two weaknesses. First, it measures only student reactions. Students may feel like they have experienced spiritual formation without actually having experienced it. Second, it does not answer the question as to whether or not spiritual formation from a distance is something biblically permissible to do. Palka's research suggests that theological students tend to observe community and spiritual development as coming mostly from their home congregations rather than the seminary community.<sup>31</sup> Palka's study has a number of weaknesses: it was a small, homogenous (every student who responded was from the same seminary), convenience sample. However, this viewpoint, that spiritual formation for theological students may occur primarily through their home congregations, is a promising line of inquiry that will have some parallels with Paul's approach to community and spiritual development as expressed through his epistles.

A somewhat different approach is taken by Forrest and Lamport. As was discussed previously, those who most strongly object to theological education through online formats are those who had theological reasons for their objections, and their objections were not being met by those who justified online theological education for pragmatic reasons. The studies that showed spiritual and character formation can occur through online mediums help to meet their objections, but these studies do not go all the way, as the objection can still be raised that these studies show that some level of

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<sup>30</sup>Mary Lowe, "A Summary of the Findings of the Study: Assessing the Impact of Online Courses on the Spiritual Formation of Adult Students," *Christian Perspectives in Education* 4, no. 1 (Fall 2010): 1-18.

<sup>31</sup>John Palka, "Defining a Theological Education Community," *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning* 5, no. 3 (2004), accessed September 19, 2013, <http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/viewArticle/197/279>.



spiritual and character formation is able to occur but not the fullness of what can be experienced in face-to-face formats. A more promising line of argument comes from Forrest and Lamport who show that in Romans Paul attempted to effect spiritual formation upon his readers.<sup>32</sup> This line of inquiry goes a long way in answering the objections of those who are concerned with online theological education, as it shows that Paul himself believed that spiritual and theological formation could occur over a distance.

Forrest and Lamport introduced a fresh approach to online theological education, basing its justification in biblical example rather than on pragmatic reasons, and specifically within the issue of spiritual formation. A number of other writers have sought to justify online theological education through biblical and theological arguments, but in a wider sense than simply in the realm of spiritual formation. Lowe and Lowe, for example, have appealed to the Spirit to justify online theological education. Their articles argue that the Spirit is able to use a variety of means to do His work of spiritual formation. This premise is strengthened, they believe, by what they call an “ecosystems” model of formation in which an individual is shaped by many different groups and settings. Therefore, they contend that the best practice is one that allows for exposure to as many different groups, settings, and media as possible, both to expose a student to a variety of ecosystems and to not limit the work of the Spirit by limiting the avenues he may take to effect formation.<sup>33</sup> While this approach, to justify online theological education through theological means, is a helpful one, Lowe and Lowe’s line of argument is questionable for a number of reasons. First, their “ecological” view of spiritual formation is a rather new and tentative one. Using it to justify online theological

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<sup>32</sup>Benjamin K. Forrest and Mark A. Lamport, “Modeling Spiritual Formation from a Distance: Paul’s Formation Transactions with the Roman Christians,” *Christian Education Journal* 10 (2013): 110-24.

<sup>33</sup>Stephen D. Lowe, “Building Community and Facilitating Formation in Seminary Distance Education,” *Christian Perspectives in Education* 4, no. 1 (2010): 2; Stephen D. Lowe and Mary E. Lowe, “Spiritual Formation in Theological Distance Education: An Ecosystems Model,” *Christian Education Journal* 7 (Spring 2010): 85.

education is not likely to persuade those who base their concerns on issues like biblical and theological fidelity. Second, they argue that theological education should not seek to limit the work of the Spirit by limiting the means by which theological education is done. Yet, one can think of any number of ways in which the Spirit might work but yet would be ultimately inappropriate to be embraced by theological institutions. The early church's prohibitions against Christians participating in the theater provides an example as to how the church might deem as inappropriate a means by which the Spirit can work. Few would object to the idea that the Spirit could use acting to effect formation. The passion play, whether in Oberammergau, the various Easter plays at churches across the United States, or the *Passion of the Christ*, is a commonplace in contemporary Christianity, and few would argue that the Spirit does not use this as a means to effect spiritual formation. And yet, it is unwise to question the early Christians' strong prohibition against the theater. In the Hellenistic world theater was too intertwined with pagan idolatry to allow for Christians to participate in it yet alone to use it as a means of conveying theological truth.<sup>34</sup> This is just one example where it is conceivable to limit the means by which spiritual formation is attempted while yet admitting that spiritual formation could happen through it. Those who object to online theological education might admit that spiritual formation could happen through it but ultimately reject it as inappropriate to utilize it in the whole.

Another line of inquiry is pursued by Esselman, who argues that the New

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<sup>34</sup>“We never find it expressed . . . , ‘Thou shalt not enter circus or theatre, thou shalt not look on combat or show;’ as it is plainly laid down, ‘Thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not worship an idol; thou shalt not commit adultery or fraud.’ But we find that the first word of David bears on this very sort of thing: ‘Blessed,’ he says, ‘is the man who has not gone into the assembly of the impious, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of scorners.’ . . . Every show is an assembly of the wicked.” Tertullian, “The Shows, or De Spectaculis,” in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. S. Thelwall, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 3, chap. 3. Chrysostom also spoke out against the theater: “Let us then say this, ‘I renounce thee, Satan,’ as men who are about in that world at that day to have that word demanded of them, and let us keep it in order that we may then return this deposit safe. But Satan’s pomps are theatres, and the circus, and all sin, and observance of days, and incantations and omens.” John Chrysostom, “Instructions to Catechumens, Second Instruction,” in *St. Chrysostom: On the Priesthood, Ascetic Treatises, Select Homilies and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. W. R. W. Stephens, *Nicene and Post-Nicene, Fathers 1* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 9, para. 5.

Testament presents a communal and egalitarian vision for theological learning and that online formats reflect this vision better than traditional formats. According to Esselman, the New Testament envisions theological learning occurring within “wisdom communities,” within which knowledge would be reciprocally discovered, shared, and received.<sup>35</sup> He then argues that online theological education closely corresponds to this model given that it tends to be less focused on the transmission of knowledge from one person to a group, as is often the case in the traditional classroom, and it is more focused on the group pursuing knowledge as a group, with the instructor taking a more facilitating role.<sup>36</sup> Esselman’s work establishes that online formats effectively facilitate the formation of wisdom communities. However, it fails to give the biblical and theological founding of online education needed to justify it to those who so strongly object against it. First, Esselman does not prove that the New Testament envisions the formation of wisdom communities. Admittedly, he cites multiple authors who make this claim. However, contrasting viewpoints are not cited and therefore not argued against. Esselman’s premise that the New Testament envisions the formation of wisdom communities is little more than an assertion. Second, even if one were to agree with Esselman that the New Testament envisioned the formation of wisdom communities, the only concrete example he gives of a biblical wisdom community is the group gathered at the Last Supper, a face-to-face gathering.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, even if one were to agree with his premise on the New Testament’s vision for wisdom communities, and even if one were to agree with him that online formats currently better facilitate the formation of wisdom communities than traditional formats, one might reasonably conclude on the basis of the Last Supper example that his argument proves the necessity to reform face-to-face formats rather than

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<sup>35</sup>Thomas Esselman, “The Pedagogy of the Online Wisdom Community: Forming Church Ministers in a Digital Age,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 7, no. 3 (2004): 164-65.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 167-69.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 164.

the biblical and theological validity of online formats. Esselmann's work is therefore unlikely to persuade those who, for theological concerns, oppose the use of online formats in theological education.

Hess also attempts theological justification of online theological education. She grounds her justification for online theological education on the nature of the Trinity, suggesting that the more democratic nature of online theological education better reflects notions associated with the Holy Trinity, specifically, the equal dignity of persons.<sup>38</sup> However, it could be objected that her thought merely suggests reform of traditional face-to-face theological education formats rather than justifying online theological education. Indeed, her line of thought might suggest that face-to-face theological education is most appropriate since the members of the Holy Trinity are always fully present to each other.

Gresham offers perhaps the most compelling theological justification for online theological education, though some aspects of his argument are stronger than others. For the sake of brevity I will discuss only his stronger point, namely, that God's self-disclosure has always been adaptive and accommodating and has made use of rich signs and symbols.<sup>39</sup> Based upon this reality, Gresham concludes that it is in keeping with the character of God to embrace online theological education, which is an adaptation to the digitalized culture of today, and which allows for the use of a great number of media: videos, music, images, and the like.<sup>40</sup>

The foregoing has demonstrated that there is a need within the literature base on online theological education for biblically and theologically grounded reflection on

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<sup>38</sup>Mary Hess, "What Difference Does It Make? Digital Technology in the Theological Classroom," *Theological Education* 41, no. 1 (2005): 80-81.

<sup>39</sup>John Gresham, "The Divine Pedagogy as a Model for Online Education," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 9, no. 1 (2006): 25.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 25, 26.

the topic. The next section begins to supply this reflection by tracing out how Paul sought to conduct theological education from a distance via the epistle.<sup>41</sup>

### **Pauline Epistolography**

Though a century has passed since the first edition, Adolph Deissman's *Light from the Ancient East* remains a key work in Pauline studies, not least because it initiated a new era in epistolary studies.<sup>42</sup> At first glance, it would appear that Deissmann's work would preclude the use of Paul's letters to guide contemporary theological education given his classification scheme of ancient letters and his placement of the Pauline letters among what he calls non-literary letters. Deissmann describes the distinction between literary epistles and non-literary letters:

To think of "literature" or to speak of "epistolary literature" in connexion with these hundreds of ancient original letters would be utterly perverse (or only possible if we were to employ the word "literature" in a secondary and colourless sense with regard to non-literary writing). The epistolary *literature* of antiquity is something altogether different. That is represented by the literary letter, the artistic letter, the *epistle*, of which we shall have to speak later on. On the contrary, we must banish all thought of literature, or conscious artistic prose, when we turn the pages of the letters that have come down to us. They are texts from which we can learn what is non-literary and pre-literary. And that is precisely what we must learn if we are to understand the New Testament historically.<sup>43</sup>

Deissmann includes the Pauline corpus in the class of non-literary letters.<sup>44</sup> Epistles, according to Deissmann, are literary works, which share the same form with letters but are different in every other respect. Epistles are aimed at no individual person but rather the public at large. Therefore, they are accessible and meaningful to everyone.

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<sup>41</sup>For a justification of the appeal to Paul's epistolary theory and practice to guide contemporary practices of online theological education, see "Comparability of Pauline Epistolary Practice and Online Theological Education" in chapter 3.

<sup>42</sup>Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World*, trans. Lionel Richard Mortimer Strachan, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1927).

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 228-30.

Letters, on the other hand, are not literary, and they are intended for specific people under specific conditions. Their meaning is, subsequently, unintelligible unless one is knowledgeable of the particular and peculiar circumstances of the letter's writing.

Deissmann portrays Paul as a consummate letter writer, claiming that none of his writings are epistolary.<sup>45</sup> He paints a picture of Paul, who because of his eager expectation of a quick return of Christ, has no sense that his writings will be kept for posterity, jotting off letters in fits of passion with no pretense or thought to form:

I have no hesitation in maintaining the thesis that all the letters of Paul are real, non-literary letters. St. Paul was not a writer of epistles but of letters; he was not a literary man. . . . Paul, whose yearning and ardent hope expected the Lord, and with Him the Judgment and the world to come—Paul, who reckoned the future of 'this' world not by centuries and millenniums but by years, had no presentiment of the providence that watched over the fate of his letters in the world's history. He wrote with absolute abandon, more so than Augustine in his *Confessions*, more than the other great teachers in their letters, which not infrequently are calculated for publication as well as for the immediate recipient.<sup>46</sup>

### **Persona Transmitted through the Epistle**

At first glance, Deissmann's perspective might seem to contradict the idea of using the Pauline epistles as models for contemporary theological education. If Paul jots off his letters with lack of thought to their form and without the view that these would be lasting works, why should they serve as models for contemporary theological education, which seeks to be well thought out and has the future in mind? However, Deissmann is helpful for this thesis. First, Deissmann's view of Paul's disposition in writing, and his understanding of the nonliterary nature of his epistles, turns out to be heavily influenced by an overly romantic world view. As described further in this literature review, later scholars demonstrate that Paul gave much thought to form and that he intended his epistles to be literary works. However, Deissmann understands that Paul's works give the

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 234.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 240-41.

reader a window into the man himself.<sup>47</sup> While later scholars note the literary character of Paul's epistles, none of them contest the idea that while Paul utilizes literary forms, he, as a man, does not shrink into the background as the authors of literary epistles generally do. Deissmann believes, and no one contests, that Paul conveys his character through his writings. This is quite important for this thesis because it shows that Paul believed that his epistles could indeed carry, albeit perhaps imperfectly, his persona to his readers.

Later epistolary scholars give a more nuanced and complex view of Paul's epistles, especially in relation to epistolary practice in the ancient world, Paul Schubert being an early and important example. Whereas Deissmann portrays a dualistic view of epistolary literature, the common, nonliterary letter and the elevated, literary epistle, Schubert describes a spectrum of epistolary literature ranging from the common invoice bill to the philosophical tract written in letter form.<sup>48</sup> This allows Schubert to take a more nuanced view of Paul in his epistolary practice in contrast to Deissmann's rather extreme view.<sup>49</sup> Schubert notes that Paul communicates his persona in his letters, allowing the reader to see his emotions, his cares, and his concerns.<sup>50</sup> However, Schubert rightly notes that this merely tells that Paul was capable of these behaviors and habits within his writing and not that he was in such a state in every point in his writing, thoughtless to his craft:

Thus we see Paul in every letter in a tense, though spontaneous, pose, preoccupied with specific problems. Objectively this observation tells us only that Paul was capable of such behavior patterns as the various letters variously portray. But to conclude that Paul was essentially or normally a high-strung emotionalist involves a

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 240.

