EFFECTIVE TECHNIQUES IN PAULINE DICTION

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I. Words at Play

Paronomasia is a figure of which St Paul is especially fond. It was dear to the prophets of Israel. In a broad way it may be defined as a playing on the sounds and meanings of words. Thus in Shakespeare's Henry IV, Act I, Scene 2, Falstaff jests with Prince Hal: "Were it not here apparent that thou art heir apparent ..."

Strictly speaking, there are two kinds of paronomasia. One involves a change of meaning caused by the alteration of one or two letters. Of this type of paronomasia Romans 1 provides instances. In v.29 we have φόνου, φόνο - '(full) of envy, of murder'; and in v.31 ἀσύνετους, ἀουνϋέτους - 'without (moral) understanding, without good faith.'

Paronomasia is especially frequent in proverbs and proverbial expressions. Instances are 'bear and forbear,' 'give and forgive,' 'toil and moil,' 'through thick and thin' etc.

The second type of paronomasia, involving similarity of sound, is the most frequent of Paul's rhetorical figures. Romans 1:28 may be quoted: καί καθώς οίκ ἔδοκμασαν τὸν Θεόν ἔχειν ἐν ἐπιγνώσει, παρέδωκεν αὐτούς ὁ Θεός εἰς ἀδόκιμον νοῦν. - 'And as they refused to have God in knowledge, God gave them up to a refuse mind.' Rather more freely, in substance Rutherford: 'Just as they reprobated the acknowledging of God, God has delivered them up to the sway of a reprobate will.'

The effect of the figure is often dependent on the presence or change of the preposition of a compound verb. Thus in Romans 2:1: εν ὃ γάρ κρίνεις τὸν ἄτρον, οεαυτόν κατακρίνεις. - 'For in the very point in which you fudge your fellow man, you adjudge yourself guilty.'

The force of the compound verb is well illustrated in Romans 12:3: μή υπερφρονεῖν παρ’ ὁ δεὶ φρονεῖν, ἀλλὰ φρονεῖν εἰς τὸ σωφρονεῖν: 'not to be high-minded above what we ought to be minded, but to be so minded as to be sober-minded.' The English attempt at reproduction is necessarily rather clumsy.

Interesting is 1 Corinthians 7:31: καί οἱ χρώμενοι τὸν κόσμον ὡς μή καταχρώμενοι - 'and those who use the world as not using it to the full' (κατά, lit. down to the ground). Goodspeed renders: 'and those who mix in the world as though they were not absorbed in it.' Rutherford has 'If you mix in the world, not identified with it.' We suggest 'participating in the world as not being part and parcel of it.'

Another striking instance of paronomasia meets us in 2 Corinthians 3:2 'You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on your' (variant reading
'our') 'hearts, to be known and read by all men' (RSV). The Greek is: γνωσκομένη καὶ ἀναγνωσκομένη ὑπὸ πάντων. N.E.B. gives 'any man can see it for what it is and read it for himself.' The Christian communities generally and in particular the church at Corinth constituted all that the Apostle could require by way of a 'letter of introduction.'

The verbs used here in their participial form - γνωσκομένη and ἀναγνωσκομένη are employed to the happiest effect in Acts 8:30: Ἄρα γε γνώσκεις ἀναγνώσκεις; The high official of the Kandake, or Queen of Ethiopia, presumably knew Greek as well as Ethiopic. He was reading from a scroll of the Greek version of Isaiah - the Septuagint (LXX).

In antiquity everyone read aloud. Silent reading was very unusual, without at least some movement of the lips. Philip the evangelist was thus able to hear what he was reading out. Rieu in the Penguin 'Acts' is superb - 'Are you really taking in what you are reading out?' The Vulgate, it should be mentioned, preserves the paronomasia in the Latin: intellegis quae legist.

