

D. FRANCOIS TOLMIE

Pointing Out Persuasion in Philemon

History of Biblical Exegesis

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Mohr Siebeck

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D. Francois Tolmie

Pointing Out Persuasion In Philemon

Fifty Readings of Paul's Rhetoric From the Fourth
to the Eighteenth Century

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

When I started this research project in April 2014, I believed it would take me more or less six months to have a quick look at the way in which some of the Church Fathers interpreted the rhetoric of the Letter to Philemon. The “quick look” turned out to be a much longer and an enormously interesting journey, during which I was privileged to become acquainted with many theologians across the centuries whose works I had not read before, and to share their love for the writings of Paul. I have come to realise how often exegetical gems are lost as the years go by, and I trust that this book will help to give new life to some of their insights on the Letter to Philemon.

I wish to express my gratitude to my institution, the University of the Free State, which supported this research project financially, gave me abundant research leave and enabled me to visit overseas libraries and attend international conferences. I was privileged to visit the library of Princeton Theological Seminary several times (where Kate Skrebutenas always was a huge help), as well as the theological libraries of KU Leuven, Universität Wien, Universität Heidelberg and Radboud University (Nijmegen).

Without the help of John Hilton, I would not have been able to complete this study. He translated numerous Latin texts for me and responded meticulously to all my questions about the interpretation of difficult Latin texts. Alfred Friedl assisted me with the interpretation of the *Glossa Ordinaria* and also provided me with copies of many articles and extracts from books that were not available in South Africa. I also wish to express my gratitude to Chrys Caragounis, Marianne Dirksen and Zoe Tsiami, who helped me with the translation and interpretation of some of the commentaries, as well as Nanette Lötter, who did the language editing of the book.

I dedicate this book to my eternally beloved, my wife Ansa, and our children, Carmien, Francois and Mialise.

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Table of Contents

Preface	V
Abbreviations	XI
<i>Introduction</i>	1
<i>Chapter 1: The Wirkungsgeschichte of the Rhetoric of the Letter to Philemon in the Early Church</i>	3
1. Ambrosiaster	3
2. Jerome	8
3. John Chrysostom	14
3.1 Argument	15
3.2 Homily 1	16
3.3 Homily 2	18
3.4 Homily 3	23
3.5 Evaluation	25
4. Pelagius	26
5. Theodore of Mopsuestia	27
6. Theodoret of Cyrus	35
7. Cassiodorus	39
8. John of Damascus	40
<i>Chapter 2: The Wirkungsgeschichte of the Rhetoric of the Letter to Philemon in the Middle Ages</i>	43
1. Alcuin of York	43
2. Claudius of Turin	45
3. Hrabanus Maurus	48
4. Haimo of Auxerre	53
5. Florus of Lyon	56

6. Isho'dad of Merv	58
7. Sedulius Scottus	59
8. Pseudo-Oecumenius	61
9. Atto of Vercelli	67
10. Lanfranc of Bec	68
11. Bruno the Carthusian	72
12. Theophylact of Ohrid	77
13. Euthymius Zigabenus	84
14. <i>Commentarius Cantabrigiensis</i>	87
15. <i>Glossa Ordinaria</i>	91
16. Peter Lombard	96
17. Hervaeus of Bourg-Dieu	97
18. Thomas Aquinas	105
19. Pierre de Tarentaise	111
20. Nicholas of Lyra	115
21. Denys the Carthusian	120

Chapter 3: The Wirkungsgeschichte of the Rhetoric of the Letter to Philemon from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century 125

1. Desiderius Erasmus	125
2. Johannes Bugenhagen	133
3. Martin Luther	137
4. Thomas de Vio Cajetan	146
5. Heinrich Bullinger	151
6. Johannes Brenz	158
7. John Calvin	163
8. Theodore Beza	170
9. Georg Major	173
10. Lambert Daneau	183
11. William Attersoll	193
12. Cornelius a Lapide	198
13. Gulielmus Estius	202
14. John Mayer	210
15. Hugo Grotius	212
16. David Dickson	217

17. John Trapp	220
18. Abraham Calovius	224
19. Matthew Henry	234
20. Georg Michael Laurentii	240
21. Johann Albrecht Bengel	245
22. Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten	250

Chapter 4: Conclusion. Tendencies in the Interpretation of Paul's Rhetorical Strategy in the Letter to Philemon over the Centuries 259

1. Imagining the Rhetorical Situation	259
1.1 Paul's Imprisonment	259
1.2 Philemon	261
1.3 Onesimus	265
1.4 The Writing of the Letter	270
1.5 The Outcome of the Letter	275
1.6 The Division of the Text	278
2. The Interpretation of the Rhetoric of the Letter	282
2.1 Letter Opening (vv. 1–3)	282
2.2 Thanksgiving (vv. 4–7)	293
2.3 An Appeal on Behalf of Onesimus (vv. 8–14)	300
2.4 A Suggestion that Onesimus May Have Been Separated So That Philemon Might Have Him Back as a Beloved Brother for Ever (vv. 15–16)	309
2.5 A Request to Welcome Onesimus as Paul (v. 17)	313
2.6 A Request to Charge Paul and a Handwritten Promise of Payment (vv. 18–19)	315
2.7 A Request to Benefit from Philemon in the Lord (v. 20)	320
2.8 A Note of Confidence in Philemon's Obedience and a Suggestion That He Will Do Even More Than Paul Requests (v. 21)	323
2.9 A Request for Accommodation (v. 22)	325
2.10 Letter Closing (vv. 23–25)	328
3. In a Nutshell	330
 Bibliography	 335
Index of Scriptural References	361
Index of Latin Terms	364
Index of Greek Terms	367
Index of Authors	368
Subject Index	375

Abbreviations

AAWLM.G	Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz. Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftliche Klasse
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
ACar	Analecta Cartusiana
AcTh.S	Acta Theologica Supplements
ACCS.NT	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament
ACN-L	Acta Conventus Neo-Latini
ACT	Ancient Christian Texts
AHDL	<i>Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge</i>
ANCTRTBS	Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies
ARG	<i>Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte</i>
Bib. Com.	Biblical Commentaries. Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas
BCCT	Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition
BCP	Blackwell Companions to Philosophy
BCR	Blackwell Companions to Religion
BDAG	W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich & F. W. Danker, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. 3rd edition.
BDR	F. Blass & A. Debrunner, <i>Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch</i> . <i>Bearbeitet von Friedrich Rehkopf</i> . Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001. 18th edition.
BHTh	Beiträge zur Historischen Theologie
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>Bibl.Interpr.</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BMSBES	Benedictina Monograph Series: Biblical-Ecumenical Section
BMT	Bible in Medieval Tradition
BP	Bibliotheca Patrum
BPEC	Bibliotheca Patrum Ecclesiae Catholicae
BR	<i>Biblical Research</i>
BS Vulg.	<i>Biblia Sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem</i> . Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft. 2007. 5th edition.
BSIH	Brill's Studies in Intellectual History
<i>BSt</i>	<i>Biblische Studien</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>Bible Translator</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
Calv. Com.	Calvin's Commentaries
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CChr.CM	Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis
CChr.SL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
CHRL	<i>Church History and Religious Culture</i>
CEH	<i>Central European History</i>

CistSS	Cistercian Studies Series
Cont & Conf	Controversia et Confessio
Comment.	Commentaria
CFCMW	Church, Faith and Culture in the Medieval West
CIL	Classics of International Law
CHMA	Collection Haut Moyen Âge
CR	Corpus Reformatorum
<i>Cr</i>	<i>Crux</i>
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
CS	Classical Studies
CSQ	<i>Cistercian Studies Quarterly</i>
CTM	<i>Concordia Theological Monthly</i>
<i>ConJ</i>	<i>Concordia Journal</i>
CThM.ST	Calwer theologische Monographien, Reihe B, Systematische Theologie und Kirchengeschichte
CTM	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
CWE	Collected Works of Erasmus
DBTR	Dortmunder Beiträge zu Theologie und Religionspädagogik
DMMRS	Duke Monographs in Medieval and Renaissance Studies
DRCH	<i>Dutch Review of Church History</i>
DThC	Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique
EBR	Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
ECF	Early Church Fathers
<i>EOr</i>	<i>Échos d'Orient</i>
<i>ES</i>	<i>Erasmus Studies</i>
<i>EstB</i>	<i>Estudios Bíblicos</i>
<i>ET</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
FGJ	Forschungen zur Geschichte der Juden
<i>FH</i>	<i>Fides et Historia</i>
FKDG	Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte
<i>FMSt</i>	<i>Frühmittelalterliche Studien</i>
GMT	Great Medieval Thinkers
GT	The Great Theologians
<i>Grot.</i>	<i>Grotiana</i>
HBW	Heinrich Bullinger Werke
HDRPM	Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements
<i>HJ</i>	<i>Historisches Jahrbuch</i>
<i>HorSem</i>	<i>Horae Semiticae</i>
<i>HThR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HTS</i>	<i>Hervormde Teologiese Studies</i>
<i>ICS</i>	<i>Illinois Classical Studies</i>
Inters.	Intersections: Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture
<i>Interp</i>	<i>Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology</i>
JCMAMW	Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World
<i>JECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
<i>JMLS</i>	<i>Journal of Medieval Latin Studies</i>
<i>Jos</i>	<i>Josephinum</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNT.S	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOT.S	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series