<sup>48</sup>Paul Schubert, "Form and Function of the Pauline Letters," *The Journal of Religion* 19, no. 4 (October 1939): 367.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 376.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

serious fallacy to which rashly psychologizing students of Paul have often fallen victims.<sup>51</sup>

This perspective is very helpful to this thesis. First, it opens the door to understanding that the choices Paul made in writing his epistles were deliberate. They therefore tell what Paul thought the epistle form was capable of doing. Second, while Schubert clearly questions many of Deissmann's views, he does not question the view that within the epistles the ethos and character of Paul carries through.<sup>52</sup>

Doty's *Letters in Primitive Christianity* provides three helpful ideas for this thesis. The first idea is that the taking up of occasional and local issues does not mean that a letter's writer did not consider that letter to be something that would be circulated or retained for posterity. Remarkably, evidence for this comes from one of the most famous ancient rhetoricians, Cicero, who kept rolled copies of his letters in his reception room. Among these letters were certainly his more expansive and philosophical works, but many of them were also more occasional and personal in nature.<sup>53</sup> While Cicero's was not a common practice, this does indicate that at least some in the ancient world might consider their more occasional letters to be worth special treatment and preservation. The other helpful idea is the more common practice in the ancient world, and this is the omission of personal details in the majority of letters written in the Hellenistic period:

Instead of personal details (letters sent home by travelers do not even mention what they have seen in foreign lands), we are confronted time and time again with a limited variety of stock phrases and a very definite letter form. The form 'John to Peter, Greetings,' for instance, remained in use from the end of the fourth century B.C.E. until well into the fourth century C.E.<sup>54</sup>

That Paul relates to his recipients on a much more personal level, describing his

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 369, 376.

<sup>53</sup>William G. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), 22.

<sup>54</sup>William G. Doty, "Classification of Epistolary Literature," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (April 1, 1969): 2.



circumstances as well as discussing those in that particular congregation, indicates that he is making some intentional choices in contrast to prevailing letter writing practice and that he believed his letters could convey his persona to his recipients.

A third helpful discussion from Doty is his categorization of ancient letters, especially his discussion of the “official letter,” a document from a ruler or other person of authority.<sup>55</sup> According to Doty, this type of letter could be seen as parallel to early Christian epistles in which a person of authority, such as an apostle, sent information and directions to Christian communities. According to Doty, the official letter itself held a place of authority and conveyed the sense that the ruler was actually present.<sup>56</sup> It could be expected for Paul to think, therefore, that he believed his letters carried something of a “personal presence” to his hearers.

The idea that ancients believed a writer could convey his personal presence through an epistle finds further support in Malherbe’s *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*.<sup>57</sup> Malherbe provides an overview of ancient epistolary practice, including the means by which the literate were given knowledge as to how to compose a letter, the way the ancient postal system worked, and other such practical issues.<sup>58</sup> However, Malherbe’s more important gift is showing the epistolary theory of the ancients, exposing what ancient rhetoricians thought made for a good letter, what the purposes of the letter were, and what could and should be achieved through the letter. The views of Demetrius, Cicero, Seneca, Pseudo Demetrius, Philostrate of Lemnos, Gregory of Nazianzus, Julius Victor, and Pseudo Libanius are considered and systematized. A significant insight for this thesis is that ancient theorists tended to believe that letters were one half of a

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<sup>55</sup>Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity*, 6.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Abraham J. Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988).

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 1-6.

dialogue, or a surrogate for actual dialogue.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, a letter should reflect the writer's personality and should imitate speech. They should also reflect the circumstances and mood of those receiving the letters. Also, such conversational tones as direct address, humor when appropriate, and complements should be used within the letter.

White's *Light from Ancient Letters* expands upon Malherbe's work. For example, White gives more detail concerning Malherbe's descriptions of the ancients' beliefs concerning the capacity of the letter to act as a form of proxy presence:

Recognizing that the letter should be a worthy substitute for one's conversation, the theorists advise that one speaks to the absent party as though he were actually present and, in order to properly convey one's presence, the language of the letter should communicate the writer's personality and reflect his mood. In particular, Demetrius suggests the letter, like spoken dialogue, should abound in glimpses of character, because character is more clearly exhibited in the letter than in any other form of composition. Similarly, Seneca stated that he wanted his letters to be just like the conversation he would speak if he were actually sitting or walking in one's company, and that he wanted nothing strange or artificial in his letters. Likening the letter to actual conversation, Julius Victor advised one to use expressions which recognize the recipient's presence, such as "you too?" And "just as you say!" And "I see you smile."<sup>60</sup>

### **Paul's Expansion of Epistolary Personal Presence**

Even more helpful than these comments is White's discussion of Paul's epistolary practice in relationship to epistolary theory and practice of other ancients. White notes both similarity and novelty in Paul's work in comparison to other letter composers. White concurs with Doty that it is reasonable to compare Christian epistles to ancient official letters in so far as they both were considered to carry the authority of the one who sent them. They could therefore be considered to be a form of presence of the sender.<sup>61</sup> At the same time, Paul made some deliberate choices which differentiated his letter from such official letters. Namely, he adopted some stylistic techniques more

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>60</sup>John L. White, *Light from Ancient Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 191.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 218.

common to letters between friends and family. This combination of both authoritative and filial notes seems to be unique to Paul among ancient letter writers.<sup>62</sup> White also notes Paul's use of coercive language in order to encourage a letter's recipients to a certain course of action, a feature found in other ancient letters. Paul accomplishes this usually in his closings through three means. First, he sometimes appeals to the letters courier. Second, he sometimes appeals to the apostolic character of the letter itself. Third, he sometimes appeals to an impending visit by himself. These three points are important to consider as this thesis proceeds. Namely, Paul believed that personal presence was indeed important, but he also believed that letters could convey a sense of personal presence. Another novelty of Paul's is his opening formula. Whereas Greek letters tended to begin with a note of greeting and a note of a wish of good health, Paul begins his letters with a blessing and a thanksgiving to God.<sup>63</sup> This is important to note because it shows that Paul believed that it was possible to confer blessing through the epistle and to mutually thank God through it. Spiritual work, in other words, could be done through the letter.

Stowers's *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* also notes the Pauline innovation in his greetings, explaining that Paul used the traditional opening greeting formulas of Greek letters, but he also creatively combined these with Semitic elements. Yet, even these Semitic elements Paul changes to give the sense that he is granting blessing through his letters.<sup>64</sup> Stowers also describes Paul as one who creatively used and adapted existing epistolary practices toward his own ends so that he created a unique

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 219.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Stanley Kent Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 21.

epistolary form.<sup>65</sup> Especially pertinent to this study is Stowers's comparison of Paul's epistolary theory and practice to the epistolary theory and practice of the ancient philosophers.<sup>66</sup> Ancient philosophers considered philosophy to be the practice of applying wisdom to the living of life. In other words, philosophy was primarily a practice of character formation. The ancient philosophers from Plato in the early classical period to the Christian bishops and monks of late antiquity readily used the letter to guide their students in the pursuit of philosophy. For the ancient philosophers, such as the Cynics and the Stoics, the philosophical sage provided the model that was to be imitated by his student. And, many of these believed that the letter was a suitable means by which to communicate the character of the sage for the formation of the student.<sup>67</sup> Stowers quotes some ancient philosophers who believed that the letter was equally as good as personal presence in conveying the personality and character of the sage to the student. Such letters between philosophers and their students often utilized such epistolary forms as paraenesis and hortatory. Significantly, Paul's letters contained often large elements of paraenesis and hortatory.<sup>68</sup> Stowers does note some differences between the letters of Paul and the letters of the philosophers. Specifically, most of Paul's letters were concerned not with the ethical transformation of individuals but rather with the formation of Christian communities.<sup>69</sup> Also, Paul adopts tones of equality with his readers as well as tones of superiority.<sup>70</sup> He appeals to them both as an apostle and as a brother. Because of these things, again, Paul shows himself to be a pioneering letter writer. However, these

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 27-31.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 36-43.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 36-40.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 42-43.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 27-31.

two ideas, that Paul evidently believed letter writing could be a means of formation and that Paul was concerned with the formation of Christian communities, finds larger discussion and application in later portions of this thesis.

### **Apostolic *Parousia***

Though Robert Funk's article "The Apostolic *Parousia*: Form and Significance" lies outside the category of literature discussed previously, it is extremely important for this thesis.<sup>71</sup> The epistolary scholars discussed above mostly examined Pauline epistolary theory and practice in relation to other epistolary theorists and practitioners of his day. Funk, on the other hand, examined a discrete section present in many Pauline epistles: the travelogue.<sup>72</sup> His studies of travelogues led him to discover that

Paul regarded his apostolic presence to his congregations under three different but related aspects at once: the aspect of the letter, the apostolic emissary, and his own personal presence. All of these are media by which Paul makes his apostolic authority effective in the churches.<sup>73</sup>

Funk's argument progresses by tabulating and analyzing Paul's travelogue/*parousia* passages, discussing the paradigm of visit/emissary/letter discovered through this analysis, and finally applying this paradigm's implications on then current issues in Pauline epistolography. What concerns this thesis most is the paradigm that Funk discovered:

[The letter, the dispatch of an emissary, and Paul's personal presence] represent the implementation of the apostolic *parousia* and in ascending order of significance. The presence of Paul in person will therefore be the primary medium by which he

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<sup>71</sup>Robert W. Funk, "The Apostolic *Parousia*: Form and Significance," in *Christian History and Interpretation; Studies Presented to John Knox*, ed. John Knox et al. (Cambridge: University Press, 1967). *Parousia* is a transliteration of a Greek word which means, roughly, "presence."

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 249. For a larger discussion of the travelogue as a unit, see Robert Walter Funk, "The Letter: Form and Style," in *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God; The Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 250-74.

<sup>73</sup>Funk, "Apostolic *Parousia*," 249.

makes his apostolic authority effective. . . . Letter and envoy will be substitutes, less effective perhaps, but sometimes necessary.”<sup>74</sup>

Funk indicates that this priority is due to Paul’s understanding about his own personal presence as well as his preference for the oral word. Paul preferred to dispatch his apostolic mission in person because he “thought of his presence as the bearer of charismatic, one might even say, eschatological power.”<sup>75</sup> If unable to visit, Paul tended to consider the emissary a more effective means of carrying out his ministry than the letter. The emissary “substitutes for the apostle himself, while the letter is at best written authority for what the emissary has to say. Since Paul gives precedence to the oral word, the written word will not function as a primary medium of his apostleship.”<sup>76</sup> Though Paul considers the letter to be the least effective means of exercising his apostolic *parousia*, it is nevertheless a “surrogate for his presence, with which . . . the letter is entirely congruent.”<sup>77</sup>

Funk’s explanation of the Pauline paradigm for his apostolic *parousia*, while accurate, widely cited, and helpful, is, however, prone to abuse. Some interpret this paradigm to mean that Paul held disparaging thoughts concerning his letters. Doty, for example, states, “It may well be that Paul considered a letter to be a fairly poor substitute for his personal presence and the spoken word . . . ,” and cites Funk for this assertion.<sup>78</sup> In a response to Weigel’s article, Diekema and Caddell question the use of Paul’s epistolary theory and practice to justify and guide online theological education.<sup>79</sup> Caddell and

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 258.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 265.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 260.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 266.

<sup>78</sup>Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity*, v.

<sup>79</sup>Diekema and Caddell, in “Response,” 27–29, give several objections to the use of Paul. Objections not taken up here will be addressed in chapter 3.

Diekema cite Funk's article as a means of accentuating the importance to Paul of face-to-face ministry and downplaying the importance of his letters.<sup>80</sup>

That Paul considered his letters to be the least effective means of exercising his presence among his congregations is well established by Funk. However, that Paul considered them to be the least effective means does not mean that he held disparaging thoughts regarding them. Paul was certainly aware of the limitations of the letter, and sometimes these limitations even caused him anxiety.<sup>81</sup> Yet, Paul at times indicates that the letter was more effective than a visit would have been and on one occasion even appeals to the letter in order to build confidence in his personal presence.<sup>82</sup> Paul had a sober but high view of the letter, not a disparaging one.

Funk's work highly influenced this thesis. It heavily utilizes his paradigm, and his catalog of travelogue/*parousia* passages form the basis of the passages studied in the exegetical portion, though a few passages are omitted and a few others added.<sup>83</sup>

### **Social Presence**

This review has taken up the recurring theme in Pauline epistolography that Paul believed his letters could make his persona and ethos present to his audiences.<sup>84</sup> In recent decades, social scientists have studied this sense of interacting with a real person through media under the term "social presence," first coined by Short, Williams, and

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 29.

<sup>81</sup>See "Galatians 4:12-20" in chap. 3 and "Inference 1" in chap. 4 for further discussion of Paul's concerns regarding the letter.

<sup>82</sup>See "2 Corinthians 2:3-4" and "2 Corinthians 10:1-11" in chap. 3 for further discussion.

<sup>83</sup>Funk, "Apostolic *Parousia*," 250.