The play of words involving γνώσκω - ἀναγνώσκω - καταγνώσκω is associated with the famous story of Julian the Apostate's returning the New Testament to St Basil1 with the untranslatable paronomasia: ἀνέγνωκα, ἐγνώκα, καταγνώκα: 'I read, I understood, I condemned.' To which Basil retorted: ἀνέγνωκα, οὐκ ἐγνώκα, εἰ γάρ ἐγνώκα, οὐκ ἂν καταγνώκα. - 'You read, but you did not understand; for if you had understood, you would not have condemned.'

ἀπορούμενοι ἀλλ' οὐκ εζαπορούμενοι in 2 Corinthians 4:8 is rendered by the N.E.B. 'bewildered, but never at our wits' end.' The elegant play on words may be reproduced by 'in despondency, yet not in despair' (Plummer); 'bewildered but not benighted' (Stanley). 'At a loss where to turn, yet not lost to hope!' says Rutherford. Could 'Down, but not down and out' stand?

A pungent paronomasia is found in 2 Thessalonians 3:11: ἀκούομεν γάρ τις περιπατῶντας ἐν ὑμῖν ἀτάκτως, μηδὲν ἐργαζομένους ἄλλα ἐργαζομένους. A tolerable equivalent in English might be: 'For we hear that some of you are living in idleness' (RSV) 'busy with what is not your own business.' Brunot offers in French 'sans rien faire et toujours affairés.'

The similarity of sound and meaning is fairly well preserved when the paronomasia of 2 Corinthians 10:12: οὐ γὰρ τολμῶμεν ἐγκρίναι ἢ συγκρίναι ἑαυτοὺς τινῶν ἑαυτοῖς συνιστανόντων, is reproduced as 'For we do not venture to pair or compare ourselves with some of those who are pushing their claims.' This approximation is due to Plummer.2 Paul's opponents are fluent, and confident, and get themselves accepted at their own evaluation. But 'self-praise is disparage.'

It is striking that the figures of Greek rhetoric occur in the Pauline corpus

1. c. 329-379 AD.. The administrator and prelate among the 'Three Cappadocians.' A great lover of Nature.
2. See II Corinthians in the International Critical Commentary, p.286.
more frequently and in a far more specific way than elsewhere in the New Testament. Our treatment might be further extended. Is Paul to be credited with some training in Rhetoric after all?

II. A Pauline Mannerism?

In discussing ‘The Life and Mind of Thucydides,’ W.H. Forbes observes: ‘he has a curious habit, which almost amounts to a mannerism³, of noting, not only the largest armies or navies or the greatest battles by land and sea which have taken place within a given time, but also the greatest calamities (iii. 113; vii. 25, 29, 30), the greatest panics (ii. 94; v. 66; viii. 1), the greatest conflagration (ii. 77), the most violent earthquake (viii. 41) which he has to record; ‘the very finest men who fell in this war’ (iii. 98), the greatest display of activity on the part of the Lacedaemonians (v. 64), the best defence on a capital charge (viii. 68), and even ‘the most durable counter-revolution effected by the smallest numbers (iv. 74)’. ⁴

Tyrrell and Purser, the celebrated editors of Cicero’s ‘Correspondence,’ note as one of the characteristic features of his use of words that ‘a great number of adjectives and adverbs in the language are intensified by the prefix per-, and mitigated by the prefix sub-.⁵ They list examples in the case of verbs to a rather more restricted extent. As T.R. Glover puts it, the sub- ‘serves to qualify, to tone down, what he suggests rather than asserts’.⁶ At a time when he could be sure of no secure postal transmission, Cicero was under the necessity of expressing himself with caution.

The fact that Christian life is very much a communal affair, involving togetherness, cooperation, and a whole nexus of associated ideas, receives emphasis in the language of Paul. Much of his thinking is in terms of σῦν — ‘with.’ The element in question, however, is not merely a feature of his literary style. It is indicative of something deeper. Pauline thought runs in a distinctive channel.