<i>JThS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KLK	Katholisches Leben und Kirchenreform im Zeitalter der Glaubensspaltung
<i>KuD</i>	<i>Kerygma und Dogma</i>
Lab.	Labarinti
L&N	J. P. Louw & E. A. Nida, <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains</i> . New York: United Bible Societies, 1988.
LSJ	H. G. Liddell, R. Scott & H. Jones, <i>Greek-English Lexicon</i> . Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.
LSQ	<i>Lutheran Synod Quarterly</i>
LStRLO	Leucorea-Studien zur Geschichte der Reformation und der Lutherischen Orthodoxie
<i>LuJ</i>	<i>Lutherjahrbuch</i>
<i>LuthQ</i>	<i>Lutheran Quarterly</i>
LW	Luther's Works
LWW	Library of the Written Word
LThK	Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche
<i>MoTh</i>	<i>Modern Theology</i>
<i>MR</i>	<i>Methodist Review</i>
MRTS	Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies
MSt	Mariologische Studien
MSKGEJ	Millennium-Studien zu Kultur und Geschichte des ersten Jahrtausends n. Chr.
NA28	<i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> . Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft. 2012. 28th edition (revised).
NAKG	<i>Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis</i>
<i>Neotest</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NSHL	The New Synthese Historical Library (Texts and Studies in the History of Philosophy)
<i>NT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NT.S	Novum Testamentum Supplements
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTTS	New Testament Tools and Studies
OECS	Oxford Early Christian Studies
OHM	Oxford Historical Monographs
OODER	Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami
OrChrAn	Orientalia Christiana Analecta
OSHT	Oxford Studies in Historical Theology
OTM	Oxford Theological Monographs
OWS	Oxford-Warburg Studies
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina
PMS	Publications in Mediaeval Studies
<i>PRJ</i>	<i>Puritan Reformed Journal</i>
PTMS	Pittsburg Theological Monograph Series
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
QDGR	Quellen und Darstellungen aus der Geschichte des Reformationsjahrhunderts
QFRM	Quellen und Forschungen zum Recht im Mittelalter
QULPMA	Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters
<i>RBen</i>	<i>Revue Bénédictine</i>
R-F	Rhetorik-Forschungen
RGST	Reformationsgeschichtliche Studien und Texte
RHT	Reformed Historical Theology
<i>RHR</i>	<i>Revue de l'histoire des religions</i>
RP	Reformed Paperbacks

RRR	<i>Reformation & Renaissance Review</i>
RThAM	<i>Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale</i>
RThR	<i>The Reformed Theological Review</i>
SASRH	St. Andrews Studies in Reformation History
SBL.RBS	SBL Resources for Biblical Studies
SBL.WGRW	SBL Writings from the Greco-Roman World
SCD	Souvenirs chrétiens de Damas
SsOC	<i>Studi sull'Oriente Cristiano</i>
SE	<i>Sacris Erudiri</i>
Sem.	<i>Semeia</i>
SHL	Supplementa Humanistica Lovaniensia
SHR	Spätmittelalter, Humanismus, Reformation
SHCT	Studies in the History of Christian Thought
SiT	Studies in Theology
SKG	Studien zur Kirchengeschichte
SKZ	Sklaverei, Knechtschaft, Zwangsarbeit. Untersuchungen zur Sozial-, Rechts- und Kulturgeschichte
SPAW	<i>Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin</i>
SPB	Studia Patristica et Byzantina
SPIB	Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici
Spec.	<i>Speculum</i>
StPatr	<i>Studia Patristica</i>
SfT	Studi et Testi
STT	Studia Traditionis Theologiae. Explorations in Early and Medieval Theology
TaS	Texts and Studies
TCS	TEAMS Commentary Series
TeT	Temi e Testi
ThAthen	<i>Theologia</i> (Athens)
ThR	<i>Theological Review</i>
THR	Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance
ThTo	<i>Theology Today</i>
ThZ	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
TRE	<i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie</i>
Trad.	<i>Traditio</i>
TS	Theological Studies
T.stone	<i>Touchstone</i>
TUMSR	Trinity University Monograph Series in Religion
VCS	Variorum Collected Studies
VigChr	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
Viator	<i>Viator. Medieval and Renaissance Studies</i>
VL	<i>Vetus Latina. Aus der Geschichte der lateinischen Bibel</i>
WHCT	Westminster Handbooks to Christian Theology
WbF	Wolfenbütteler Forschungen
WSV	Wittenberger Sonntagsvorlesungen
WThJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAC	<i>Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum</i>
ZBRG	Zürcher Beiträge zur Reformationsgeschichte
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>
Zwing.	<i>Zwingliana</i>

Introduction

In 2005, I published a study on the rhetorical analysis of the Letter to the Galatians in which I opted not to “apply” a particular rhetorical model – ancient or modern – to the letter but instead attempted to reconstruct Paul’s rhetorical strategy from the text itself, thus using the letter itself as starting point.¹ Since it seemed as if such an approach could be applied fruitfully to other Pauline letters too, I decided to investigate the Letter of Philemon in a similar way. In the study on Galatians, I only offered a very brief overview of the research on the rhetoric of the letter. In the study on the Letter to Philemon, I decided to devote more attention to this aspect and thus began to look at the way in which the rhetoric of the letter was interpreted in the earliest commentaries on it. What I originally thought I would only spend a couple of months on, soon proved to be such a fascinating and interesting journey (constantly expanding!), that it put me on a new research voyage that took several years to complete. In this book, I share the results of this research with other scholars who might be interested in the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the letter and in particular, in the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the rhetoric of the letter. I offer an overview of the way in which fifty² commentators interpreted the rhetoric of the letter; beginning from the first extant commentary on the letter (the one by Ambrosiaster) up to the commentary of Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten, published posthumously (1767). To my mind, Baumgarten’s commentary represents the first commentary on the letter written in a way that would nowadays be considered characteristic of the commentary genre, and it thus served as a good place to end the overview.

I have divided this overview into three time periods, in the same way as McKim³ does in his overview of Biblical interpreters through the centuries. For the first period (Early Church), eight authors have been discussed, while in the

¹ D. F. Tolmie, *Persuading the Galatians. A Text-Centred Rhetorical Analysis of a Pauline Letter* (WUNT 2.190; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

² Take note that I actually discuss 51 commentators, but since Atto of Vercelli’s comments on the Letter to Philemon were copied from Claudius of Turin, his commentary was not included in the number above. Furthermore, take note that I use the term “commentators”, well aware that in some instances the term “commentary” does not adequately cover the contribution of a particular person. For example, Chrysostom did not write a commentary on the letter but homilies.

³ D.K. McKim (ed.), *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters* (Downers Grove IL/Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

cases of the second and third periods (the Middle Ages and the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, respectively), a number of commentaries that may be regarded as representative of what happened during these periods were selected for discussion. In the final chapter, I have attempted to draw all the lines together by pointing out the continuity as well as the diversity in the ways in which interpreters viewed Paul's rhetorical strategy over a period of almost 1400 years. I have written the final chapter in such a way that it will make sense even if one has not read the first three chapters. Additionally, I offer a very brief summary of the most important findings of the study on the last pages of the final chapter.⁴

⁴ See the section "In a Nutshell".

Chapter 1

The *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the Rhetoric of the Letter to Philemon in the Early Church

In this section, the focus is on the Patristic Era, broadly defined as stretching until the seventh century CE in the West and the ninth century CE in the East.¹ The interpretation of the Letter to Philemon in this era is scrutinised from the perspective of the way in which the rhetoric of the letter was understood. Of course, these authors were not interested in the rhetorical analysis of the letter in the sense that we are pursuing the matter nowadays; they were rather interested in what Paul was saying to the believers of their times.² Nevertheless, by reading their interpretations of the letter, one quite often gets a fair idea of the way in which they perceived its rhetorical effect, and this is the aspect that will be highlighted in this overview.

1. Ambrosiaster

“Ambrosiaster” is the name given to an unknown member of the Roman clergy who wrote a commentary on the Pauline letters in the fourth century CE. The commentary was attributed to Ambrose of Milan for a long time, and it was only realised in the seventeenth century that it had been written by someone else.³ This commentary, in Latin, was written during the time of Pope Damasus

¹ See C. Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity. With Special Contributions by Various Scholars* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2006), p. 3.

² See M. M. Mitchell, “Reading Rhetoric with Patristic Exegetes: John Chrysostom on Galatians”, in: A. Y. Collins and M. M. Mitchell (eds.), *Antiquity and Humanity: Essays on Ancient Religion and Philosophy Presented to Hans Dieter Betz on His 70th Birthday* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), p. 339.

³ G. L. Bray (transl. & ed.), *Commentaries on Galatians – Philemon: Ambrosiaster* (ACT; Downers Grove IL: IVP Academic, 2009), pp. xv–xvi. In the past, it was thought that Desiderius Erasmus was responsible for the name “Ambrosiaster”. However, this is not correct. Some scholars believe that the name was created by the Maurists. See, for example, J. Papsdorf, “‘Ambrosiaster’ in Paul in the Middle Ages”, in: S. Cartwright (ed.), *A Companion to St. Paul in the Middle Ages* (BCCT 39; Leiden: Brill, 2013), p. 51, n. 1, based on the research of A. E. C. Volgers, *A Church in Search of Answers: A Study of the Latin Quaestiones-Tradition* (D. Phil. Thesis; University Utrecht, 2005), p. 31. However, J. Krans, “Who Coined the Name ‘Ambrosiaster’?”, in: J. Krans, B. J. L. Peerbolte, P.-B. Smit and A. Zwiep (eds.), *Paul, John, and Apocalyptic Eschatology: Studies in Honour of Martinus C. de Boer* (NTS 149; Boston: Brill, 2013), pp. 274–

(366–384 CE⁴) and is the oldest extant commentary on *all* the Pauline epistles. Ambrosiaster's views have been described as “distinctively *clerical*, distinctively *moderate*, and distinctively *Roman*.”⁵ In his commentary, Ambrosiaster follows the Biblical text, adding brief comments by which he tries to present a clear account of Paul's message to educated people of his time.⁶ For our purposes in this study the following are important:

How Ambrosiaster understands what would nowadays be called the *rhetorical situation* of the letter can be gained from the preface to his commentary:⁷ Paul wrote this private letter to Philemon on behalf of his slave Onesimus.⁸ According to Ambrosiaster, Philemon was not one of the clergy but a worthy layman.⁹ Paul wanted him to welcome Onesimus back and also to thank God because he was

281, pointed out that this idea was also wrong and that the name was actually created by Lucas Brunguis in his *Notationes in Sacra Biblica* of 1580.