<sup>84</sup>The idea that the letters of Paul could make his persona and ethos present to his audiences is contrary to Diekema and Caddell's thought that Paul's letters only conveyed a "sense" of his presence." Diekema and Caddell, "Response," 29. Further reflection on how Paul's letters mediated his presence in part necessitates the appeal to social presence theory.

Christie.<sup>85</sup> They use this term to describe the capacity for any particular communication medium to communicate the ethos of individuals.<sup>86</sup> In other words, they believe that certain media were better at facilitating an individual's communication of his or her personality than others. Face-to-face communication would have greater social presence than communication over the telephone, which does not allow for facial expressions or other such bodily clues.<sup>87</sup> Yet, telephone communication would have greater social presence than letter writing. Short, Williams, and Christie drew upon two previous works to flesh out their theory of social presence. In particular, they drew upon the idea of intimacy as discussed by Argyle and Dean and the idea of immediacy as discussed by Wiener and Mehrabian.<sup>88</sup> Again, Short, Williams, and Christie focused on what was perceived to be objective qualities of various communication media. Some media, for example, are better at conveying a sense of intimacy, the feelings of closeness that one has with regard to the other with whom one is speaking, and the type of medium used to communicate is a way of conveying immediacy, the queues of the psychological or emotional closeness or distance given by a communicator. Two things should be noted about this discussion of Short, Williams, and Christie. First, they discussed intimacy and immediacy in terms of the communication medium itself: the use of a particular medium conveys a particular sense of intimacy or immediacy. Second, they discussed intimacy and immediacy as related concepts to social presence, but they did not necessarily consider them to be constitutive elements of social presence.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>John Short, Ederyn Williams, and Bruce Christie, "Theoretical Approaches to Differences between Media," in *The Social Psychology of Telecommunications* (London: Wiley, 1976).

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 65.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 75-76.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 72-73; Morton Wiener and Albert Mehrabian, *Language within Language: Immediacy, A Channel in Verbal Communication* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968); Michael Argyle and Janet Dean, "Eye Contact, Distance, and Affiliation," *Sociometry* 28, no. 3 (1965): 289-304.

<sup>89</sup>Short, Williams, and Christie, "Theoretical Approaches to Differences," 72.



The next step in social presence theory came from Rafaeli.<sup>90</sup> Rafaeli somewhat modified the idea of social presence held by Short, Williams, and Christie to make it more subjective. Social presence, for Rafaeli, was the sense in which participants engaged in communication felt like they were engaged with a real person, based upon their perceptions of intimacy and immediacy with the other communicator. It should be noted that Rafaeli questioned the utility of social presence as a helpful idea in the analysis of communication.<sup>91</sup> However, Rafaeli expanded discussions of social presence by discussing it in more subjective terms, as aforementioned, and by introducing the idea that media may have different capacities for facilitating social presence, capacities that can be utilized to a greater or lesser extent by participants in communication. He accomplished this expansion of the discussion of social presence in an indirect way. As previously mentioned, Rafaeli questioned the idea of social presence, and his explorations had more to do with “interactivity,” what he described as the “degree to which . . . exchanges referred to even earlier transmissions.”<sup>92</sup> However, Rafaeli influenced discussions of social presence despite his reluctance to embrace the idea through an insight of his concerning interactivity: certain media have more or less capability of facilitating interactivity, but that capability may also be utilized by communicators to a greater or lesser extent.<sup>93</sup>

The idea that different communication media have different capacities for what Rafaeli termed “interactivity,” but that those utilizing these media could use them to

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<sup>90</sup>S. Rafaeli, “Interactivity: From New Media to Communication,” in *Advancing Communication Science: Merging Mass and Interpersonal Processes*, ed. Robert Hawkins, John M. Wiemann, and Suzanne Pingree (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988), 110-34; idem, “Interaction with Media: Parasocial Interaction and Real Interaction,” in *Information and Behavior*, ed. Brent D. Ruben and Leah A. Lievrouw (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1990), 3:125-81.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 117.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 111.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

greater or lesser effect, was taken up later by Walther.<sup>94</sup> Walther was among the first to notice that theories regarding the possibility of building relationships and community through computer-mediated conferencing did not match the results of early studies, which found that participants in computer-mediated conferencing did feel that it was possible to build true relationships and community online.<sup>95</sup> However, he did have a few caveats. Specifically, he believed that computer-mediated formats have what is now called “low social bandwidth,” although he did not use this term. In other words, his impression was that it took longer to create relationships and community through online formats. However, despite this limitation it was his belief that those who apply themselves in the online format could actually attain real relationship on a par with relationships that were fostered face-to-face.<sup>96</sup> Walther’s work, more than anything, was a call for a research agenda. Specifically, he noted that much more work needed to be done to explore the impressions of those engaged in computer-mediated formats as to the intimacy and immediacy they felt with others engaged in conversation with them.<sup>97</sup>

That research agenda has been taken up by many; however, Gunawardena has been the foremost in conducting this research.<sup>98</sup> Gunawardena’s work supports this thesis

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<sup>94</sup>Joseph B. Walther, “Interpersonal Effects in Computer-Mediated Interaction: A Relational Perspective,” *Communication Research* 19, no. 1 (1992): 52-90.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 52-54.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 80.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 81-82.

<sup>98</sup>Charlotte N. Gunawardena, “Social Presence Theory and Implications for Interaction and Collaborative Learning in Computer Conferences,” *International Journal of Educational Telecommunications* 1, no. 2 (1995): 137-66; Charlotte N. Gunawardena and Frank J. Zittle, “Social Presence as Predictor of Satisfaction within a Computer-Mediated Conferencing Environment,” *The American Journal of Distance Education* 11, no. 3 (1997): 101-17; Kayleigh Carabajal, Deborah LaPointe, and Charlotte N. Gunawardena, “Group Development in Online Learning Communities,” in *Handbook of Distance Education*, ed. Michael G. Moore and William G. Anderson (Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates, 2003): 217-34; Charlotte N. Gunawardena et al., “A Theoretical Framework for Building Online Communities of Practice with Social Networking Tools,” *Educational Media International* 46, no. 1 (2009): 3-16; Charlotte N. Gunawardena, C. A. Lowe, and T. Anderson, “Analysis of a Global Online Debate and the Development of an Interaction Analysis Model for Examining Social Construction of Knowledge in Computer Conference,” *Journal of Educational Computing Research* 17, no. 4 (1997): 397-431; Charlotte N. Gunawardena et al., “A Cross-Cultural Study of Group Process and Development in Online Conferences,” *Distance Education* 22, no. 1 (2001): 85-121; Daniel C. A. Hillman, Deborah J.

in three ways. First, she has conducted studies which confirm Walther's theory. Her research notes that it is more difficult to build relationships and therefore community within computer-mediated conferencing formats, but she also observed that participants within these formats, recognizing this difficulty, take special effort to project their persona in order to facilitate interpersonal relationships.<sup>99</sup> In other words, social presence is more difficult to facilitate in online formats than face-to-face, but by utilizing practices that lead to immediacy and intimacy, social presence can happen. Second, Gunawardena draws upon a substantial research base with regard to the importance of instructors displaying behaviors associated with immediacy.<sup>100</sup> The weight of these studies is that the displaying of immediacy behaviors by a teacher is correlated to student success, whether in face-to-face or online formats, confirming the theory that social bandwidth can be utilized to a greater or lesser extent. Third, Gunawardena's work indicates that students who have a heightened sense of the social presence with their instructors and peers tend to report greater satisfaction with their online coursework.<sup>101</sup>

A few authors have applied the idea of social presence to theological education, including Mark R. Maddix, James Riley Estep, and Mary Hinkle Shore.<sup>102</sup>

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Willis, and Charlotte N. Gunawardena, "Learner-Interface Interaction in Distance Education: An Extension of Contemporary Models and Strategies for Practitioners," *American Journal of Distance Education* 8, no. 2 (1994): 30-42; Deborah K. LaPointe and Charlotte N. Gunawardena, "Developing, Testing and Refining of a Model to Understand the Relationship between Peer Interaction and Learning Outcomes in Computer-Mediated Conferencing," *Distance Education* 25, no. 1 (2004): 83-106; M. S. McIsaac and Charlotte N. Gunawardena, "Distance Education," in *Handbook of Research for Educational Communications and Technology*, ed. David H. Jonassen (New York: Mac, 1996), 403-37.

<sup>99</sup>Gunawardena, "Social Presence Theory," 163-65.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 152-53; Derek H. Kelley and Joan Gorham, "Effects of Immediacy on Recall of Information," *Communication Education* 37, no. 3 (July 1988): 198-207; Diane M. Christophel, "The Relationships among Teacher Immediacy Behaviors, Student Motivation, and Learning," *Communication Education* 39, no. 4 (1990): 323-40; P. Kearney, T. Plax, and N. Wendt-Wasco, "Teacher Immediacy for Affective Learning in Divergent College Classes," *Communication Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (1985): 61-74; Joan Gorham, "The Relationship between Verbal Teacher Immediacy Behaviors and Student Learning," *Communication Education* 37, no. 1 (1988): 40-54.

<sup>101</sup>Gunawardena and Zittle, "Social Presence as Predictor," 23.

<sup>102</sup>Mark A. Maddix, "Developing Online Learning Communities," in *Best Practices of Online Education*, 31-40; James Riley Estep, "Social Presence in Online Learning," in *Best Practices of Online*

Their work tends to emphasize the importance of attending to social presence in order to build a sense of immediacy between students and their instructors and in order to build community in online learning formats. While these observations are certainly valid and helpful, no connection has been made between the idea of social presence and the appropriateness of online learning formats in theological education. This thesis, on the other hand, draws lines of comparison between the apparent Pauline sense of the possibility of conveying presence through his epistles, contemporary notions of social presence, and the ideals of theological education, in order to show that indeed there is biblical precedent for thinking that goals such as spiritual and character formation, and even the fostering of community, can in fact happen through online formats.

## Definitions

### Letter and Epistle

This thesis makes no formal distinction between “letter” and “epistle,” agreeing with Deissmann’s critics that such a distinction imposes artificial and anachronistic categories on the broad spectrum of letter types.<sup>103</sup> That there were different categories of letters in the ancient world, and that the ancients formally identified these, is unquestionable.<sup>104</sup> This thesis, if necessary, relates these different categories by various adjectives like “family” or “public” letter or epistle, but it uses the terms “letter” and “epistle” interchangeably to describe written works taking the form of direct address.

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*Education*, 41-54; Mary Hinkle Shore, “Establishing Social Presence in Online Courses: Why and How,” *Theological Education* 42, no. 2 (2007): 91-100.

<sup>103</sup>Doty, “Classification of Epistolary Literature,” 185-92; Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 18-19; John L. White, *The Form and Function of the Body of the Greek Letter: A Study of the Letter-Body in the Non-Literary Papyri and in Paul the Apostle*, SBL Dissertation Series 2 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press for the Society of Biblical Literature, 1972), 2; Schubert, “Form and Function of the Pauline Letters,” 367-79.

<sup>104</sup>Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*, 7; Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity*, 4-8; idem, “Classification of Epistolary Literature,” 195-98; Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 19.

## **Education: Distance, Online, Face-to-Face, and Theological**

This thesis uses the term “education” to denote an intentional program of learning towards a desired outcome or goal.<sup>105</sup> Distance education describes an educational program in which the majority of learning occurs from a physical distance between students and their instructors and fellow learners. Online education describes a subset of distance education in which the majority of instruction occurs through computer conferencing. Face-to-face education describes education which is pursued primarily in the physical presence of instructors and fellow learners. The traditional classroom format of education is an example of face-to-face education. Theological education is used in a dual sense. On the one hand, it is used to describe the effort of Paul to instruct congregations and individuals in doctrine and conduct. While this was certainly a less formalized approach than what is commonly considered education in the contemporary world, this thesis works with the assumption that Paul had goals in mind for congregations and individuals and that his ministry to them, both in person and through epistles, was an effort at achieving those goals. When referring to contemporary theological education, this thesis refers primarily to instruction aimed at preparing individuals for Christian ministry. As mentioned previously, the M.Div. degree is kept in mind as the primary means through which this is accomplished among Protestants.

## **Social Presence and Social Bandwidth**

This thesis uses the term “social presence” to describe the degree to which individuals feel that they are interacting with a real person.<sup>106</sup> This is a more subjective use of the term than its original context in Short, Williams, and Christie. This thesis works with the assumption that social presence is a combination of both the level of

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<sup>105</sup>James Riley Estep, Michael J. Anthony, and Gregg R. Allison, *A Theology for Christian Education* (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 16; George R. Knight, *Philosophy & Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2006), 10.

<sup>106</sup>Gunawardena and Zittle, “Social Presence as Predictor,” 9.

intimacy, feelings of closeness to those with whom one interacts, and immediacy, behavioral cues of accessibility by communicators.<sup>107</sup> With regard to the capacity of a communication medium to facilitate social presence, the term “social bandwidth” is used.

### **Thesis Statement**

Paul understood the strengths and weaknesses of theological education conducted both in person and from a distance via the epistle. On the one hand, Paul understands that face-to-face theological education is indispensable and has a number of strengths that cannot be reproduced from a distance. On the other hand, Paul utilizes distance education through the epistle because of his confidence in the capabilities of the epistle and his knowledge of strengths not available through face-to-face education alone. Paul displays an educational strategy that utilizes the strengths of both face-to-face education and distance education via the epistle while compensating for weaknesses in each format. Paul’s practice would suggest that theological institutions might do the same: take stock of the strengths and weaknesses of both face-to-face and online formats, utilize the strengths of each, and compensate for the weaknesses of each.