Σῦν is the sign-manual in Paul of friendship and of loyal association in a common enterprise. The extent to which this is true may be verified by consulting the entries in a N.T. Greek concordance. In Romans 16:3 there is a greeting for Prisca and Aquila, ‘my fellow-workers’ (τοὺς συνεργοὺς μοϋ) in Christ Jesus’; in 16:9 Urbanus is remembered as ‘our fellow-' or ‘co-worker in Christ’ (τῶν συνεργῶν ἡμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ). In Romans 16:21 ‘Timothy, my fellow worker’ (ὁ συνεργὸς μου) ‘greets you.’

3. Italics supplied.
In 2 Corinthians 8:23 Titus is spoken of as the Apostle's 'partner' (κοινωνός) and 'fellow worker' (συνεργός) in their service. And in Philippians 2:25 Epaphroditus is Paul's 'brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier' (συστρατιώτην). In the same Epistle Εἰδοδία and Σωφρήνη are entreated to 'agree in the Lord' (4:2-3), and Σύζυγος, 'a yoke fellow by name and a yoke fellow by nature' — it would seem that Paul is punning whimsically on the name of some particular associate — is instructed to cooperate with the women mentioned on the ground of their having 'co-athletised' (συνήϋλησαν) with the Apostle. The imagery is that of the games. The same verse alludes to Clement and 'the other συνεργοί whose names are in the book of life' (RSV).

In Colossians 4:10 Paul sends greetings from Aristarchus his 'fellow prisoner' (συναρχιμάλωτος), Mark and Jesus who is called Justus' as being the only men of the circumcision among his fellow workers (συνεργοί) for the kingdom of God. Timothy is spoken of in 1 Thessalonians 3:2 as 'our brother and Christ's fellow worker.' Philemon is Paul's 'beloved fellow worker' (Philemon, 1). At the end of the same delightful letter greetings are sent from Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke' (RSV), the Apostle's fellow workers (v. 24).

In 2 Corinthians 1:11 request is made for their cooperation in prayer — 'yes, he will continue to deliver us, if you will cooperate by praying for us' (N.E.B.). The invitation is, literally, for them to be 'co or joint workers by prayer (συνυπουργούντων καί υμών υπέρ ήμών τή δεήσει). In the same letter (7:3) 'the place you have in our heart,' says the Apostle, 'is such that, come life, come death, we meet it together' (N.E.B.). '... I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together' (RSV) — lit. 'to co-die and to co-live.'

Paul derives the greatest joy from the reflection that his 'friends' or 'brothers' are sharers with him. The compound forms must have been similarly full of significance for those so mentioned. They were all valued and prized members of a functioning unit of endeavour.

Compound forms in ὑπ- not only describe Paul's relations with his various helpers in the Christian enterprise. They are also used to express 'togetherness' or solidarity with Christ. This idea of identification or of mystic union meets us in Romans 6:4. 'We were co- or jointly-buried with him συνετέιφημεν by 'baptism into death' (RSV); and Colossians 2:12 refers to their having been co-buried in the act of baptism. In Romans 8:17 co-suffering is rewarded by co-glorification (συμπάσχομεν . . . συνδοξασύνωμεν).

Finally we may cite the magnificent sequence of συν- s in Ephesians 2:5,6. God 'co quickened' ('co-lived?') us with Christ' (ουμπάσχομεν . . . co-raised (συνδοξασύνωμεν) and co-seated (συνεκάυσαν) us . . . In the following chapter the Gentiles in terms of the revelation of the 'mystery' are pronounced co- or joint heirs (συγκληρονόμα), a 'joint body' and 'joint sharers' of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel (ούσσωμα και συμμέτοχα τής ἐπαγγελίας . . .) (3:6).
References might be multiplied. The material examined should be enough to show that Paul's fondness for συν- is no mere literary mannerism, oddity or idiosyncrasy. It is rather a constituent element in his understanding of Christianity.

It may be added that few of these συν- words are original coinages on the part of the Apostle. The lexicons are able to cite non-Pauline uses for nearly all of them. But it may be asserted that Paul displays a flair for taking a perfectly ordinary word and impressing on it a spiritual sense that transcends but does not distort its basic significance. He embodies in his συν- vocabulary concepts of fundamental importance for his theology.