⁴ Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, p. 1081. The time of the writing of his commentary and the *Quaestiones* may be narrowed down to the early 380s. See D. G. Hunter, “2008 NAPS Presidential Address: The Significance of Ambrosiaster”, *JECS* 17:1 (2009), p. 7.

⁵ Hunter, “Significance of Ambrosiaster”, p. 5 (emphasis by Hunter).

⁶ Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, p. 1082.

⁷ I used the text in H. J. Vogels (ed.), *Ambrosiastri qui dicitur commentarius in epistulas Paulinas III: In epistulas ad Galatas, ad Efesios, ad Philippenses, ad Colosenses, ad Thesalonicenses, ad Timotheum, ad Titum, ad Filemonem* (CSEL 81/3; Wien: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1968). Page and line numbers are indicated in brackets according to this text. I also used the English translation of Bray (transl. & ed.), *Galatians – Philemon (Ambrosiaster)*, pp. 161–163.

⁸ Ambrosiaster, *ad Philm. arg.* (337.4–5). He uses the phrase *familiares litteras facit*, borrowed from the so-called Marcionite prologues. In the Marcionite prologues, the occasion of the Letter to Philemon is summarised as follows: *Philemoni familiares litteras facit pro Onesimo servo eius. Scribit autem ei a Roma de carcere*. See A. Souter, *The Text and Canon of the New Testament* (SIT; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), p. 206. According to J. J. Clabeaux, “Marcionite Prologues to Paul”, *ABD* 4 (1992), pp. 520–521, these prologues are first found in Marius Victorinus's commentary on the Pauline letters. The origin of the prologues is uncertain. D. de Bruyne, “Prologues bibliques d'origine marcionite”, *RBen* 24 (1907), pp. 1–24, and P. Corssen, “Zur Überlieferungsgeschichte des Römerbriefes”, *ZNW* 10 (1909), pp. 1–45, 97–102, identified them as Marcionite, but this was disputed by scholars such as W. Mundle, “Die Herkunft der ‘marcionitischen’ Prologe zu den paulinischen Briefen”, *ZNW* 24 (1925), pp. 56–77, and N. A. Dahl, “The Origin of the Earliest Prologues to the Pauline Letters”, *Sem.* 12 (1978), pp. 233–77. The Marcionite prologues became part of the Vulgate and were thus later taken up in some of the (Latin) commentaries on the Pauline letters. The expression *familiares litteras* literally means “friendly/intimate/amicable letter”. D. J. Theron, *Evidence of Tradition: Selected Source Material for the Study of the History of the Early Church, the New Testament Books, the New Testament Canon* (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1957), p. 83, and Bray (transl. & ed.), *Galatians – Philemon (Ambrosiaster)*, p. 161, translate it as “personal letter”, but V. Blomkvist, *Euthalian Traditions: Text, Translation and Commentary. Including the Appendix: Parainesis as an Ancient Genre-Designation by David Hellholm and Vemund Blomkvist* (TU 170; Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), p. 254, opts for “private letter”. G. Dahan, “L'exégèse médiévale de l'épître à Philémon”, *AHDL* 85:1 (2018), p. 17, explains the meaning of the term as an indication that the letter was not directed to a congregation. In this study, the translation “private letter” will be used.

⁹ *vir laudabilis* (Ambrosiaster, *ad Philm. arg.* [337.4]).

receiving Onesimus back not as a slave but as a dear brother.¹⁰ Further on in the commentary, some additional pieces of information are provided: On the basis of his apostolic authority, Paul was entitled to expect of Philemon to do what he wanted him to;¹¹ Philemon was a good man and about the same age as Paul;¹² Onesimus had fled to Paul for divine help during his imprisonment in Rome, and on realising his potential, Paul baptised him.¹³ Ambrosiaster also mentions that Onesimus had offended Philemon, taken refuge with Paul after a long journey and wanted to show that he was not going back to his earlier life as someone bound in sin but rather as someone whose sins had been forgiven.¹⁴

Broadly speaking, Ambrosiaster thus accepts what later became known as the “traditional view”¹⁵ on the origin of the letter: Onesimus offended Philemon in some way, fled, was baptised by Paul and was then sent back by Paul to his master.¹⁶ What is interesting, though, are some of the detail aspects which Ambrosiaster uses to fill out this view, in particular the notion that Onesimus had fled to Paul for divine help¹⁷ and that he had taken refuge with Paul after a long journey.¹⁸ Unfortunately, Ambrosiaster does not elaborate on these two comments, so that one cannot be sure exactly what he has in mind, but what is intriguing is that it seems as if he was of the opinion that Onesimus did not wander around aimlessly after he had left Philemon’s house and then met Paul by chance but that he deliberately went to him for help. This is the first occurrence of such a notion in existent literature on the Letter to Philemon and only rarely taken up in later commentaries. Also, take note that if this explanation of Ambrosiaster’s view is correct, it may serve as further proof that Peter Lampe’s interpretation of the origin of the letter is indeed accurate.¹⁹

¹⁰ Ambrosiaster, *ad Philm. arg.* (337.3–7).

¹¹ Ambrosiaster, *ad Philm.* 8–9 (338.29–339.2).

¹² Ambrosiaster, *ad Philm.* 8–9 (339.2–4).

¹³ Ambrosiaster, *ad Philm.* 10–13 (339.21–26).

¹⁴ Ambrosiaster, *ad Philm.* 15–16 (340.5–9).

¹⁵ See D. F. Tolmie, “Tendencies in the Research on the Letter to Philemon since 1980”, in: D. F. Tolmie and A. Friedl (eds.), *Philemon in Perspective. Interpreting a Pauline Letter* (BZ NW 169; Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2010), pp. 2–6, for a detailed overview of research in this regard and how this view was later challenged by scholars.

¹⁶ As Ambrosiaster’s commentary on the Letter to Philemon is the oldest extant commentary on the letter, this is the first time that we find this view expressed in a commentary. However, as M. M. Mitchell, “John Chrysostom on Philemon: A Second Look”, *HThR* 88:1 (1995), pp. 145–147, points out, this interpretation of the origin of the letter was not new and is also reflected elsewhere in literature around that time.

¹⁷ *ad divinum auxilium* (Ambrosiaster, *ad Philm.* 10–14 [339.22]).

¹⁸ *confugit longa peregrinatione ad apostolum* (Ambrosiaster, *ad Philm.* 15–16 [340.5–6]).

¹⁹ According to P. Lampe, “Keine ‘Skavenflucht’ des Onesimus”, *ZNW* 76:1–2 (1985), pp. 135–137, Onesimus should not be classified as a *fugitivus*; although he had left Philemon’s house, he intended to return to him and only went to Paul to intercede on his behalf so that he could do so. See also P. Lampe, “Affects and Emotions in the Rhetoric of Paul’s Letter to Philemon: A Rhetorical-Psychological Interpretation”, in: D. F. Tolmie and A. Friedl (eds.), *Philemon in*

With regard to Ambrosiaster's reception of Paul's *rhetorical strategy*, the following should be highlighted:

vv. 1–3: According to Ambrosiaster, Paul mentions the fact that he is a prisoner in order to indicate the importance of his letter. Ambrosiaster also points out that to be imprisoned for something wrong, was shameful but to be imprisoned for Christ, should be regarded as the height of glory.²⁰

v. 7: Ambrosiaster interprets the reason for the joy that Paul expresses regarding Philemon's refreshing of the "entrails"²¹ of the saints as follows: This commendable behaviour of Philemon in providing for the needs of the saints makes Paul confident that he will also obey his request because Paul is of a higher rank than the saints that he helped.²²

vv. 8–9: Ambrosiaster highlights the fact that Paul appeals to Philemon instead of ordering him. Paul has the right to order him, "his disciple", because he has the apostolic authority to do so but seeing that Philemon is a good man, Paul rather appeals to him to comply with his wishes because of his love for Paul. Furthermore, Philemon is almost the same age as Paul and also a "prisoner for Christ",²³ which means that he has to do the Lord's work.²⁴

vv. 10–14: In his discussion of these verses in which Paul begs Philemon "for his 'son', Onesimus", Ambrosiaster again mentions Paul's authority and points out that he does not use it. Instead, he humbles himself, according to Ambrosiaster, a very praiseworthy thing to do for such a prominent person as Paul.²⁵

vv. 15–16: That Paul calls Onesimus Philemon's brother both in the flesh and in the Lord, is interpreted by Ambrosiaster as a way of humbling Philemon. Ac-

Perspective. Interpreting a Pauline Letter (BZNW 169; Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2010), pp. 62–65.

²⁰ Ambrosiaster, *ad Philm.* 1–3 (337.8–338.5).

²¹ The term *σπλάγχνα* referred to one's entrails and figuratively, to the seat of one's emotions ("heart"). See BDAG (*σπλάγχνον*). It was also used (especially at later stage) to refer to somebody's children. See G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), *σπλάγχνον*. In Latin, the situation is more or less the same: the word *viscera* refers to one's entrails and in a transfigurative sense to the seat of one's emotion, as well as to one's children. See P. G. W. Glare (ed.), *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012 [1982], 2nd edition), *uisus*. As will be seen in the rest of this study, the different ways in which the two terms could be interpreted gave rise to a diversity of interpretations in commentaries.