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<sup>107</sup>Argyle and Dean, “Eye Contact, Distance, and Affiliation,” 293; Wiener and Mehrabian, *Language within Language*, 4.

## CHAPTER 3

### PREMISES

This chapter explores the philosophical and exegetical foundations necessary to apply Pauline epistolary theory and practice to the use of online formats in theological education. The chapter begins with a philosophical question: “Is it appropriate to draw inferences from Pauline epistolary theory and practice for practices of online theological education?” The chapter then continues with an exegetical examination of Pauline passages having to do with his presence via the personal visit, the letter, and the emissary. Funk’s list of apostolic *parousia* passages form the basis of the passages examined, though a few of his passages are omitted and other passages included.<sup>1</sup> No novel interpretations are given at this point. These will come in the next chapter.

#### **Comparability of Pauline Epistolary Practice and Online Theological Education**

Vital to establishing this thesis is the idea that Pauline epistolary theory and practice can be legitimately and fruitfully applied to contemporary online education theory and practice. Such legitimate and fruitful application requires that Pauline epistolary theory and practice be sufficiently comparable to contemporary online theory and practice. However, such comparability is not self-evident. Therefore, this section establishes the premise by first examining the ways in which Pauline epistolary practice is not like online theological education, then points of comparison are examined.

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<sup>1</sup>Some of Funk’s passages would add very little to this discussion, and other passages, because they do not qualify as a travelogue, escape Funk’s list.

## Points of Contrast

The most evident difference between online theological education and Pauline epistolary practice is the medium through which communication occurs. Paul utilizes the letter, a written form of communication. These letters were often carried by emissaries who would also verbally deliver them to their recipients.<sup>2</sup> Months, even years, could pass until a letter was delivered. While the letter did allow a measure of interactivity through mutual correspondence and perhaps through the authority given to the emissary, such interactivity was certainly not quick.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, online theological education is facilitated mainly through internet connected computers, dependent upon various learning management systems, bulletin boards, social networking sites, and the like. Time between correspondences is narrow. There is much more back and forth interaction.

Another difference is the nature of the educational endeavor. Contemporary theological education is focused upon the individual student; whereas, most of Paul's theological content appears in letters to congregations.<sup>4</sup> Letters to individuals, the pastoral letters, dwell mainly on advisory issues as they encourage pastors like Timothy

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<sup>2</sup>Ben Witherington, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 23.

<sup>3</sup>Evidence for interactivity between Paul and his congregations is most evident in the Corinthian correspondence. Assuming that the "Severe Letter" mentioned in 2 Cor 2:4 and 7:8-11 is a now lost document and not to be identified with 1 Corinthians, then Paul wrote at least three letters to the Corinthians. Victor Paul Furnish, *2 Corinthians*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 32A, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 159, 160; C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. Black's New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 119; Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 13 (Waco, TX: Word, 1986), 33. In addition, Paul records the bringing of reports about the Corinthian congregation (i.e., 1 Cor 1:11 and 2 Cor 7:6, 7). A negative report from Corinth is attributed as the reason for the change in tone in 2 Corinthians even by those who hold to the integrity of the letter. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 298-89. Paul also notes a letter that had come to him from the Corinthians (1 Cor 7:1).

<sup>4</sup>The focus on the individual student is reflected, for example, in ATS's "Educational and Degree Program Standards": "The purpose of the Master of Divinity degree is to prepare *persons* for ordained ministry and for general pastoral and religious leadership responsibilities in congregations and other settings." Association of Theological Schools, "Educational and Degree Program Standards," accessed January 30, 2014, <http://docs.ats.edu/uploads/accrediting/documents/educational-and-degree-program-standards.pdf>, emphasis added. Paul's focus on providing instruction to congregations rather than individuals was unique in his day as well. Stanley Kent Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 42-43.



and Titus to uprightness in conduct, wisdom in administering the congregation, and the pursuit of correct doctrine. In this sense, Paul's letters to congregations have more in common with a sermon or a Bible study than a course in a theological institution.

### **Points of Comparison**

Admittedly, Paul's epistles and online theological education have some profound differences. However, they also share some points of comparison.

**Epistle as an educational tool.** Crucial to this thesis is the idea that Paul's epistles were educational, deliberate efforts to facilitate learning toward particular goals and outcomes. A fundamental objection to this premise, Deissmann's perspective that Paul's epistles were artlessly composed in fits of passion and that they therefore had no greater aims than speaking to pressing concerns, has been sufficiently countered in the previous chapter. However, what positive proof can be given that Paul utilized the epistle to educational ends?

First, the Greco-Roman letter writing tradition needs to be considered.<sup>5</sup> While opinions were mixed as to the ability of teaching and learning to occur within the letter format, some believing that the letter was just as good as being in the physical presence of the teacher and others believing that it was a poor substitute for being in a teacher's presence, the record is clear that letters were used for educational purposes in the ancient world. Philosophical schools, most notably the Stoics and Cynics, readily used the letter in their efforts to instruct students.<sup>6</sup> It is reasonable to believe that Paul borrowed this use

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<sup>5</sup>While Aramaic epistolography is important to consider when taking up the issue of Paul using the letter in ways similar to the "family letter," Aramaic epistolography is of less value in understanding Paul's epistolary practice as a work of education, mainly because no evidence exists that letters were used this way in the Aramaic epistolary corpus. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Some Notes on Aramaic Epistolography," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93, no. 2 (1974): 26, 27.

<sup>6</sup>Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 36-40; William G. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), 6-7.

of the letter from the philosophers. Paul had contact with the philosophers (Acts 17), and his letters show many similarities to Greco-Roman philosophical letters.<sup>7</sup> In sum, evidence from outside of Paul's epistles and evidence within them suggests that Paul considered his epistles similarly to the philosophers as means of offering instruction.

The content of the epistles also indicates that Paul considered himself to be conducting theological education through his letters. First, some epistles contain mainly doctrinal content, Romans and Galatians being the best examples. Other epistles are more hortatory and paraenetic in character. And yet, many of Paul's urgings have a theological underpinning which he also communicates. For example, Paul bases his rubrics concerning the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:33-34) upon doctrine concerning the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:23-26).<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Paul states forthrightly that he intends his epistles to perform theological instruction. Ephesians 4:1-16 reads as a justification for Paul's instructing the Ephesians through his epistle.<sup>9</sup> Colossians 1:24-28 demonstrates that Paul considered his epistles to be means of theological education. Paul indicates that God commissioned him to instruct the Colossians (v. 25).

**Online formats and the epistle.** The epistle format and online formats also

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<sup>7</sup>Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 42; John L. White, *The Form and Function of the Body of the Greek Letter: A Study of the Letter-Body in the Non-Literary Papyri and in Paul the Apostle*, SBL Dissertation Series 2 (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1972), 159; John L. White, *Light From Ancient Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 192; Abraham J. Malherbe, "'Gentle as a Nurse': The Cynic Background to I Thess II," *Novum Testamentum* 12, no. 2 (1970): 203-17; Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989).

<sup>8</sup>This characteristic method of Paul, in which he conveys doctrine in response to challenges or questions faced in congregational life, is unique. The discussing of local concerns puts his letters in a different category than the philosophical treatise in epistle form, but the universal doctrinal content he relates to such local concerns precludes his epistles from being merely local letters. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity*, 25-27, 42. Barnett states that 2 Cor 10:3-6 is another example of Paul giving timeless teaching motivated from a "mundane situation." Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 470.

<sup>9</sup>This thesis operates under the assumption that all the canonical epistles attributed to Paul are authentic.

have points of comparison. First, both the epistle and online formats are designed to allow communication between people who are not physically close. Second, local congregations tend to be important considerations in both epistles and online formats in theological education. As has been discussed, most of Paul's epistles were written to congregations as a whole. Also, the pastoral epistles were written to pastors actively serving congregations. Only one epistle, Philemon, does not seem to have the congregation in view. Likewise, online theological formats are often pursued both by students and theological institutions to allow students to remain in their current congregations.<sup>10</sup>

Another point of comparison between the epistle and online formats are their limitations. While some of the ancients considered letter writing to be just as good a manner of facilitating teacher and student communication as face-to-face communication, Paul takes a more sober view. Robert Funk has convincingly shown that Paul gave the least priority to the letter out of the three means that he exercised his apostolic authority:

[The letter, the dispatch of an emissary, and Paul's own presence] represent the implementation of the apostolic *parousia* and in ascending order of significance. The presence of Paul in person will therefore be the primary medium by which he makes his apostolic authority effective, whether for negative (1 Cor 4:19) or positive (Phil. 1:24 ff.) reasons. Letter and envoy will be substitutes, less effective perhaps, but sometimes necessary. The shape of the apostolic *parousia* as a whole should be considered from this perspective.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>See, for example Concordia Seminary, "Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP)," accessed September 19, 2012, <http://www.csl.edu/admissions/academics/altrt/specific-ministry-pastor-smp-pastor/>.

<sup>11</sup>Robert W. Funk, "The Apostolic *Parousia*: Form and Significance," in *Christian History and Interpretation; Studies Presented to John Knox.*, ed. John Knox et al. (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), 258. It should be noted that some scholars have tempered the tendency for Funk's paradigm to downplay the effectiveness and power vested in Paul's letters. Though he readily utilizes Funk's insight into Paul's priority of exercising his apostolic *parousia*, Wall tempers Funk's insights by noting that Paul uses the threat of a visit to heighten the authority of a letter, "which supplies an inferior *although effective* substitute for Paul's persona and the edifying charisms he conveys within the faith community." Robert W. Wall, "The Function of the Pastoral Letters within the Pauline Canon of the New Testament: A Canonical Approach," in *The Pauline Canon*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, Pauline Studies (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 1:30, emphasis added.

Likewise, even proponents of utilizing online formats for education have noted that such formats have limitations. For example, Gunawardena notes that online formats are low in social bandwidth.<sup>12</sup>

### **Sufficiently Comparable**

Despite the differences between Pauline epistolary practice and online theological education, they have enough in common to justify treating them as comparable phenomenon. On the one hand, the differences are significant, but they are not differences of contradiction but rather of degree. Contemporary theological education tends to focus more on the individual while Paul's letters tend to focus on congregations, but congregations are made of many individuals. Online formats allow for more interactivity, but communication through the epistle and emissary also allowed for interactivity, though at a slower rate. On the other hand, Paul's epistolary theory and practice shares many points of comparison with online theological education. They are both means of theological education. They are both done from a physical distance. The local congregation is a significant consideration in both formats. All of these points of comparison allow for fruitful results in the attempt to glean wisdom from Paul's letter writing to apply to practices of online theological education today.

### **Paul and Presence**

Having established that it is permissible to utilize Pauline epistolary theory and practice to gain insight into the use of online formats for theological education, it is then necessary to gain insight into what Paul believed about the use of the epistle for conducting his ministry. Such insight has been gained in part throughout the text of this thesis, most notably in its review of Funk's "Apostolic *Parousia*." This chapter proceeds by examining

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<sup>12</sup>Charlotte N. Gunawardena, "Social Presence Theory and Implications for Interaction and Collaborative Learning in Computer Conferences," *International Journal of Educational Telecommunications* 1, no. 2 (1995): 156.

pertinent Pauline passages that discuss his presence, whether through the epistle, the emissary, or personal visit. It does so primarily by examining Robert Funk's catalog of *parousia* passages, though a few additional pertinent passages are included, and a few of Funk's passages that do not yield fodder for this thesis are omitted.<sup>13</sup> This study focuses only on those portions of the passages which pertain directly to this thesis; these are quoted, and comments follow.

### **Romans 1:7-15 and 15:14-33**

Funk considers Romans 15:14-33 to be the "most elaborate and formally structured of these passages having to do with the apostolic *parousia*" and therefore the best "provisional model" for such passages.<sup>14</sup> However, this discussion focuses more on 1:7-15 since Funk considers it parallel to 15:14-33, and it offers more pertinent content for this thesis.

"For God is my witness . . . that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers" (1:9, 10).<sup>15</sup> These words relate to Paul's presence in two ways. First, they met a common concern of letter writers, the establishment of a rapport with the audience, though in a common way. Kruse writes,

Such assurances of prayer are common place in the *exordia* of letter found among the ancient Greek papyri. Their purpose was to establish rapport with the audience and engender a willingness on their part to give the letter a good hearing when it was read to them.<sup>16</sup>

However, the content of his prayers and the earnestness of this prayer-report are significant for this thesis. Paul reports that he prays to "at last succeed in coming to you" (1:10). Thus Paul seeks to assure the Romans of the sincerity of his desire to see them by

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<sup>13</sup>Funk, "The Apostolic *Parousia*," 250.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>15</sup>All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>16</sup>Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 59.

associating a solemn activity like prayer and by invoking a vow to confirm that this is indeed the content of his prayers. These prayers are occurring even as he composes the letter, as Paul uses the present tense (ποιῶμαι) to describe his mentioning them in his prayers. The reception of reports (1:8) and the dispatching of this epistle do not satisfy what Paul would accomplish in a visit.

Additionally, it should be noted that this statement, which gives a window into the prayer life of Paul, is an example of the intimate self-disclosure that is distinctive in Paul's letters.<sup>17</sup> This intimate self-disclosure is taken up further as this thesis relates Paul's epistolary practice to contemporary social presence theory.