²² Ambrosiaster, *ad Philm.* 7 (338.19–24).

²³ The version of the *Vetus Latina* that was used by Ambrosiaster reads *cum talis sis* (Ambrosiaster, *ad Philm.* 7 [338.27–28]), thus referring to Philemon also. All the other manuscripts of the *Vetus Latina* also read *sis* (with some variation in word order). See H. J. Frede (ed.), *Epistula ad Philemonem* (VL 25; Freiburg: Herder, 1983), p. 981. The reading in the Vulgate is similar: *cum sis talis*. As M. Barth and H. Blanke, *The Letter to Philemon. A New Translation with Notes and Commentary* (ECC; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), p. 320, point out, a correct Latin translation of the Greek would have been *cum sim talis*, or *cum talis sim* – as Erasmus had already pointed out. See also n. 39 in Chapter 3.

²⁴ Ambrosiaster, *ad Philm.* 8–9 (338.25–339.9).

²⁵ Ambrosiaster, *ad Philm.* 10–14 (339.10–26).

ording to him, Paul does so in order to prevent him from taking a conceited approach to Onesimus, as masters often do.²⁶

v. 17: Ambrosiaster regards Paul's request to Philemon to receive Onesimus as he would receive him (i. e., Paul), as a means of scaring Philemon into taking Onesimus back, in case he may not be persuaded to take him back out of love.²⁷

v. 18: Ambrosiaster interprets Paul's remark that Philemon may charge anything that Onesimus owes him to his account as a way of removing any reason that Philemon may still have for being angry at Onesimus and for finding it impossible to forgive him.²⁸

vv. 20–21: Ambrosiaster views these verses as a gentle treatment of Philemon so that he will obey Paul voluntarily. According to Ambrosiaster, such an approach might work since it is normally the case that people who know that they are thought well of do more than is expected of them.²⁹

v. 22: Paul's request for accommodation is interpreted by Ambrosiaster as a measure of ensuring Philemon's obedience. This is the case since people who are absent are usually easily ignored.³⁰

Evaluation

With regard to the way in which Ambrosiaster understands Paul's rhetorical strategy in the letter, three aspects should be highlighted.

Firstly, the interesting way in which he understands the rhetorical purpose of some of Paul's remarks must be pointed out. In the case of vv. 1–3, he interprets Paul's reference to himself as a "prisoner of Christ" as a way of indicating the importance of his letter. And in the case of v. 7, it is important to take note that Paul's reference to the other saints whose "entrails"³¹ Philemon refreshed is interpreted by Ambrosiaster not so much as a compliment to Philemon but rather as an indication that Philemon will have to obey Paul since he is of higher rank than the saints already helped by Philemon.

Secondly, for Ambrosiaster the authority and rank that Paul has, play an important role in his rhetorical strategy. Ambrosiaster mentions this several times (see his comments on vv. 7, 8–9 and 10–13). He also points out that, in some instances, Paul chose not to base his rhetorical strategy on his authority. For example, in vv. 8–9, Paul begs Philemon rather than ordering him because Philemon is a good man; and in vv. 10–14, Paul again humbles himself by begging Philemon.

²⁶ Ambrosiaster, *ad Philm.* 15–16 (340.1–15).

²⁷ Ambrosiaster, *ad Philm.* 17 (340.16–21).

²⁸ Ambrosiaster, *ad Philm.* 18 (340.23–341.3).

²⁹ Ambrosiaster, *ad Philm.* 20–21 (341.11–18).

³⁰ Ambrosiaster, *ad Philm.* 22 (341.19–23).

³¹ See n. 21 above on the term "entrails".

Thirdly, it seems as if Ambrosiaster is of the opinion that Paul might have foreseen that Philemon would not be persuaded so easily and that Paul therefore also has to make use of other rhetorical strategies in order to achieve his goals. For example, Ambrosiaster interprets v. 17 (“Receive him as if me”) as a way of scaring Philemon into taking Onesimus back, v. 18 (“Charge it to my account”) as Paul’s way of removing any anger that Philemon may have had and v. 22 (Paul’s request for accommodation) as another way of putting pressure on Philemon.

2. Jerome

Jerome wrote his commentary³² on the Letter to Philemon between 386 and 388 CE, i. e., shortly after he had settled in Bethlehem. It represents the first of his exegetical works on the Pauline letters.³³ In his explanation of the letter, he depended mainly on Origen’s commentary on the letter (which has unfortunately been lost); to such an extent that we may even assume that through Jerome’s work on Philemon, we have access to Origen’s interpretation of it, which probably was the first written interpretation of this letter.³⁴ Jerome’s work on Philemon is much longer than that of Ambrosiaster, whose commentary Jerome ignored – there was not much love lost between the two of them!³⁵

The nature of Jerome’s four commentaries on Paul is aptly summarised by Gorday:³⁶

³² As A. Friedl, “St Jerome’s Dissertation on the Letter to Philemon”, in: D. F. Tolmie and A. Friedl (eds.), *Philemon in Perspective. Interpreting a Pauline Letter* (BZNTW 169; Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2010), p. 294, points out, strictly speaking, Jerome does not call his study on Philemon a “commentary”. He uses the word *dissero* (“discuss”) in the introduction to this work and later refers to it as an *interpretatus* in the introduction to his work on Galatians, in which he mentions his work on Philemon. He completed the latter a few days before he started working on Galatians. In view of the foregoing, Jerome’s work on Philemon may be called either a “dissertation” or an “interpretation”. Friedl opts for “dissertation”.

³³ Friedl, “St Jerome’s Dissertation”, pp. 289–290.

³⁴ Friedl, “St Jerome’s Dissertation”, p. 291. See also the detailed investigation of this issue by R. E. Heine, “In Search of Origen’s Commentary on Philemon”, *HTR* 93:2 (2000), pp. 117–133. Take note of Heine’s conclusion: “We may, therefore, be fairly confident that in this commentary we have the exposition of Origen dressed in the garb of Jerome’s Latin. This, in turn, means that we have a commentary on Philemon from the mid-third century rather than from the late fourth century. Furthermore, it makes the exposition contained in the commentary the earliest known exposition of the Epistle to Philemon. Indeed, this exposition, in all likelihood, represents the first commentary ever written on the epistle” (p. 133).

³⁵ Ambrosiaster opposed Jerome’s revision of the Latin translation of the Bible and he may be one of the “two-legged asses” mentioned by Jerome in this regard. See the discussion by Hunter, “Significance of Ambrosiaster”, p. 10.

³⁶ P. J. Gorday (ed.), *Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (ACCS.NT 9; Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity, 2000), p. xxv.

As elsewhere in his work Jerome reveals a constant concern for the *hebraica veritas*, for the background in Hebrew and Jewish language and culture, as the key to understanding some obscurity in Paul's statements. He also has a fine sense for the various qualifications and nuanced modulations that Paul introduces into arguments. Unlike Chrysostom, who tends to see these as equivocations that protect the feelings and sensibilities of his readers, Jerome sees them as the balancing tools of a good scholar who wishes to state his arguments with dialectical precision. In the fashion of the Greek exegetes on whom Jerome modeled himself, he saw his exegetical work in terms of the removal of obscurities and the deft balancing of various interpretative options inherited from his predecessors, so that the reader might make judicious and informed decisions.

For the purpose of this study, the following should be noted:

Jerome understands the *rhetorical situation* of the letter as follows: Paul was in prison in Rome, "chained up", as Jerome puts it,³⁷ from where he wrote the Letter to Philemon at the same time that he wrote the Letters to the Philippians, the Colossians and the Ephesians.³⁸ The recipient of this particular letter was Philemon, who was a Colossian, like his slave Onesimus. Paul sent Onesimus (accompanied by Tychicus) to Colossae with two letters: one was meant for the whole congregation, and the other one was a private letter with recommendations to Onesimus's master.³⁹

Jerome explains the events giving rise to Paul's letter as follows: Onesimus stole some of his master's possessions and then fled to Italy where he knew he would not be apprehended easily. There, through an extravagant lifestyle, he wasted the money that he got for the stolen possessions.⁴⁰ However, everything changed when he met Paul: he genuinely repented of his sins, was baptised by him and thus had Paul himself as a witness of his conversion.⁴¹ Thus, from being a runaway slave and a thief, he was asked to become Paul's helper, his *minister*.⁴² Jerome links the service that Onesimus rendered to Paul's own ministry. According to him, the only ministry that Paul had was the gospel of Christ. By becoming Paul's *minister*, Onesimus thus became involved in the same ministry as Paul. This means that Onesimus had become Philemon's "fellow-slave and

³⁷ Jerome, *ad Philm.* 1–3 (84.82). I used the critical edition of F. Bucchi (ed.), *Commentarii in epistulas Pavli apostoli ad Titum et ad Philemonem* (CChr.SL 77C; Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 75–106, citing page and line numbers in brackets according to this text. I also consulted the English translation of Jerome's commentary on the Letter to Philemon by T.P. Scheck (transl.), *St. Jerome's Commentaries on Galatians, Titus, and Philemon* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), pp. 351–382.

³⁸ Jerome, *ad Philm.* 1–3 (84.82–84).

³⁹ Jerome, *ad Philm.* 1–3 (85.107–113). The expression that he uses is *privata et ... commendatrix ... littera* (85.112–113). Later on, Jerome also claims that Paul did not dictate the Letter to Philemon – as was his usual practice – but wrote it with his own hand. See Jerome, *ad Philm.* 19 (99.481–483).

⁴⁰ Jerome, *ad Philm.* 8–9 (94.336–339). Jerome deduces this from Paul's statement in v. 19 that he will repay anything that Onesimus owes Philemon.