“For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine” (1:11-12). Paul here describes his reason for wishing to visit the Romans: the impartation of a spiritual gift and the mutual encouragement in the faith. Regarding that spiritual gift, the near context strongly suggests that it is the gospel and that this gift would be imparted by preaching (1:15).<sup>18</sup>

It is easy to make either too much or too little of Paul's statements in 1:8-15 regarding his desires for a visit. On the one hand, one could argue that Paul's desire to visit the Romans in order to preach the gospel is being fulfilled by means of the epistle he is composing. According to this view, a visit by Paul would be unnecessary, and one might point to the travel plans of 15:22-33 as evidence that a visit to Rome is a secondary or even a tertiary concern now that the epistle has been written. However, such a view does not do justice to the earnestness conveyed in 1:8-15, and Paul's use of present tense verbs

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<sup>17</sup> Adolf Deissmann, *Light From the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World*, trans. Lionel Richard Mortimer Strachan, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: George H. Doran, 1927), 240-41; Paul Schubert, “Form and Function of the Pauline Letters,” *The Journal of Religion* 19, no. 4 (1939): 376.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 248; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 58.

in expressing his desire to see them indicates that this desire persists even as he writes the letter: “I mention (ποιούμαι) you . . . I long (ἐπιποθῶ) to see you” (1:9, 11). On the other hand, one could argue that Paul’s imparting of a spiritual gift could only occur through preaching and not through the letter. However, Paul only indicates that the desire to impart the gift motivated a desire to visit; he does not indicate the impossibility of imparting the gift by means of the epistle. Moreover, that Paul lays out the gospel in the epistle would indicate that he believed he could bestow this spiritual gift by means of the letter, though perhaps not on par with preaching. Fitzmyer is correct in his suggestion regarding this statement:

It may be, however, that Paul also indirectly intends his very writing of Romans to be a way of passing on to the Christians of Rome some spiritual gift. That is, his plan to visit Rome also supplies a motivation for his writing of Romans. This is then a way of discharging his apostolic missionary obligation, as he writes this letter.<sup>19</sup>

In this passage Paul uses the term, “brothers,” one of the filial notes that makes his work distinctive from typical letters from authority figures, and a note by which he seeks to bind himself intimately with the Roman congregation.<sup>20</sup>

### **First Corinthians 4:14-21**

“I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church” (16-17). These words demonstrate in part why Paul considered his personal presence to be so important: his way of life offered a pattern of Christian conduct to new converts.<sup>21</sup> Willis Peter De Boer recognizes this pattern of Christian conduct as a pedagogical tool:

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<sup>19</sup>Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 248.

<sup>20</sup>White, *Light From Ancient Letters*, 55; Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2011), 65; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 249.

<sup>21</sup>C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 116.

[Paul's] example served as a forceful illustration for pedagogical purposes. . . . In his role as teacher Paul stands as an example of the thing he is teaching. Paul points to his own example and calls for the imitation of himself, because he is the teacher who has made these things vividly real to his readers.<sup>22</sup>

Garland also uses pedagogical language in describing Paul's call for the Corinthians to imitate him: "Paul is interested in them learning his ways (cf. 12:31), not just his ideas or doctrines."<sup>23</sup> Paul believed that his life was a reflection of Christ crucified and that it therefore stood as a powerful means by which the Corinthians could learn to imitate Christ.<sup>24</sup>

Paul's belief that through Timothy he could exercise apostolic authority is also notable in this passage: "In sending Timothy as an emissary, Paul is exercising his apostolic authority and power, because through Timothy he himself will be present to them."<sup>25</sup>

"Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power" (18-19). With this passage Paul demonstrates the full range of ways by which he exercises his apostolic *parousia*. In verse 14 he discusses his letter as a means by exercising apostolic authority. In verse 17 he discusses his sending of Timothy as another means. Here, he shows that while the letter and the emissary are both effective means by which he can exercise his apostolic *parousia*, the most powerful means is his

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<sup>22</sup>Willis Peter De Boer, "The Imitation of Paul: An Exegetical Study" (Ph.D. diss., Vrije Universiteit, 1962), 213-14.

<sup>23</sup>David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 148.

<sup>24</sup>Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 116.

<sup>25</sup>Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 32 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 223.



personal presence: “The subordinate role of the emissary is obliquely expressed in 1 Cor 4:17 ff.: Timothy will remind them, but Paul will put their power to the test.”<sup>26</sup>

### **First Corinthians 5:3-5**

“For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present” (3-4).<sup>27</sup> Most modern commentators reject the idea that Paul uses the “absent in body but present in spirit” statement in the sentimental way it is used today.<sup>28</sup> There is less agreement on exactly how Paul considers himself among the Corinthians, some arguing for a more psychological presence<sup>29</sup> and others for a presence of Paul’s spirit by means of the Holy Spirit.<sup>30</sup> It is not necessary for this thesis to decide among these two options; however, Barrett, Fitzmyer, Fee, Garland and Thiselton all agree that Paul believed that his presence, whether psychological or spiritual, was mediated by the epistle being read in the presence of the Corinthians.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Funk, “The Apostolic *Parousia*,” 259n11.

<sup>27</sup>Funk did not include this passage in his catalog of passages having to do with Paul’s apostolic *parousia*, probably because it does not discuss his sending of a letter, dispatching of an emissary, or plan to visit. However, this passage is discussed on account of its shedding light on Paul’s understanding of his presence among the Corinthians by means of the epistle.

<sup>28</sup>Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 123-24; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 236; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 164; Anthony C Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 391.

<sup>29</sup>See C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 123-24; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 236.

<sup>30</sup>See Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1987), 255; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 164-65; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 391.

<sup>31</sup>See also commentators on the parallel in Col 2:5: Peter Thomas O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44 (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 98; James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 134. This thesis will not further discuss Col 2:5 since that passage offers no insight beyond what can be gleaned from 1 Cor 5:3.

Evidently, his presence was powerful as through it Paul sat in judgment over the wrongdoer even though not physically among the Corinthians.<sup>32</sup>

### **Second Corinthians 2:3-4**

“And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all” (3).<sup>33</sup> Paul shows one circumstance where he believed exercising his apostolic authority by means of a letter was more effective than by means of his personal presence. Barrett writes, “The circumstances were such that to visit Corinth would do harm, and to stay away would do harm (as it manifestly had done). Paul had sought to deal with this difficult situation by writing a letter.”<sup>34</sup> While Paul believed that sending a letter in that circumstance was the best option, Funk points out that writing the letter was a means towards a productive visit: “He makes it clear that he wrote instead of coming on this particular occasion in order to prepare them for his coming.”<sup>35</sup>

### **Second Corinthians 8:16-9:5**

“So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction” (9:5). Second Corinthians 2:3-4 give evidence that Paul believed that at times an epistle could be more effective than his personal presence. In 2 Corinthians 9:5, Paul stated that he believed his emissaries can be more effective than his presence.

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<sup>32</sup>First Cor 16:1-2 is listed by Funk as a *parousia* passage. However, as the passage offers little fodder for this thesis, it will not be discussed.

<sup>33</sup>Though this is not one of Funk’s apostolic *parousia* passages, I have included a discussion on account of its illustration of Paul’s beliefs concerning the capabilities of the letter.

<sup>34</sup>C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 87. See also Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 119; Ernest Best, *Second Corinthians*, Interpretation (Atlanta: J. Knox, 1987), 21; Furnish, *2 Corinthians*, 159.

<sup>35</sup>Funk, “The Apostolic *Parousia*,” 259n1.

Dispatching these emissaries would “ensure that their contribution was a generous gift that brought blessing and not as a miserly gift that stemmed from covetousness.”<sup>36</sup>

### **Second Corinthians 10:1-11**

In this section Paul defends the integrity of his ministry. Detractors are claiming that he is a weakling when present but bold and forceful when away (v. 1), and on account of this they level that Paul walks “according to the flesh” (v. 2). Paul therefore must show the continuity of his letters with his apostolic mission to build up the church in Corinth (v. 8).<sup>37</sup>

“Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present” (11). Here Paul asserts that his ministry is of a piece. “There is only one Paul; and when plain speech is called for he will give it, whether on paper or face to face.”<sup>38</sup> Especially important to this thesis is the window this statement gives into Paul’s mind regarding his epistles. Paul believed his epistles accurately conveyed his ethos or persona. Such an attitude therefore serves as an endorsement for the authority and efficacy of his letters: “It should be noted that Paul . . . tacitly endorses . . . the effectiveness of his letters, undergirding their importance to this church and to other churches.”<sup>39</sup> Finally, an interesting dynamic occurs in this passage. While in general Paul appeals to his personal visits as means to vest his letters with authority, this passage does the opposite. Paul is

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<sup>36</sup>Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 629. See also Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 434-35.

<sup>37</sup>Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 475.

<sup>38</sup>Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 262. See also Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 475; Best, *Second Corinthians*, 97.

<sup>39</sup>Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 478.

justifying the way he conducts his ministry in person. He does this in part by appealing to his epistles, stating he is the same man in person who composes the epistles.<sup>40</sup>

### **Galatians 4:12-20**

“I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you” (20). Paul here indicates one way in which apostolic presence via the letter or the emissary will not suffice, and that is in the relief of anxiety regarding the welfare of those from whom he is absent. Bruce suggests that Paul is anxious over how his epistle will be received:

Paul may be afraid here that his Galatian friends will concentrate on the uncompromising severity of his language and overlook the underlying concern and affection: if only he could be with them he would adapt his tone of voice to his deep-seated emotions.<sup>41</sup>

The near context, in which Paul takes up just this concern, expressing fears that he has become their “enemy by telling . . . the truth” (4:16) would support Bruce’s suggestion. Paul here shows that he has two concerns about the limitations of the epistle: the words detached from personal presence may alienate the Galatians rather than achieve Paul’s desired effect, and therefore an epistle will not relieve the writer’s anxiety concerning the welfare of its recipients.<sup>42</sup>

### **Philippians 1:27**

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit,

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<sup>40</sup>Funk lists 2 Cor 12:14-13:10 as among the apostolic *parousia* passages. However, this thesis does not discuss this passage because all of the pertinent themes are taken up in the other passages from 2 Corinthians that are discussed.

<sup>41</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1982), 213.

<sup>42</sup>See also 2 Cor 2:4 and 7:8, which hint at this same anxiety.

with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.”<sup>43</sup> With these words Paul indicates an expectation that the doctrine and practice of the Philippians be the same whether he is present or absent from them. Some commentators have argued that this demonstrates a concern of Paul that it would be easier for them to stray when he is absent.<sup>44</sup>

### **Philippians 2:19-30**

“I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you” (19). Paul evidently believes that the dispatching of an emissary is beneficial not only for the receiving congregation but also for the sending apostle. One may note the similarity in thought between this verse and Romans 2:12.

“But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel” (22). Paul adds these words regarding Timothy as an assurance that Timothy “would faithfully represent Paul’s heart and mind.”<sup>45</sup> This is an instance of Paul's understanding that one’s ethos or persona could be projected beyond one’s physical presence, here by means of an emissary.

“I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also” (24). Despite Paul’s confidence in emissaries in general, and Timothy in particular, to faithfully represent him, Paul yet indicates his belief that the emissary, and thus by extension also the letter,

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<sup>43</sup>Though this is not one of Funk’s *parousia* passages, I have included a discussion on account of how it displays Paul’s viewpoints concerning the ability of the epistle.

<sup>44</sup>G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 95; Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 81.

<sup>45</sup>Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 197. See also Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 13 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 113.

cannot replace his own presence.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, the promise of a visit “backs up the authority and power of his letter.”<sup>47</sup>

### **First Thessalonians 2:17-3:13**

“But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again” (2:17-18). A *prima facie* reading of this passage shows how strongly Paul desired to be in the presence of the Thessalonians.<sup>48</sup> Paul uses emphatic language to describe both his separation (“torn away”) and his desire to be in their presence (“great desire” and “again and again”). However, Paul’s heartfelt affection for the Thessalonians is also evident. Witherington writes, “One . . . cannot but be touched by the deep pathos of the text and the profound love and concern exuding from Paul as he guides and goads and praises and warns and frets and exults over his converts.”<sup>49</sup>

We sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith. . . . But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you. (3:2, 6)

The role of the emissary as an extension of the apostle’s work is demonstrated in these words, but they also demonstrate the opportunity afforded by the emissary: interactivity. The emissary could represent the apostle to the congregation and the congregation to the apostle.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 198.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>48</sup>Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 151.

<sup>49</sup>Ben Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 100; Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers*, 75.

<sup>50</sup>Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek*

“For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know” (3:4). Witherington cites this passage as an example of Paul’s epistolary theory and practice by which Paul continues to drive home the teaching he made in person by means of the epistle.<sup>51</sup> Heath has argued that here Paul is attempting to arouse a sense of *enargeia* in his hearers.<sup>52</sup> According to Heath, *enargeia* was the sense that something absent was represented in such a “way that made it seem so vivid, so clear, so animated or immediate that it appeared to be practically perceptible to the senses.”<sup>53</sup> Heath therefore helps to show how Paul’s apostolic *parousia* could function through the epistle.

### **Philemon 21-22**

“Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even

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*Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 128-33.

<sup>51</sup>Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 94.

<sup>52</sup>Jane M. F. Heath, “Absent Presences of Paul and Christ: Enargeia in 1 Thessalonians 1-3,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32, no. 1 (2009): 5. For more on *enargeia* see Andrew Sprague Becker, “Reading Poetry through a Distant Lens: Ecphrasis, Ancient Greek Rhetoricians, and the Pseudo-Hesiodic ‘Shield of Herakles,’” *American Journal of Philology* 113, no. 1 (1992): 5-24; Riemer Faber, “Vergil Eclogue 3.37, Theocritus 1 and Hellenistic Ekphrasis,” *American Journal of Philology* 116, no. 3 (1995): 411-17; Simon Goldhill and Robin Osborne, “The Naive and Knowing Eye: Ecphrasis and the Culture of Viewing in the Hellenistic World,” in *Art and Text in Ancient Greek Culture*, ed. Simon Goldhill and Robin Osborne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Philip Hardie, *Ovid’s Poetics of Illusion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Andrew Laird, “Sounding out Ecphrasis: Art and Text in Catullus 64,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 83 (1993): 18-30; Ingunn Lunde, “Rhetorical Enargeia and Linguistic Pragmatics: On Speech-Reporting Strategies in East Slavic Medieval Hagiography and Homiletics,” *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 5, no. 1 (2004): 49-80; Roos Meijering, “Literary and Rhetorical Theories in Greek Scholia” (Ph.D. diss., University of Groningen, 1987), 5-53; Ellen Perry, *The Aesthetics of Emulation in the Visual Arts of Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 150-171; Ann Vasaly, *Representations: Images of the World in Ciceronian Oratory* (Berkeley, CA: Univ of California Press, 1993), 89-104; Andrew D. Walker, “Enargeia and the Spectator in Greek Historiography,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 123 (1993): 353-77; Ruth Webb, “Imagination and the Arousal of the Emotions in Greco-Roman Rhetoric,” in *The Passions in Roman Thought and Literature*, ed. Susanna Morton Braund and Christopher Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 112-27; Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1990).

<sup>53</sup>Heath, “Absent Presences of Paul and Christ, 4-5.

more than I say. At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.” This passage emphasizes the authority Paul exercised by means of the epistle: “knowing that you will do even more than I say.” At the same time it acknowledges that the power of the epistles was confirmed and backed up by the possibility of an apostolic visit: “prepare a guest room.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 36.



## CHAPTER 4

### INFERENCES

In the present chapter this thesis transitions from an analytical to a synthetic approach. The previous chapters laid out the current state of the literature base regarding online theological education, Pauline epistolary theory, and social presence theory. They examined, passage by passage, excerpts from Pauline passages which shed light on his epistolary theory and practice. This chapter synthesizes the previous findings into discrete inferences. These inferences then form the basis of the applications and recommendations in chapter 5.

#### **Inferences Concerning Pauline Epistolary Theory and Practice**

**Inference 1: Paul believed that in most circumstances he could dispatch his apostolic mission, including instruction in Christian doctrine and morality, most effectively in person.** Paul generally preferred carrying out his apostolic mission in person: “The presence of Paul in person will therefore be the primary medium by which he makes his apostolic authority effective. . . . Letter and envoy will be substitutes, less effective perhaps, but sometimes necessary.”<sup>1</sup> Letters and envoys or emissaries are useful but will not accomplish all that Paul would accomplish in a visit (Rom 1:8-10).<sup>2</sup> Paul shows this conviction in Romans, where he expresses a continued desire to visit despite

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<sup>1</sup>Robert W. Funk, “The Apostolic *Parousia*: Form and Significance,” in *Christian History and Interpretation; Studies Presented to John Knox.*, ed. John Knox et al. (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), 258.

<sup>2</sup>See “Romans 1:7-15 and 15:14-33” in chap. 3.

the fact that he had dispatched his apostolic mission toward the Roman congregation through his epistle to them (Rom 1:9, 11; 15:14-33).<sup>3</sup> Paul believed that his personal presence not only afforded the opportunity for preaching (Rom 1: 15), but also for giving an example of a Christian way of life, his personal example being a means of educational instruction for new believers (1 Cor 4:16-17).<sup>4</sup> Paul feared that his epistles may not accurately convey the love and concern with which he writes; therefore, the dispatch of letters do not relieve his anxiety regarding the recipients of his writings (Gal 12-20).<sup>5</sup> Paul fears that it may be easier for the members of his churches to stray from Christian morality when he is away (Phil 1:27).<sup>6</sup> Finally, Paul mentions the possibility of a personal visit as a means of vesting his letters with authority (Phil 2:24; Phlm 21-22).<sup>7</sup> The potential of a visit from Paul heightened the authority of his letters. This inference is a general rule with some exceptions, which are discussed in Inference 2. Paul preferred the visit over the letter, and this preference was based not on whim or bias, but rather on convictions regarding the capacities of these two methods for the effective carrying out of his mission.

### **Inference 2: Paul believed that his presence could be mediated by means**

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<sup>3</sup>Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, vol. 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 248. See also “Romans 1:7-15 and 15:14-33” in chap. 3.

<sup>4</sup>Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 248; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 58; Willis Peter De Boer, “The Imitation of Paul: An Exegetical Study” (Ph.D. diss., Vrije Universiteit, 1962), 213-14; C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 116.

<sup>5</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1982), 213.

<sup>6</sup>G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 95; Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 81.

<sup>7</sup>Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 192, 198; Peter Thomas O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44 (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 36.

**of the epistle.** Paul utilized and expanded ancient epistolary theory which held that an author could make his ethos or persona present to his audience by means of the letter and that a letter could bear the authority of an author.<sup>8</sup> Paul discharges “his apostolic missionary obligation” of preaching the gospel to the Romans by means of composing his epistle (Rom 1:8-15).<sup>9</sup> By means of the epistle, Paul exercises an authoritative spiritual presence by which he sits in judgment among the Corinthians (1 Cor 5:3-5).<sup>10</sup> The Paul who is present is the same Paul of letters (2 Cor 10:11).<sup>11</sup> In other words, one could accurately perceive Paul’s ethos through the letter. Paul uses the letter to reinforce and drive home the message he has delivered in person, and he strives through his language to create the impression that he is actually among the hearers of his epistle (1 Thess 3:4).<sup>12</sup> Paul at times expresses confidence that his letters will result in the obedience of his hearers (Phlm 21-22). Even though Paul gave the letter the least priority out of the three means he exercised his apostolic *parousia*, he yet considered his letters to be an effective means.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>See “Persona Transmitted through the Epistle” in chap. 2.

<sup>9</sup>Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 248.

<sup>10</sup>C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 123-24; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, vol. 32 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 236; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1987), 255; David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 164-5; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 391.

<sup>11</sup>Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 478.

<sup>12</sup>Ben Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 94; Jane M. F. Heath, “Absent Presences of Paul and Christ: Enargeia in 1 Thessalonians 1-3,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32, no. 1 (2009): 5.

<sup>13</sup>Funk, “The Apostolic *Parousia*,” 258; Robert W. Wall, “The Function of the Pastoral Letters within the Pauline Canon of the New Testament: A Canonical Approach,” in *The Pauline Canon*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, Pauline Studies (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 1:30.

**Inference 3: Paul believed that in some circumstances his personal presence would be less effective than an emissary or a letter.** In one circumstance, Paul believed that a personal visit would cause unnecessary pain to both him and the Corinthians, and this belief led him to send the Severe Letter (2 Cor 2:3-4).<sup>14</sup> In another circumstance, Paul believed that sending an emissary would allow for a free gift from the Corinthians; whereas, if Paul were to be present the collection would be an exaction (2 Cor 9:5).<sup>15</sup> While one must acknowledge Funk's insight that the letter and the emissary in these circumstances prepared the way for a personal visit and that thus they do not represent a reordering of the priority of Paul's apostolic *parousia*, the fact remains that a visit in these circumstances would have been counterproductive to Paul's greater apostolic mission.<sup>16</sup>

**Inference 4: Paul's personal presence and epistolary presence mutually reinforced each other.** Even in circumstances where Paul's estimation of the effectiveness of the epistle were highest (2 Cor 2:3-4), the epistle prepared the way for a future apostolic visit.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the epistle reinforced what Paul had taught in his visits (1 Thess 3:4).<sup>18</sup> At the same time, the promise of a visit heightened the authority of his letters (Phil 2:24; Phlm 21-22).<sup>19</sup> Finally, Paul appealed to the strength of his letters in

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<sup>14</sup>C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Black's New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 87; Ernest Best, *Second Corinthians*, Interpretation (Atlanta: J. Knox, 1987), 21; Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 119; Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 32A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 159.

<sup>15</sup>Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 629; Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 434-35.

<sup>16</sup>Funk, "The Apostolic *Parousia*," 259n1.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 94.

<sup>19</sup>Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 192, 198; O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 36.

order to lend credibility to his ministry in person (2 Cor 10:11). While it is certainly legitimate to believe that Paul gave primacy to the personal visit as the generally most effective means of exercising his apostolic *parousia*, it does not follow that the legitimacy of his letters flowed only from his visits. Visits, or promises of visits, strengthened the effectiveness of his letters. However, his letters carried a legitimacy independent of the visit so that his letter could also strengthen the effectiveness of his visits.

**Inference 5: Paul believed that his letters carried legitimacy and authority in themselves, independent of an apostolic visit.** Paul considered his visits to be the primary and generally most effective means by which he exercised his apostolic authority.<sup>20</sup> However, that he considered his visits to be the primary means of exercising his authority does not indicate that he believed that the authority of his letters derived solely from his visits. Funk states that he also considered his letters to be sometimes necessary.<sup>21</sup> At times, Paul appealed to the authority present in his letters as a justification for the way he conducted his ministry in person (1 Cor 10:11). If Paul believed that his letters were at times necessary, and if Paul believed that his letters could bolster the authority and credibility of his personal presence, then Paul believed that his letters carried legitimacy and authority in themselves, independent of the apostolic visit.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Funk, "The Apostolic *Parousia*," 258.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Diekema and Caddell are certainly correct to emphasize that Paul's letters are almost always connected to a previous visit or the desire for a future visit ("Response: The Chimera of Virtual Place: False Dichotomies Never Apply," *Christian Scholars Review* 32, no. 1 (2002): 27–29). However, they slightly overstate their point in suggesting that the authority of Paul's letters rest on previous visits: "Paul's nurturing efforts when he was physically present became the fundamental basis for such a 'correspondence ministry.'" (29) The data for this inference shows that the letters at times could be a "fundamental basis" for a visit and that therefore they have an authority that is independent of the visit. This is, in part, because Paul viewed the letters as a means of mediating his presence and not just as a means of giving a "sense" of his presence, as Caddell and Diekema assert (29).

**Inference 6: Paul used the epistle as part of a cohesive strategy for fulfilling his apostolic mission.** Paul was aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the various means of carrying out his apostolic mission. He understood that some circumstances called for a personal visit while others demanded a letter (see Inferences 2 and 3). While Paul believed that in most circumstances a personal visit was the strongest way of exercising the apostolic *parousia* (Inference 1), he yet recognized that a visit could be counterproductive and that a letter served his purposes better (Inference 3). His letters and his visits mutually reinforced each other, and he at times appealed to his visits to lend credibility to his letters but at other times appealed to his letters to lend credibility to his visits (Inference 4). Given such Pauline evaluations of the means by which he exercised his apostolic *parousia* and given the mutual reinforcement between his letters and his visits, one cannot legitimately view Paul's letters as merely supplemental to his visits.<sup>23</sup> Rather, Paul deliberately used the letter as an integral part of a cohesive strategy. His ministry would have not been as effective had he not used the letter.

**Inference 7: Paul was cautiously optimistic that his disposition when writing could be perceived by a letter's audience.** Paul takes pains, unique in his time, to disclose intimate details of the heart in his letters (Rom 1:10; 1 Thess 2:17-18).<sup>24</sup> That he included such cues indicates that Paul believed they could be perceived by the audience. However, some passages indicate that Paul feared that his disposition of love

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<sup>23</sup>Contra Paul R. House, "Hewing to Scripture's Pattern: A Plea for Personal Theological Education," *Colloquy* 18, no. 2 (2010): 4. House's use of the term "supplemental" to describe the writings of the prophets and apostles, the Scriptures, is surprising coming from one of evangelical convictions.

<sup>24</sup>Adolf Deissmann, *Light From the Ancient East; The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World*, trans. Lionel Richard Mortimer Strachan, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1927), 240-41; Paul Schubert, "Form and Function of the Pauline Letters," *The Journal of Religion* 19, no. 4 (October 1, 1939): 376; Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 100; Abraham J Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 75.

and concern would not carry through the text of his letter (Gal 4:20).<sup>25</sup> Paul was therefore not entirely comfortable in the letter's ability to convey his disposition.

**Inference 8: Paul strove to nurture the sense that he was personally present by means of the epistle.** Ancient official letters held a place of authority and conveyed the sense that the authority figure was actually present.<sup>26</sup> Because the ancients considered letters to be one half of a conversation, they emphasized that the writers of letters should strive to imitate conversational speech and reflect the writer's personality.<sup>27</sup> Paul utilized this epistolary convention. He states that by means of the epistle he is sitting in a place of authority among the Corinthians (1 Cor 5:3-5).<sup>28</sup> He attempts to conjure a sense among the Thessalonians that he is personally among them (1 Thess 3:4).<sup>29</sup>

### **Inferences Concerning Social Presence in Paul's Letters**

In order to apply Pauline epistolary theory and practice to contemporary practices of online theological education, it is necessary to translate, or shift the manner of speaking, to reflect the differences between online media and the Pauline epistles. The language developed by contemporary social presence theory offers a fruitful vocabulary to do this work of translation insofar as it offers a broader way of speaking about the sense of personal presence through media in a way that includes, but is not limited to, the letter.

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<sup>25</sup>Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 213.

<sup>26</sup>William G. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), 6.

<sup>27</sup>Abraham J. Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988), 12; John L. White, *Light from Ancient Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 191.

<sup>28</sup>Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 123-24; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 236; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 255; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 164-5; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 391.