⁴¹ Jerome, *ad Philm.* 8–9 (94.344–348).

⁴² *minister Apostoli* (Jerome, *ad Philm.* 8–9 [94.352–353]).

fellow-evangelist”;⁴³ like Philemon, he was “a slave and a minister of Christ”.⁴⁴ Further on, Jerome again refers to this idea several times: in his comments on vv. 10–13, he speaks of Onesimus’s ministry in the gospel as something that was established in chains;⁴⁵ in his comments on the next two verses, he refers to Onesimus who became “a minister of the gospel” because he had fled from his master;⁴⁶ and in the explanation of v. 20, he mentions the possibility that Onesimus will be refreshed by receiving religious instruction from Philemon.⁴⁷ Thus, Jerome’s view on this matter differs from that of Ambrosiaster. Onesimus would not return to Philemon’s household to continue his work as a slave; his life (as a slave) would be devoted to the spreading of the gospel, just like that of Paul and Philemon.

In his discussion of the contents of the letter itself, Jerome’s focus does not fall on Paul’s *rhetorical strategy*. He is mostly interested in the meaning and the theological implications of the text. For example, in the case of v. 14, where Paul writes that he does not want to do anything without Philemon’s consent so that his good deed might be voluntary and not forced, Jerome does not discuss the strategy that Paul follows in this instance at all but immediately moves to a theological issue, namely, why God did not create humankind good.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, occasionally Jerome does refer to Paul’s strategy or the effect that the letter might have had on Philemon. These instances will now be discussed.

vv. 1–3: In his discussion of this part of the letter, Jerome mentions two issues that are related to rhetorical aspects. First, he interprets Paul’s reference to himself as “a prisoner of Christ” as a way of enhancing his authority. He describes it as “an authority of chains”,⁴⁹ something that will help Paul to get what he wants: Onesimus.⁵⁰ Second, Jerome refers to the fact that Paul also mentions the co-writer, Timothy. According to him, Paul’s reason for doing so is that the letter will have more authority because it does not come from one person only.⁵¹

vv. 4–6: Jerome points out that the first three verses are addressed to Philemon, Apphia⁵² and Archippus (i. e., except for the words “and the church that is in your

⁴³ *sed quasi a conseruo et coeuagelista* (Jerome, *ad Philm.* 8–9 [95.355]).

⁴⁴ *seruus ... et minister* (Jerome, *ad Philm.* 8–9 [95.355–356]).

⁴⁵ *ministrum Euangelii in uinculis constituti* (Jerome, *ad Philm.* 8–9 [94.380–381]).

⁴⁶ *minister Euangelii* (Jerome, *ad Philm.* 15–16 [98.437]).

⁴⁷ Jerome, *ad Philm.* 20 (101.517–519).

⁴⁸ Jerome, *ad Philm.* 14 (96.390–410).

⁴⁹ *auctoritas uinculorum* (Jerome, *ad Philm.* 1–3 [84.71]).

⁵⁰ Jerome, *ad Philm.* 1–3 (83.65–84.73).

⁵¹ Jerome, *ad Philm.* 1–3 (86.138–143).

⁵² For an overview of the way in which Paul’s reference to Apphia was interpreted by Patristic exegetes, see D. F. Tolmie, “The Reception of Apphia in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries CE”, in: D. F. Tolmie (ed.), *Perspectives on the Socially Disadvantaged in Early Christianity* (AcTh.S 23; Bloemfontein: SunMedia, 2016), pp. 282–300. Also take note that I use the (Greek) spelling, i. e., “Apphia”, throughout this study.

Index of Scriptural References

Old Testament

Genesis

15:17 165
45:1–28 12, 22, 310

Exodus

17:12 287

Deuteronomy

6:5 116

1 Chronicles

22:10 116

Proverbs

16:31 223

Isaiah

8:1 106

Daniel

7:1–28 223

Ecclesiasticus

33:31 107

44:17 112

New Testament

Matthew

5:29–30 116
11:26 137
18:23–35 156, 178

John

6:29 134

Acts

7:1–60 206
9:15 106
28:30 202

1 Corinthians

4:18–20 182, 326
7:21 207, 274
16:18 215, 299

Galatians

3:13 184

Ephesians

3:1 184

Colossians

4:9 154, 176, 189
4:17 59, 141, 176, 195, 205, 211, 215,
222, 289–290

Philemon

1 6–7, 10, 16, 29, 35–36, 44, 47,
50, 54, 57, 64, 70, 74, 79, 85, 89,
93–94, 98, 101, 109–110, 112–119,
123, 130, 135, 139–140, 142,
145–146, 149, 153–154, 160, 167,
175, 177, 182, 184–185, 194–195,
200, 205–206, 211, 215, 219, 222,
227–228, 231, 236–237, 240–242,
247–248, 252–253, 280–287, 292
2 6–7, 10, 15–16, 29, 34–36, 50,
57, 64, 74, 80, 85, 89, 91, 94, 101,
105, 109–110, 113–114, 118–120,
123, 131, 135, 140, 142, 145–146,
153–154, 167, 171, 175, 177, 184,
186, 193–195, 200, 205, 211, 215,
219, 222, 228–229, 231, 237, 240,
242, 248, 253–254, 280–282,
287–292, 331

- 3 6-7, 10, 16, 26, 36, 47, 57, 64,
66, 80, 109, 113, 118, 140, 146,
149, 154, 175, 178, 183, 186, 195,
200, 211, 219, 222, 228, 230-231,
236-237, 240, 242, 253-254,
280-282, 292
- 4 10-11, 18, 26, 30, 37, 44, 54, 64,
75, 77, 80, 94, 102, 109, 113-114,
118, 131, 142, 145, 149, 155, 160,
171, 175, 178, 182-184, 186, 195,
211-212, 219, 228, 230-231, 237,
241-243, 253-254, 257, 278,
280-281, 293-297
- 5 10, 18, 26, 37, 44, 47, 51, 55,
64, 75, 77, 80, 85, 89, 94, 102,
109-110, 113-114, 118, 123, 131,
136, 142, 149, 155, 161, 167, 175,
178, 182-183, 186, 195, 201, 205,
211-212, 215, 219, 228, 230-231,
237, 241-243, 247, 250, 253-254,
278, 280-281, 293, 295-297,
333
- 6 10, 18, 26, 37, 64, 75, 80, 83, 102,
109, 113, 118, 131, 142, 155, 167,
175, 178, 182-183, 187, 195, 205,
211-212, 219, 228, 230-231, 237,
242-243, 248, 253-254, 278,
280-281, 293, 295-296
- 7 6-7, 30, 51, 55, 64, 70, 80, 85,
89, 102, 109, 113-115, 118, 123,
142, 145, 149, 155, 161, 167, 171,
175, 178, 183, 187, 195, 201, 206,
211-212, 215, 219, 228, 230-231,
234, 237, 241-243, 248, 250,
253-254, 262, 278, 280-281, 293,
295-296, 298-299, 307, 332
- 8 6-7, 11, 19, 24, 26-27, 30, 35,
37, 44, 47, 50-51, 55, 65, 71, 75,
81, 83, 94, 102, 109, 113, 115,
118, 131, 135-136, 142, 146, 156,
161, 168, 172, 175, 179, 182, 188,
195, 211-212, 219, 222, 228, 231,
238, 241-243, 248, 253-254, 278,
280-281, 300-302, 324, 330
- 9 6-7, 11, 20, 27, 30, 35, 37-38, 44,
47, 50-51, 55, 60, 65, 71, 75, 77,
81, 84, 86, 89, 91, 95, 99, 102, 109-
110, 113, 115, 118-119, 123, 131,
133, 136, 142, 145-146, 149, 151,
156, 161, 168-169, 172, 175, 177,
179, 182, 188, 195-196, 201, 206,
211-212, 216, 219, 228, 231, 238,
241-243, 248, 250, 252-255, 257,
260, 276, 278, 280-281, 300-305,
330, 332
- 10 6-7, 10-11, 20, 31, 35, 37, 45, 47,
51, 55, 65, 70-71, 75, 81, 86, 90,
102, 109-110, 113, 118, 123, 131,
135-136, 140, 142, 145-146, 150,
156-157, 162, 166, 168, 175, 182,
186, 188, 190, 195-196, 201, 206,
211-212, 215-216, 219, 222-223,
228, 231, 236, 238, 242-243,
247-248, 250, 253-255, 268, 278,
280-281, 300-301, 305-306, 330
- 11 6-7, 10-11, 21, 26, 31, 35, 37, 45,
51, 65, 70-71, 79, 81, 85-86, 90,
93, 95, 99, 102, 109-110, 113, 118,
135-136, 143, 145, 150, 156, 162,
172, 175, 180, 182, 186, 189, 195-
197, 201, 206, 211-212, 216, 219,
228, 231, 238, 242-243, 247-250,
253-255, 260, 278, 280-281, 300,
301, 305-307, 330-331
- 12 6-7, 10-11, 13, 21, 32, 38, 45, 47,
51, 55, 75, 81, 86, 93, 103, 109,
113-115, 118-120, 123, 132,
143-144, 146, 150, 157, 162, 166,
168, 172, 175, 180, 189, 195-197,
201, 207, 211-212, 215-216,
219-220, 223, 228, 232, 236, 238,
242-243, 248-250, 253, 255, 257,
264, 278, 280-281, 300, 306-308,
315, 322, 331-332
- 13 6-7, 10-11, 22, 32, 38, 45, 48, 51,
55, 61, 65, 71, 81, 103, 109-111,
113-114, 118-119, 136, 144,
146, 150, 157, 162, 168-169, 175,
180, 182, 189, 195-196, 201, 207,
211-212, 219-220, 227-228,
232, 236, 238, 242-243, 248-250,
253, 255-256, 278, 280-281, 300,
306-309
- 14 6, 10, 48, 55, 65, 81, 86, 103, 109,
113-114, 118, 136, 144, 150, 157,
162, 168, 172, 175, 180, 182, 189-
190, 195-196, 201, 207, 211-212,
216, 219-220, 223, 227-228, 232,
236, 238, 241-243, 248-250, 253,
255-256, 274-275, 278, 280-281,
300, 306-309
- 15 6, 12, 22, 32, 48, 56, 63, 65, 70, 72,
75, 82, 84, 86, 101, 103, 109, 114,
118, 132, 135-136, 144, 150-151,
157, 162, 166, 168, 172, 175, 180,
182, 185, 190, 195-196, 202, 207,