<sup>29</sup>Heath, "Absent Presences of Paul and Christ," 5.

**Inference 9: The language of social presence theory can legitimately be used to describe means by which Paul exercised personal presence through his epistles.** No anachronism is involved in using social presence theory to analyze the Pauline epistles. It is not being claimed, for example, that Paul had a sense of contemporary social presence theory. Rather, this thesis uses the language of social presence theory to describe Paul's belief that his hearers could have a greater or lesser sense of interacting with a real person in his letters as well as Paul's means by which he sought to foster that sense.

That Paul believed he could be personally present, albeit in a less effective way than in a personal visit, by means of his epistles has been adequately explored through the text of this thesis. Heath's discussion of *enargeia* helps to explain a means by which Paul could be present though absent.<sup>30</sup> Social presence theory offers an even broader framework than Heath's to explain how Paul could mediate his presence through the epistle. Paul's attempted arousal of *enargeia* can be understood as one of many approaches to heightening intimacy within his letters. This inference does not claim that Paul consciously adhered to some nascent form of contemporary social presence theory. Such a claim would clearly be anachronistic. Rather, this thesis states that social presence theory, as a descriptive paradigm to explain how individuals come to have a sense that one is interacting with a real person, is useful to describe Paul's beliefs concerning his ability to be personally present among those who received his letters and the means by which he sought to effect this personal presence.

**Inference 10: Paul believed that recipients of letters could have a greater or lesser sense of interacting with a real person, a greater or lesser sense of social presence.** Ancient epistolary theorists believed that letters were one half of a dialogue

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid.



and that the skilled author of letters would strive to make their personality shine through the text.<sup>31</sup> Ancient theorists desired that reading a letter would give the impression of interacting with its sender in person:

Seneca stated that he wanted his letters to be just like the conversation he would speak if he were actually sitting or walking in one's company, and that he wanted nothing strange or artificial in his letters. Likening the letter to actual conversation, Julius Victor advised one to use expressions which recognize the recipient's presence, such as "you too?" And "just as you say!" And "I see you smile."<sup>32</sup>

Paul not only adopted this epistolary convention of self-disclosure, but he also took it to extremes not normally seen among the ancients.<sup>33</sup> Paul was aware of the desirability for recipients of letters to have the impression of interacting with the sender in person and therefore took great pain to ensure that his readers gained that impression.<sup>34</sup> Though Paul would not have been aware of this terminology, in his letters he fostered social presence, the impression that one is interacting with a real person.

**Inference 11: Paul sought to increase social presence by fostering intimacy, feelings of closeness to him by his audience.**

Paul took to extremes the ideal of self-disclosure recommended by ancient epistolary theorists.<sup>35</sup> Such radical self-disclosure can be seen, for example, in 1 Thessalonians 2:17, where "one . . . cannot but be touched by the deep pathos of the text and the profound love and concern exuding from Paul."<sup>36</sup> This radical self-disclosure, a deliberate choice on Paul's part, was aimed in

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<sup>31</sup>Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*, 12; White, *Light from Ancient Letters*, 191.

<sup>32</sup>White, *Light from Ancient Letters*, 191.

<sup>33</sup>Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 240-41; Schubert, "Form and Function of the Pauline Letters," 376; William G. Doty, "Classification of Epistolary Literature," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (1969): 2.

<sup>34</sup>Heath, "Absent Presences of Paul and Christ," 5.

<sup>35</sup>Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 240-41; Schubert, "Form and Function of the Pauline Letters," 376; Doty, "Classification of Epistolary Literature," 2.

<sup>36</sup>Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 100.

part to arouse feelings of closeness toward him in his readers. In other words, Paul attempted to foster intimacy in his hearers.<sup>37</sup>

**Inference 12: Paul sought to increase social presence by fostering immediacy, cues of accessibility to his audience.** Paul intended to highlight his authority over his audiences. Paul utilized the official letter type as a means of exercising authority among his congregations.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, Paul used verbal cues to express accessibility to his hearers. He adopts tones of equality with his readers, utilizing such terms as “brothers” (1 Thess 2:17) and indicating that a visit would give mutual benefit (Rom 1:11-12). Mixing such authoritative and egalitarian tones was a Pauline innovation, indicating that a deliberate choice was made and that Paul was not merely following convention.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, Paul deliberately sought to foster immediacy, cues of accessibility toward his audiences.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Michael Argyle and Janet Dean, “Eye Contact, Distance, and Affiliation,” *Sociometry* 28, no. 3 (1965): 293.

<sup>38</sup>Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity*, 6; White, *Light from Ancient Letters*, 218.

<sup>39</sup>White, *Light from Ancient Letters*, 219; Stanley Kent Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 27-31.

<sup>40</sup>Morton Wiener and Albert Mehrabian, *Language within Language: Immediacy, a Channel in Verbal Communication* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968), 289-304.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 1 of this thesis established the need for ongoing theological inquiry into practices of online theological education. Chapter 2 more thoroughly explored this need and identified a gap in the literature regarding online theological education. It also explored two areas of inquiry that will assist in filling this gap: Pauline epistolary theory and practice and social presence theory. Chapter 3 established the appropriateness of applying Pauline epistolary theory and practice to the theory and practice of online theological education and analyzed Pauline passages relating to personal presence and presence mediated through the letter. Chapter 4 synthesized the findings of chapters 2 and 3 into discrete propositional inferences that will aid reflection on applying Pauline epistolary theory and practice. This present chapter applies the findings to the problems which necessitated this study. In particular, it reflects on how Pauline epistolary theory and practice might aid in the understanding of online theological education. This chapter demonstrates how this study has contributed to the literature base, and finally, gives recommendations for practice.

#### **Application of Results**

This section applies the inferences of the previous chapter to practices of online theological education.

**Application 1: Pauline epistolary theory and practice suggest that traditional, face-to-face formats should hold a primary place in theological education.**

This application may be surprising in a thesis seeking to provide justification and guidance for theological programs utilizing online formats. However, this conclusion

cannot be avoided given the preponderant evidence. The proof for Inference 1, “Paul believed that in most circumstances he could dispatch his apostolic duties, including instruction in Christian doctrine and morality, most effectively in person,” is overwhelming.<sup>1</sup> To put it succinctly, if colloquially, Paul generally preferred the pulpit over the postal system.

Giving a primary place to traditional, face-to-face formats does not preclude the use of online formats in theological education, just as the primary place of the visit in Paul’s apostolic *parousia* did not preclude the use of the epistle.<sup>2</sup> Neither does this primary place preclude the formation of completely online courses of study or even completely online institutions like Rockbridge Seminary.

Rather, this application calls for sober judgments about the utilization of either face-to-face formats or online formats. Proponents of online theological education are justified in their advocacy, but this application means that they should take seriously the concerns expressed by many theology faculty members over the use of online formats in theological education.<sup>3</sup> This thesis strongly critiques the positions of House, Diekema, and Caddell, but they are correct in their concern that certain opportunities for formation are lost by the utilization of online formats, opportunities like shared meals, prayers, and worship.<sup>4</sup> Theological institutions, accrediting agencies, and potential students should

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<sup>1</sup>See chap. 4 for a discussion of all inferences cited in the present chap.

<sup>2</sup>Many other descriptions for the place of face-to-face formats were considered. For example, “preferred” was considered but ultimately rejected since it conveyed a sense that the use of online formats may be less than ideal for a specific student, school, or program. “Primary” was chosen as this is the same term used by Funk to describe the place of the visit in Paul’s ministry. However, the use of the term “primary” should not be construed to mean that theological education should be pursued mostly in face-to-face formats.

<sup>3</sup>Steve Delamarter, “Theological Educators and Their Concerns about Technology,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 8, no. 3 (2005): 135-38.

<sup>4</sup>Paul R. House, “Hewing to Scripture’s Pattern: A Plea for Personal Theological Education,” *Colloquy* 18, no. 2 (2010): 2, 6; David Diekema and David Caddell, “The Significance of Place: Sociological Reflections on Distance Learning and Christian Higher Education,” *Christian Scholars Review* 31, no. 2 (2001): 169–84; David Caddell and David Diekema, “Response: The Chimera of Virtual

attend to this application when making decisions about the place of online formats in theological education.

**Application 2: Pauline epistolary theory and practice suggests that online formats may be legitimately used for theological education.** While Paul gave priority to his visits in exercising his apostolic *parousia*, he believed that his letters carried legitimacy and authority in themselves, independent of an apostolic visit (Inference 5). He may have generally considered his letters to be less effective than visits, but at times he found them necessary.<sup>5</sup> Like many contemporary theological faculty members, Paul believed in the importance of personally relating to his students; however, Paul believed that his personal presence could be mediated by means of the epistle (Inference 2).<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Paul believed that in some circumstances the epistle was a better means of exercising his apostolic *parousia* than was a visit (Inference 3). Therefore, Paul utilized the epistle as part of a cohesive strategy in which the epistle and the apostolic visit mutually reinforced each other (Inferences 4-6).

Paul's belief that the letter could legitimately be used should be instructive to detractors of utilizing online formats in theological education, especially since Paul held so strongly to the importance of his physical presence in dispatching his duties of instructing in Christian doctrine and morality. Indeed, this aspect of Paul's epistolary theory would indicate that the use of media such as online formats in theological education is legitimate.

Moreover, Pauline epistolary theory would suggest that the utilization of online formats, even completely online formats, is legitimate independently from their

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Place: False Dichotomies Never Apply," *Christian Scholars Review* 32, no. 1 (2002): 19–30.

<sup>5</sup>Robert W. Funk, "The Apostolic *Parousia*: Form and Significance," in *Christian History and Interpretation; Studies Presented to John Knox.*, ed. John Knox et al. (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), 258.

<sup>6</sup>Delamarter, "Theological Educators," 135-38.

relationship to face-to-face formats. Paul held that his letters carried legitimacy and authority in themselves, independent of an apostolic visit (Inference 5). His letters were not merely supplemental to his visits but were rather an integral part of his greater, cohesive apostolic mission. The legitimacy of Paul's letters, a legitimacy independent of an apostolic visit, would suggest that online theological education can legitimately be utilized independently of any relationship to traditional, face-to-face educational formats.<sup>7</sup>

**Application 3: The utilization of online formats in theological education is legitimate in part on account of social presence, the sense of interacting with a real person through media.** Paul utilized the epistle, over against the philosophical treatise or the play, on account of the epistle's capacity to imitate dialogue as if the writer and reader were physically present and conversing. Paul believed that his presence could be mediated by means of the epistle (Inference 2). Many of Delamarter's respondents were concerned that some of the more "personal" aspects of the theological educational endeavor would be lost online, aspects such as spontaneity, the exhilaration of conversational repartee, and the ability to conduct mentoring, character development, and spiritual formation on account of the ease of adopting fake online persona.<sup>8</sup> Paul's epistolary theory and practice would indicate that he, too, sensed the importance of authentic and personal relationships in the task of instructing in Christian doctrine and morality, as indicated by Inferences 1, 2, 7, and 8. That Paul yet utilized the letter indicates his confidence that his hearers could have the sense that through the letter they were interacting with the real Paul. He was cautiously optimistic that his disposition when writing could be perceived by a letter's audience (Inference 7), and he strove to give the sense in his epistles that he himself was among them by fostering intimacy and

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<sup>7</sup>*Contra* House, who based upon his conviction that the apostolic writings were merely supplemental to the face-to-face ministry of the apostles recommends that online formats only be used as a bridge to traditional, face-to-face education. House, "Hewing to Scripture's Pattern," 2, 6.

<sup>8</sup>Delamarter, "Theological Educators," 135-38.

the giving of immediacy cues (Inferences 8-12). Paul believed that it was possible to foster the personal element of theological education within the epistle. Likewise, social presence theory indicates that it is possible to foster authentic personal relationships through online media.

It must be conceded that it is possible to adopt fake persona online. However, it is also possible to adopt fake persona in face-to-face formats. Hypocrisy did not begin with the advent of the internet. The ability of adopting fake persona online is not a valid reason to discredit online theological education any more than it is a valid reason to discredit face-to-face theological education.

**Application 4: Pauline epistolary theory and practice suggest that it is legitimate for the sake of theological education to exploit opportunities afforded by online formats that may not be available from face-to-face, traditional formats.**

Consistent with Paul's commitment to the apostolic visit as the primary and generally most effective means of dispatching his apostolic duties (Inference 1), this thesis holds that traditional, face-to-face formats should hold a similar place of priority in contemporary theological education (Application 1). However, such a priority does not indicate that traditional, face-to-face formats are most effective in every circumstance. Despite the priority Paul gave to the apostolic visit, he held that the dispatch of an emissary or the sending of a letter could at times be more beneficial to his overall apostolic mission (Inference 3). In like manner, students and theological institutions may find that in some circumstances online formats may better serve their overall mission than face-to-face formats. The Pauline example would indicate that the use of online formats in such circumstances is not only permissible but also recommendable. For example, a common use of online formats is certificate programs for laypeople engaged in church work, set up in order to give greater theological and biblical understanding.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Calvin Theological Seminary, "Certificate Programs," accessed August 27, 2014,

Such a program fills a need that would likely not be met by traditional, face-to-face formats. Additionally, it is conceivable that theological institutions may find that certain kinds of conversations lend themselves better to online bulletin boards rather than classroom discussions. For example, the online bulletin board may allow for more thoughtful interaction on systematic theology over and against a face-to-face discussion.