- 211–212, 217, 219–220, 228, 233, 236, 238, 242–243, 248–250, 253, 255–256, 273, 278, 280–281, 306, 309–311, 330, 333
- 16 6, 12, 22, 32, 56, 65, 76, 82, 86, 93, 95, 109, 114, 118, 140, 157, 162, 168, 175, 181, 186, 190, 195–196, 202, 207–208, 211–212, 219–220, 222, 227–228, 238, 241–244, 247–250, 253, 255–256, 266, 273–274, 278, 280–281, 306, 309, 311–313, 330, 333
- 17 7–8, 15, 23, 33, 35, 38, 52, 65, 70, 72, 76, 82, 90–91, 103, 109, 114, 118, 120, 132–133, 144, 150, 157, 162, 175, 181, 183, 190, 195–197, 202, 208, 211–212, 215, 219–223, 228, 233, 238–239, 242–244, 249–250, 253, 255–256, 271, 278, 280–281, 313–315, 332
- 18 7–8, 23, 27, 33, 45, 50, 56, 61, 64–65, 70, 74, 79, 82, 95, 109, 114, 118, 123, 132–136, 144, 154, 158, 163, 166, 169, 175, 181–182, 186, 191, 195, 197, 202, 204, 208, 211–212, 219–220, 222, 224, 228, 233, 236, 238–239, 241–244, 247–250, 253, 255–256, 272, 278, 280–281, 315–318, 330, 332
- 19 12–13, 23, 33, 38, 45, 50, 65, 74, 76–77, 82, 87, 90, 100, 103, 109–110, 114, 118, 120, 123, 132–136, 144, 149, 158, 169, 175, 181, 183, 186, 191, 195, 197, 204, 208, 211–212, 217, 219–222, 224, 227–228, 233, 238–239, 241–245, 247–249, 252–253, 255–256, 262–263, 272, 275, 278, 280–281, 315, 317–320, 330, 332
- 20 7, 10, 12–13, 24, 33, 35, 38, 48, 52, 59, 61, 65, 72, 76–77, 82, 86–87, 90, 95, 101, 104, 109, 114, 118, 124, 132, 137, 144–145, 150–151, 158, 169, 172, 175, 182, 186, 191, 195, 197, 202, 209, 211–212, 217, 219–220, 224, 228, 233, 238–239, 242–244, 247, 249, 253, 255–256, 278, 280–281, 318, 320–323, 330, 332–333
- 21 7, 13, 24, 45, 48, 52, 56, 58, 66, 70, 72, 76, 83, 87, 95, 104, 109, 114–115, 118, 124, 137, 145, 158, 163, 175, 182, 192, 195, 197, 209, 211–212, 219–220, 224, 228, 234, 236, 238–239, 242, 245, 253, 255–257, 274–276, 278, 280–281, 318, 321, 323–325, 330–331, 333
- 22 8, 13, 15, 24, 38, 45, 48, 52, 66, 76, 83, 87, 96, 104, 109–110, 114–115, 118, 133, 148, 151, 158, 169, 175, 182–183, 192, 195, 197, 202, 209, 211–212, 215, 219–220, 224, 228, 234, 239, 242, 244, 253, 257, 260, 262, 278, 280–281, 325–328, 331
- 23 26, 64, 66, 79, 83, 91, 100, 109, 114–115, 118, 133, 163, 175, 182, 192–193, 195, 198, 209, 211, 219–220, 228, 234, 239, 242, 244, 249–250, 253, 257, 261, 278, 280–281, 328–329, 331
- 24 25, 61, 83, 91, 100, 109, 114–115, 118, 133, 163, 175, 182, 192–193, 195, 198, 209, 211, 219–220, 228, 239, 242, 244, 247, 249–250, 253, 257, 261, 278, 280–281, 328–329, 331
- 25 57, 76, 109, 114–115, 118, 124, 151, 173, 175, 182, 192, 195, 198, 204, 211, 219–220, 228, 239, 242, 244, 253, 257, 278, 280–281, 328–329
- 1 Thessalonians*
1:3 187
- 1 Timothy*
5:1 71, 95, 102, 119, 303
- 2 Timothy*
4:10 122

Index of Latin Terms

- a minore ad maius* 26, 181, 190–191, 307, 320
actio gratiarum 113, 279
adiuratio 33, 70, 76, 90, 95, 144, 315, 321
adulatio 136, 141, 145, 290, 333
adulatio sancta 141, 145, 290, 333
affectus 156, 302
allusio 175, 180, 182, 280
alter ego 132–133, 163, 271, 313
amanuensis 36, 181
amphibolia 249–250
amplificatio 144, 187, 190, 296, 312
anticipatio 180
antonomasia 229, 286
apophasis 197, 320
apostolici 12, 310
argumenta precatoria 161, 305
argumenta suasoria 161, 305
argumentatio 155
argumentum 29, 49, 62–64, 69, 73, 78–79, 93, 98, 112, 117, 129, 135, 139–140, 146, 148, 153–154, 173, 175–176, 185, 199, 203–204, 215, 228, 272, 278, 280
argumentum a contrariis 192, 325
articuli 220
benevolentia 155, 219
blandio 145, 302
brevitas 189
captatio benevolentiae 108, 118, 279
carus/carissimus/charissimus 141, 289–300
catena 62, 64, 78, 84, 278
causa 113
chirographum 136, 158, 249, 317
collega 219
commendatio 114, 157, 185, 189
commendatrix 9, 88, 272
comminatio 175, 182–183, 280, 326
comparatio ex minore ad maius 175
compassio 284
conclusio 108–109, 114, 117–118, 155, 175, 182, 247, 279–280, 321
conclusio pathetica 175, 280
confirmatio 155, 157, 189, 192, 308
confutatio 155, 175, 180, 182, 189, 280, 311
congregatio 131
correctio 162–163, 190–191, 309, 320, 325
crurifragium 63, 247, 277–278
discedo 309, 311
dispensator 55
disputatio 144–145
dissero 8
divisio 108, 112, 117, 155
divisio textus 108, 112, 117
doctor ecstasticus 120
doctor famosissimus 111
doctrina 175, 177, 270
ductus 116
duplex sensus litteralis 116
ecclesia 131, 292
enarratio 117
epilogus 158, 162, 175, 182, 185, 192, 280, 313, 321
epistola amatoria 177
epistola collaudatoria 177
epistola commendaticia 176
epistola consolatoria 177
epistola defensoria 177
epistola deprecatoria 177, 182
epistola domestica 272
epistola familiaris 247, 273
epistola inactiva 177
epistola iocosa 177
epistola lamentatoria 177
epistola monitoria 177
epistola privata 176, 272
exaggeratio 144
excusatio 192
exordium 155, 175, 178, 182, 206, 280, 296
exprobatio 177
expurgatio 177
familia 94, 149
fideiubeo 132, 317
fiducia 30, 150, 300
forsitan 12, 48, 56, 150–151, 309–311, 333
frango 156, 302
fruitio 151
fruor 150, 320

- fugitivus* 5
genus deliberativum 177
genus demonstrativum 177
genus dissuasorium 177
genus iudicale 177
genus suasorium 177
hospitium 13, 325, 327
inscriptio 108, 135, 154, 160, 175, 247, 279–280
insignia 130
insinuatio 188
intercessoria 228, 230, 281
interpretatio 162, 189, 307
interpretatus 8
inutilis 93, 300
inversio 167, 175, 181, 280, 297, 320
ita 12, 72, 95, 137, 158, 182, 209, 320–322
ius 45
ius divinum 181, 319
laudatio 161
lectio 87
lene verbum 249, 311
lenis oratio 249, 316
locus/loci 140, 142–145, 148, 150–151, 153, 184, 276, 296, 308, 327
loci communes theologici 174
loci doctrinae 175, 177
locus dialecticus 186–193, 296, 302, 308, 312, 325
locus rhetoricus 186–193, 296, 302, 312, 325
locus theologicus 187
lucrifacio 248
magister officiorum 39
materia 113
maxima disputatio 144–145
meiosis 255
mens auctoris 153
minister 9–10, 13, 94, 271, 290
minus iniquus 132, 319
mire 153, 247, 273
misericordia 284
mite verbum 249
mitigo 76, 329
mitius synonymon 249, 316
narratio 108–109, 155, 175, 178–179, 182–183, 279–280, 296
necessarium officium 168
nota/notae 108, 112
obligatio 158, 181, 317, 319
obsecro 90, 300, 303
obtestatio 173, 321
occultatio 197
occupatio 175, 180, 182, 188, 191, 207, 280, 308
officium 168, 222, 304
ordinatio 106
ordinis inversio 167, 297
pactum salutis 218
particula mitigans 249
partitio 155, 185, 228
pater familias 94, 101, 105
patronus 186, 289
paulum rerum 131, 303
paulus 132–133, 149, 303
peroratio 155, 190, 313
persecutio 118, 279
persona 155–157, 178, 296, 302, 314
petitio 108–109, 118, 123, 175, 178–180, 182, 219, 279–280, 301, 321
philosophicus 87
pincerna 228, 260
praemunitio 175, 179, 301
praeparatio 175, 179, 182, 280, 301
praeparatoria 228, 230, 281
praeteritio 208, 320
praetorium 39, 98
precator 156
preces 156, 186, 281, 302
privata littera 9, 88, 272
privatus 9, 88, 176, 272
probatio 155
prooemium 122, 185–186, 280
propositio 155–156, 182, 206, 208, 232, 301, 313, 321
pulso 200, 287
quaestiones 108, 112
quomodo 187
ratio 175, 280
reconventio 209, 320
refutatio 181–182
reportatio 106
reprehensio 155
respondeo 265
reus 191
sacramentum 90–91, 315
salutatio 108–109, 113, 117–119, 175, 178, 192, 279–280
scrinium 182
semina argumentorum 161, 296
senex 55, 71, 75, 90, 95, 168–169, 300–301, 303–304
sensus spiritualis 235
sententiae 161
servulus 153
signa 76, 318
sponsio 158, 317
sponsionis epistola 61, 317
sponsor 132, 317