**Application 5: Theological institutions and faculty should strive to foster social presence in all academic settings, online, face-to-face, or otherwise.** Social presence is not limited to mediated interactions; it applies to face-to-face interactions as well. For example, the social presence within the traditional classroom can vary based on the number of immediacy cues given, for example eye contact and a willingness to field questions. Paul's example of fostering social presence by attending to intimacy and immediacy behaviors (Inferences 10-12), as well as contemporary research which correlates social presence with student success, indicates that the fostering of social presence should be a priority for theological institutions.<sup>10</sup> Paul was optimistic about the ability of the epistle to foster intimacy between him and his readers, but it was a cautious optimism (Inferences 7-8). At times Paul feared that his disposition of love and concern would not carry through the text of his letter (Gal 4:20).<sup>11</sup> Likewise, social presence theorists have found that social presence is more difficult to build within online formats.<sup>12</sup>

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<http://calvinseminary.edu/academics/certificate-programs/>; Covenant Theological Seminary, "Graduate Certificate," accessed August 27, 2014, <http://www.covenantseminary.edu/academics/degrees/gc/>; Gordon Conwell, "Online Certificate in Christian Studies," accessed August 27, 2014, <http://www.gordonconwell.edu/online/Online-Certificate-Christian-Studies.cfm>.

<sup>10</sup>Charlotte N. Gunawardena and Frank J. Zittle, "Social Presence as Predictor of Satisfaction within a Computer-Mediated Conferencing Environment," *The American Journal of Distance Education* 11, no. 3 (1997): 23.

<sup>11</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1982), 213.

<sup>12</sup>Charlotte N. Gunawardena, "Social Presence Theory and Implications for Interaction and Collaborative Learning in Computer Conferences," *International Journal of Educational Telecommunications* 1, no. 2 (1995): 163-65.



Both the Pauline example and contemporary research would indicate, therefore, that the fostering of social presence should be of special concern to students and faculty engaged in online learning.

Another implication of the importance of social presence in online learning is that theological institutions, faculty, students, and accrediting agencies should give priority to those online formats that foster social presence to a greater degree. It is possible, for example, to set up a theological course in which there is no interaction between students and instructors. While there may be certain courses in which this methodology is permissible, as a rule Pauline theory and practice as well as contemporary research indicates that theological education is better done in formats with greater social bandwidth.

**Application 6: An ideal approach to theological education would utilize a hybrid model in which the format employed, whether the face-to-face, traditional classroom, or online formats, has been deliberately chosen to most effectively facilitate learning.** Paul employed a cohesive strategy for fulfilling his apostolic mission, a strategy that at times necessitated the dispatching of emissaries or the sending of letters (Inference 6). At times, the sending of the letter was done on account of his conviction that it would push forward his apostolic mission better than an apostolic visit (Inference 3). Likewise, theological institutions would do well to appropriately match the educational format with the learning objectives of courses. Some courses may lend themselves better to online formats than others. A systematics or history course, for example, may lend itself to online formats better than a homiletics course since homiletics, in general, has to do with preaching before live congregations.

This application is an ideal based upon the example of Paul. It does not, therefore, call into question the legitimacy of theological programs conducted completely online any more than it calls into question the legitimacy of theological programs conducted entirely in the traditional, face-to-face format.

**Application 7: Within hybrid formats, face-to-face elements should, in general, be employed toward the beginning of the course or program.** This application stems from a method found within Paul’s strategy of exercising his apostolic mission. That is, Paul tended to appeal to his former visits within his letters and through his emissaries. While it is true that some of his letters prepared the way for Paul to visit congregations he had never before visited, such as Romans, in general the epistles appeal to what congregations had heard and seen in him in his previous visits (1 Cor 4:16-17; 1 Thess 3:4). One of the means by which Paul sought to effect social presence in his epistles was by arousing *enargeia* in his hearers, the sense that he “appeared to be practically perceptible to the senses,” and he sought to arouse this *enargeia* by appealing to his audience’s memory of him.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, putting face-to-face elements toward the beginning of hybrid courses or programs give the potential to increase the social presence within online elements.

### **Contribution of the Research to the Precedent Literature**

This thesis has contributed to the research literature in several ways. First, its interdisciplinary approach has linked three fields of study, theological educational theory, Pauline epistolary theory, and social presence theory, in a way that contributes to each of them. Second, it has provided a stronger theological basis for the theory and practice of online theological education. Third, it has opened up further avenues of inquiry.

### **Interdisciplinary Linking**

This thesis has brought together theological educational theory, Pauline epistolary theory, and social presence theory in a way that produces new understanding to each of them. With regard to theological educational theory, this thesis has applied Pauline

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<sup>13</sup>Jane M. F. Heath, “Absent Presences of Paul and Christ: Enargeia in 1 Thessalonians 1-3,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32, no. 1 (2009): 4-5.

epistolary theory to the theory and practice of online theological education. Some have related Paul's ministry to educational theory and practice, but few have related it to online theological education.<sup>14</sup> This thesis has therefore enriched the literature surrounding theological education in general and online theological education in particular by applying insights from Paul's work of theological education.

This thesis has also enriched the literature surrounding social presence theory, though in an indirect way. The purpose of this thesis was to address a deficiency in the literature surrounding online theological education. Therefore, this thesis has not deeply explored implications for social presence theory. Nonetheless, this thesis contributes to social presence theory in a small way by demonstrating that ancient theorists believed that participants in mediated discussions could have a greater or lesser sense of interacting with a real person and that this sense could be increased by attending to intimacy and immediacy. Social presence theory is a young field of inquiry; relating it to ancient epistolary theory contributes towards its credibility.

Pauline epistolary studies is a mature and well-developed field. Therefore, this thesis contributes the least to this literature base. However, this thesis has made a modest contribution. Many authors have well established *that* Paul believed his presence could be mediated by means of the epistle. Fewer have discussed *how* Paul believed his presence could be mediated by means of the epistle. This thesis, by applying social presence theory to Paul's letters, has shown how Paul attended to intimacy and immediacy to effect a sense in his reader that they were interacting with a real person. This thesis has thus contributed, though in a small and nascent way, to understanding how Paul believed his presence was mediated through the epistle.

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<sup>14</sup>Examples of those who have related Paul's ministry to education include Kent L Johnson, *Paul the Teacher: A Resource for Teachers in the Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986); Roy B. Zuck, *Teaching as Paul Taught* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); H. T. Kuist, *The Pedagogy of St. Paul* (New York: George H. Doran, 1925); Harry A. Hoffner, "The Teacher-Pupil Relationship in Pauline Pedagogy" (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1960).

## **A Stronger Theological Basis for Online Education**

By relating online theological education to Pauline epistolary theory and practice, this thesis has strengthened the credibility of using online formats in theological education. In its literature review, this thesis noted that the two sides of the debate on utilizing online formats in theological education tend to speak past one another. Those opposed to the use of online formats based their objections on theological concerns, but those promoting the use of online formats based their justifications mainly on pragmatic grounds. This thesis brought Pauline theory and practice on the use of media to bear on the use of online theological education. It demonstrated that Paul believed that his authoritative, apostolic presence could be mediated by the letter. It showed that Paul believed that his character could be communicated through the letter. It demonstrated that Paul utilized the letter as an integral part of a cohesive strategy of fulfilling his apostolic mission. Such apostolic example thus will help meet the objections of those who are concerned regarding the use of online formats in theological education and who base their concerns on theological grounds.

This thesis has also provided guidance for institutions and individuals engaged in or considering engaging in online theological education. It argues that the value of face-to-face, traditional formats should not be underestimated but rather highly valued. This insight provides guidance to institutions as they make decisions regarding their future approaches. It also provides guidance to individuals as they consider what kinds of programs they might enroll in. This thesis has also provided guidance that faculty and students should especially attend to social presence when engaged in online media. It has suggested that an ideal approach would be one that utilizes hybrid approaches to theological education. Finally, within hybrid programs, it has given guidance as to where face-to-face elements would be most beneficial.

## **Further Avenues of Inquiry Opened**

This thesis has mainly focused on the “what” of Pauline epistolary theory and

practice. It examined what Paul believed the epistle was capable of achieving within his apostolic mission, namely that it was a means of mediating his presence as part of a cohesive strategy. This issue was discussed at great length in the literature review of chapter 2 and exegetical section of chapter 3. This thesis also began to answer the “how” of Pauline epistolary theory and practice. By relating contemporary social presence theory to Paul’s epistolary theory and practice, it has suggested that Paul fostered a sense of interacting with him as if present by attending to intimacy and immediacy. This thesis has offered only a few comments on the “why” of Pauline epistolary theory and practice. In other words, it has not in any significant way explored the theological and philosophical reasons why Paul believed that the epistle was an acceptable and effective means of carrying out his apostolic mission. This is not to say that the lack of this discussion is a deficiency in this thesis. This thesis merely needed to describe the role of the epistle in Paul’s mission in order to better ground the role of online formats in theological education. However, the theory and practice of online theological education could be much strengthened by further studies that would more strongly explore the “how” and the “why” of Pauline epistolary theory and practice.

A second line of inquiry could also be pursued. This thesis has suggested that an ideal approach for theological programs would be to adopt a hybrid approach in which institutions would select the educational format best suited to teaching a subject. Further studies could be made in order to give guidance as to which formats would be most effective for which courses. Both philosophical/theological and empirical studies could be pursued. For example, when asking what kind of formats would be most appropriate for teaching homiletics, philosophical and theological studies could study the nature of Christian homiletics and make recommendations from their findings. Empirical studies, on the other hand, could study the outcomes of various approaches to teaching homiletics and make recommendations from those findings.

## Recommendations for Practice

Based upon the applications above, recommendations for practice are given:

**Recommendation 1: Institutions should develop a clear strategy for utilizing various educational formats in carrying out their missions.** Just as Paul used the visit, the letter, and the emissary as integral parts of a cohesive strategy for carrying out his apostolic mission, so also theological institutions should utilize various educational formats in a planned and deliberate way consistent with their mission and ethos. This strategy, therefore, will vary widely from institution to institution. An institution like Nashotah House Theological Seminary, in which daily Eucharist and prayer figure prominently in its ethos, will utilize various formats in very different ways from Rockbridge Seminary.<sup>15</sup> No matter what formats are utilized, they should be used in a clear and strategic way that is faithful to the mission and ethos of the institution.

**Recommendation 2: Institutions that utilize online formats should equip faculty and students to facilitate social presence.** Social presence made possible for Paul the mediation of his presence via the epistle; likewise, social presence helps to give legitimacy to online formats in theological education. Because social presence is so important, students and faculty should receive adequate preparation and resources to foster social presence. Faculty and students engaged in online formats might be required, for example, to receive training on why social presence is so important and how to foster social presence. Because social presence is so important, and because the face-to-face format provides higher social bandwidth than online formats, institutions utilizing online formats should strongly consider hybrid approaches. This is not to say that strictly online formats and programs are illegitimate. Rather, this is to say that the power of face-to-face interaction should be strongly considered when planning programs and courses.

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<sup>15</sup>Nashotah House, “Daily Worship,” accessed August 28, 2014, <http://www.nashotah.edu/about/spiritual-formation/daily-worship/>; Rockbridge Seminary, “About Rockbridge Online Seminary,” accessed September 19, 2012, <http://www.rockbridgeseminary.org/about-us>.

**Recommendation 3: Institutions utilizing hybrid formats should employ face-to-face elements toward the beginning of programs and courses.** Based upon Paul's example and the greater social bandwidth of face-to-face formats, this thesis argued that an appropriate application would be for hybrid formats to employ face-to-face elements toward the beginning of programs and courses (Application 7). This recommendation might be carried out in many different ways. For example, a hybrid M.Div. program might include an intensive residency at the beginning of the program. Hybrid courses may include classroom portions at the beginning of the semester. In general, the research of this thesis suggests that the online portions of programs and courses will benefit from such early face-to-face interaction.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This thesis has not carried over all of the applications directly to practical recommendations. One might expect, for example, a recommendation that M.Div. programs utilize hybrid approaches based upon Application 6. Another recommendation that could be expected would be that ATS continue its policy that accredited institutions require at least one year in residence based upon Application 1. This thesis has not given such recommendations out of my conviction that, ideally, those responsible for decisions regarding the use of online formats in theological education should make these decisions not out of slavish adherence to specific recommendations but rather out of informed deliberation. Therefore, this thesis' most important recommendation is its first, that institutions develop a clear strategy for the use of online formats. This thesis aims to aid such reflection by giving a deeper theological basis.

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## ABSTRACT

### THE PHENOMENON OF SOCIAL PRESENCE IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR PRACTICES OF ONLINE EDUCATION

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Many theological institutions have adopted online educational formats. Proponents of online formats in theological education have typically given pragmatic justifications for the use of online formats while the most vocal detractors of online formats base their objections on theological concerns. This thesis gives a greater theological foundation for the use of online formats in theological education by demonstrating that Paul believed that Christian formation could be effected from a distance via the epistle. Specifically, this thesis shows that Paul held beliefs about the capability of the epistle to act as a personal proxy. Paul therefore displays an educational strategy that utilizes the strengths of both face-to-face education and distance education via the epistle while compensating for weaknesses in each format. Paul's practice would suggest that theological institutions might have the opportunity to do the same: take stock of the strengths and weaknesses of both face-to-face and online formats, utilize the strengths of each, and compensate for the weaknesses of each.

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### PUBLICATIONS

"Educational Reforms of Wittenberg and Their Faithfulness to Martin Luther's Thought." *Christian Education Journal* 10 (Spring 2013): 71-87.