- status* 177, 182, 186
studium 105, 141, 286
subiectio 187, 190, 296
subscriptio 108, 142, 148, 175, 279–280, 292
summa 188
supplicatio 113, 279
suprascriptio 108, 142, 279, 292
synecdoche 255
temperantius 90, 319
- titillatio* 142, 145, 296, 333
utilis 162, 300
utilitas 75
verbum 143, 249, 311, 306
verecundia 140–141, 145, 286, 333
viscera 6, 11–12, 40, 47, 52, 55, 61, 76, 93, 104,
120, 123–124, 132, 142–145, 207, 220, 293,
298, 300, 315, 320

Index of Greek Terms

- ἀγάπη 172, 188
ἀγαπητός 16, 33–34, 229, 282, 286, 312, 333
ἀδελφή 16
ἀδικέω 249, 316
αἰσχύνομαι 15
ἀνήκω 19, 172, 222, 302
ἀνθυποφορά 190, 311
ἀντίθεσις 190, 312
ἀντιμεταβολή 11
ἀπέχομαι 32, 35
ἀποσιώπησις 217
ἀστεῖος 247, 273
ἀσύνδετον 187
αὔξησις 144, 187, 189, 296
γέρας 223, 304
γηράσκω 223, 304
γράμματιον 38, 317
διήγησις 155
δυσωπέω 18, 295
εἰς Χριστόν 80, 83, 295
ἐκτύπωσις 191, 317
ἐν Χριστῷ 19, 302
ἐξήγησις 188, 190–191, 312, 320
ἐπάνοδος 11
ἐπίλογος 155
ἐπιτάσσω 172, 188
εὐχρηστος 201
ἔχομαι 32
ἦθος 156
ιδιόχειρον γραμματεῖον 317
κεφαλή 64, 67, 278
κοινωνία 18, 33
κοινωνός 33, 35, 82
κύκλος 11
μειώσις 188, 302
ναί 12, 24, 172, 182, 202, 209, 217, 233, 321–322
ὀνίνημι 132–133, 172, 202, 209, 224, 249, 321–322
ὄπως 187
ὀφείλω 249, 316
πάθος 156, 175, 177, 179, 182, 191, 305
παρακαλέω 172, 188, 216, 243, 248, 268
παρασιώπησις 217, 320
παρασκευή 175, 179, 182, 280, 301
παρρησία 19, 30, 172, 188, 191, 320
πίστις 155
πρεσβευτής 81, 84, 304, 333
πρεσβύτης 81, 84, 188, 243, 304, 333
πρόθεσις 155
προκατάληψις 233
πρόληψις 233, 311
πρόλογοι 63, 277
προοίμιον 155
προσλαμβάνω 21, 86, 216, 249, 255
πρόφασις 62–63
σπλάγχνον 6, 21, 24, 38, 80, 85–86, 132, 201, 298
σύνδουλος 86, 284
συνεργός 184
τάξις 186, 188
τάχα 22, 63, 172, 310
τόποι 142
ὑπὲρ δοῦλον 249
ὑπέρδουλος 249
ὑπόθεσις 14–15, 62, 78
ὑποφορά 192, 325
φιλία 33
φίλος 141
χαριεντισμός 24
χιασμός 248
χωρίζω 249, 311
ὡς 65, 82, 249

Index of Authors

- A Lapide, Cornelius 198–202, 227, 262–263, 265–266, 273, 277, 287, 298, 303, 305, 314, 322, 327, 335
- Affeldt, W. 112, 335
- Agachi, A. 61, 335
- Aland, K. 138, 246, 335
- Alarcón, E. 107, 350
- Alcuin of York 43–46, 48–49, 96, 271, 275, 294, 298
- Ambrosiaster 1, 3–8, 10, 49, 68–69, 85, 92–93, 95–96, 127, 140, 152, 154, 199, 211, 215, 229, 262, 264–265, 268–269, 272–273, 283, 294, 297, 301, 304, 312, 315–316, 320, 324–325, 331–332
- Anderson, R.D. 142, 156, 179, 187, 217, 233, 249, 335
- Angold, M. 77, 335
- Antonopoulou, T. 61, 335
- Appold, K. 225, 335
- Aquinas, Thomas 105–112, 115, 120–121, 147, 203, 206–208, 261, 266, 269, 279, 285, 298, 306, 308, 314, 318, 327
- Arndt, W.F. 6, 336
- Arnold, M. 164, 335
- Attersoll, William 193–198, 260, 281, 284, 301, 316, 320, 326–327
- Atto of Vercelli 1, 67–68
- Austin, G. 67, 335
- Backus, I. 92, 153, 165, 170–171, 187, 335, 349
- Bainton, R.H. 127, 336
- Baird, H.M. 170, 336
- Balduin, F. 229–230, 291–292, 336
- Balsarak, J. 121, 336
- Bardenhewer, O. 61–62, 336
- Barth, M. 6, 336
- Baschera, L. 152–153, 183, 336
- Basse, M. 165, 353
- Bateman, J.J. 128–132, 336
- Batka, L.U. 137, 350
- Bauer, W. 6, 336
- Baum, G. 166, 336
- Baumgarten, Siegmund Jacob 1, 250–258, 260–261, 263–264, 275, 284, 288, 292, 299, 304, 310, 318, 320, 322–323, 327, 329, 332–333, 336
- Bede 43, 46, 49, 57, 227–278, 336
- Beeke, J.R. 218, 220–221, 336
- Benedetto, R. 73, 346
- Bengel, Johann Albrecht 245–250, 266, 268, 272, 278, 280, 297, 306, 316, 322, 332–333, 336
- Benz, W. 53, 345
- Bergjan, S.-P. 153, 336
- Beutel, A. 137, 336
- Beyer, M. 173–174, 336, 344, 347, 358
- Beza, Theodore 127, 170–173, 183, 194, 199, 214, 290, 294, 299, 310–311, 321–322, 337
- Bieber-Wallmann, A. 134, 337
- Birdsall, J. 81, 337
- Blacketer, R.A. 164, 337
- Blanke, H. 6, 336
- Blomkvist, V. 4, 62–64, 277–278, 337
- Boda, M.J. 221, 353
- Böhne, W. 49, 337
- Bons, J.A.E. 190, 337
- Boodts, S. 57, 337
- Booker, C.M. 52, 337
- Boss, G. 198, 337
- Boucaud, P. 43, 46, 49, 57, 59, 337
- Boynton, S. 53, 357
- Brandy, H.C. 159, 337
- Bräuer, S. 173, 358
- Bray, G.L. 3–4, 337
- Brecht, M. 247, 337
- Brenz, Johannes 158–163, 262–263, 268, 273, 296, 303, 305, 311, 313, 317, 325, 332, 337
- Bronkhorst, A.J. 214, 357
- Brouette, É. 120, 337
- Brunnhölzl, F. 49, 337
- Bruno the Carthusian 72–77, 269, 272, 284–285, 288, 291, 301, 318, 321, 323, 329, 333
- Bucchi, F. 9, 337
- Bugenhagen, Johannes 133–137, 173, 259, 274, 297, 301, 306, 317, 337

- Bühler, A. 251, 339
 Bullinger, E. W. 180, 337
 Bullinger, Heinrich 151–158, 166, 211, 264, 269, 271, 276, 296–297, 301–302, 311, 314, 317
 Bultmann, R. 28–29, 31, 338
 Burkard, D. 203, 342
 Burnett, A. N. 184, 338
- Cajetan, Thomas de Vio 146–151, 204, 260–261, 265, 276, 285, 298–299, 311, 322, 327, 330, 333, 338
 Callahan, A. D. 14–15, 338
 Calovius, Abraham 224–234, 260, 265, 268, 274, 278, 281, 285–288, 291–292, 294, 310–311, 338
 Calvin, John 152, 163–170, 183, 194, 264, 267, 269, 274, 283, 297, 301, 304, 308, 311, 318–319, 322, 333
 Campi, E. 152–153, 338, 358
 Caplan, H. 191, 338
 Caragounis, C. 62
 Carrington, J. L. 125–127, 338
 Carson, T. 199, 356
 Carter, D. 138, 338
 Cartwright, S. 3, 53, 106, 116, 344, 348, 352
 Carvalho, C. 116–117, 338
 Casiday, A. 61, 335
 Cassiodorus 26, 39–40, 47, 273, 283
 Castagno, A. M. 61, 338
 Cerrito, J. 199, 356
 Christ-von Wedel, C. 153, 203, 338, 341
 Chrysostom, John 9, 14–26, 36, 38, 41, 58, 62–64, 66–67, 78–79, 83–84, 96, 111, 127, 130–131, 152, 165, 178, 182, 194, 199, 227–234, 252, 262, 270–271, 273, 275, 284–287, 289–292, 294–295, 301–302, 305, 307, 310–313, 316, 319, 322–327, 329, 331
 Church, F. F. 25, 338
 Clabeaux, J. J. 4, 338
 Claudius of Turin 1, 45–49, 53, 68, 259, 271, 273, 283, 298, 317, 324
 Clifton, J. 205, 357
 Colish, M. L. 96–98, 338
 Collins, A. 68, 70, 338
 Collins, A. Y. 3, 350
 Collins, T. A. 148, 338
Commentarius Cantabrigiensis 87–91, 263, 267, 270, 284–285, 288–289, 298–299, 315, 319, 321, 323, 326, 328, 332
 Conley, T. M. 84, 339
 Contreni, J. J. 53, 339
 Coppieters 't Wallant, B. 57, 342
- Coroleu, A. 214, 351
 Corssen, P. 4, 339
 Cottier, J.-F. 128, 339
 Coverdale, M. 223, 339
 Cowdrey, H. E. J. 69, 339
 Craig, E. 221, 339
 Cramer, J. A. 64, 278, 339
 Crocius, J. 228, 232, 260, 339
 Crump, D. 236, 339
 Cunitz, E. 166, 336
 Czaplá, B. 180, 339
- D'Onofrio, G. 67, 339
 Dahan, G. 4, 69, 93, 98, 108, 112, 279, 339
 Dahl, N. A. 4, 339
 Dales, D. 43, 339
 Daneau, Lambert 183–193, 262, 280–281, 289, 296, 299, 302, 304, 307–309, 311–313, 317, 320, 323, 325, 329, 332, 339
 Danker, F. W. 6, 336
 Danneberg, L. 251, 339
 Davies, B. 105, 356
 De Blic, J. 92, 339
 De Bruyn, T. 26, 339
 De Bruyne, D. 4, 69, 339
 De Félice, P. 183, 339
 De Gorran, N. 111–115, 268, 272, 279, 284, 288, 291, 294, 299, 316, 324, 339
 De Groote, M. 61, 339
 De Hamel, C. F. R. 92, 340
 De Jonge, H. J. 92, 127, 214, 340
 De Tarentaise, Pierre 106, 108, 111–115, 120, 267, 272, 279, 284, 288, 291, 294, 299, 316, 324, 348
 De Wet, C. L. 14–15, 21, 340
 Decock, P. B. 14–15, 340
 Defilippis, D. 214, 351
 Demeulenaere, R. 57, 342
 Dennison, J. T. 36, 346
 Denys the Carthusian 120–124, 264, 271, 273, 285, 287, 299, 316–318, 322, 324, 333, 338
 Di Bernardino, A. 61, 338
 Dickson, David 217–220, 264, 266, 268–269, 280, 296, 326, 340
 Dinda, R. J. 134, 340
 Dingel, I. 137, 173–174, 336, 340, 344, 347, 350, 358
 Domeris, W. R. 15, 340
 Doyle, M. A. 96, 340
 Drobner, H. R. 26, 340
 Drown, C. T. 36, 346
 Duke, J. O. 73, 346
 Dümmler, E. 45–46, 340

- Ehmer, H. 159–160, 341
 Elliott, B. 108, 354
 Elliott, M. W. 203, 341
 Ellis, A. A. 81, 341
 Emerson, N. D. 45–46, 341
 Emery, K. 120–121, 341
 Enenkel, K. 226, 351
 Erasmus, Desiderius 3, 6, 78, 92, 125–133,
 138, 151–154, 166, 171, 199–200, 204, 214,
 261–262, 265–266, 270–271, 274, 276, 283,
 285, 294, 303, 310, 316–317, 319, 322, 327,
 330–331
 Estes, J. M. 159, 341
 Estius, Gulielmus 202–210, 227, 232, 260,
 263–264, 268, 273–275, 277, 284, 288, 297,
 299, 303, 308–309, 312–313, 319–320, 322,
 324, 328, 341
 Euthymius Zigabenus 84–87, 120, 260, 267,
 285, 289, 297, 304, 308, 317
 Evans, G. R. 96, 338

 Faber, R. 125, 127–128, 166, 341
 Fatio, O. 183–184, 341
 Fausset, A. R. 247, 341
 Feenstra, R. 214, 340
 Fennell, C. A. M. 223, 314, 341
 Ferguson, J. 27, 341
 Field, F. 14, 341
 Fields, P. 164, 341
 Fitzgerald, J. T. 28–31, 33, 274, 321, 341
 Fitzmyer, J. A. 25, 125, 341
 Fleckenstein, J. 48, 342
 Flores, T. 106, 342
 Florovsky, G. 40, 342
 Florus of Lyon 56–58, 68, 283
 François, W. 203, 342
 Franssen, P.-I. 57–58, 283, 342
 Frassetto, M. 87, 350
 Frede, H. J. 6, 60–61, 85, 266, 297, 317, 342
 Freybe, P. 173, 358
 Friedl, A. 5, 8, 14–15, 28, 81, 93, 139, 265, 304,
 340–342, 348, 356, 358
 Fritsch, C. T. 247, 342
 Froehlich, K. 52, 91–93, 96, 342
 Fry, C. G. 224, 343

 Gärtner, H. A. 39, 347
 Gaskoin, C. J. B. 43, 343
 Gatti, P. 40, 343
 Geisenhof, G. 134, 343
 Gemeinhardt, P. 43, 343
 Gerber, D. A. 108, 354
 Giannelli, C. 111, 348

 Gibson, M. 68–69, 343
 Gibson, M. D. 58, 343
 Gibson, M. T. 93, 342
 Gillon, L. B. 111, 348
 Gingrich, F. W. 6, 336
 Ginther, J. R. 56, 343
 Glare, P. G. W. 6, 94, 185, 343
 Glazemaker, J. H. 129, 343
Glossa Ordinaria 52, 53, 91–97, 117, 262, 264,
 268, 271–272, 279, 284, 288, 290, 301, 305,
 312, 316, 321, 324, 326, 332
 Glunz, H. H. 97, 343
 Goodall, B. 14, 343
 Goodell, C. L. 220, 343
 Gorday, P. J. 8, 343
 Gordon, B. 152, 203, 342, 343
 Görgemanns, H. 39, 347
 Gorman, M. 45, 343
 Gosselin, E. A. 116–117, 343
 Gracia, J. J. E. 120, 341
 Green, R. 214, 351
 Greer, R. A. 26, 28, 32–33, 71, 343
 Greschat, M. 41, 346
 Grieser, H. 199–200, 343, 350
 Griffiths, R. 148, 352
 Gritsch, E. W. 137, 344
 Grosse, S. 203, 341
 Grotius, Hugo 212–217, 225–229, 232,
 260–261, 264, 266, 268, 275, 278, 290, 297,
 299, 304, 306, 309, 317, 320, 323, 332, 344
 Guggisberg, H. R. 213, 344
 Guiley, R. 111, 344
 Guinot, J.-N. 35–36, 344
 Gustafson, H.-F. 147–148, 344

 Hablitzel, J. B. 46, 49, 344
 Haimo of Auxerre 53–56, 92, 96, 262, 265,
 267, 272, 275, 283, 294, 299, 301, 303, 305,
 310, 312, 318, 333
 Hallensleben, B. 146–147, 344
 Hansen, G. 165, 344
 Hanson, C. L. 63, 277, 344
 Harkins, F. T. 106–107, 344
 Harman, A. M. 234–236, 344
 Harrington, K. P. 59, 344
 Harrison, B. 193, 210, 218, 345–346, 348
 Hasse, H.-P. 173–174, 344
 Hauschild, W.-D. 134, 344
 Hauser, A. J. 138, 356
 Havsteen, S. R. 125–127, 163, 344
 Haykin, M. A. G. 236, 344
 Hays, G. 67, 344
 Heath, M. 14, 345

- Hehl, W. 245, 247, 345
 Heil, J. 46, 49, 53, 59, 345
 Heine, R. E. 8, 345
 Hellholm, D. 155, 345
 Hellmann, S. 60, 345
 Hendel, K. K. 134, 345
 Henderson, J. R. 128, 339
 Hendrix, S. H. 137–138, 345
 Henry, Matthew 234–240, 261, 264, 267, 281, 285, 288, 295, 318, 326, 332–333, 345
 Hergenröther, J. 61, 345
 Hervaeus of Bourg-Dieu 97–105, 260, 266, 269, 275, 277, 283, 286–287, 291, 294, 301, 303, 319, 326
 Hexter, R. J. 67, 344
 Hill, R. C. 35–37, 345
 Hillerbrand, H. J. 173, 347
 Hilton, J. 40, 43, 46, 49, 54, 57, 60, 69, 73, 88, 98, 112, 117–118, 122, 140, 147, 153, 171, 173, 175–176, 179, 182, 184, 200, 204, 207, 216, 222–223, 226, 228, 270, 276, 309
 Hohl, M. 152, 345
 Holder, R. W. 96, 126, 134, 139, 147, 152, 159, 164, 166, 174, 341–342, 345, 347, 349, 352, 358
 Holfelder, H. H. 134, 345
 Holfelder, K. D. 218, 345
 Hollsteiner, J. 111, 349
 Houghton, H. A. C. 57, 62, 78, 84, 346
 Hrabanus Maurus 34, 43, 46, 48–53, 260, 268, 298, 310, 313, 321
 Hughes, K. L. 53, 346
 Hunnius, E. 194, 231–234, 310–311, 346
 Hunter, D. G. 4, 8, 346
 Hurst, D. 43, 346
 Hynd, J. E. 41, 346

 Iogna-Prat, D. 53, 339
 Irons, L. 36, 346
 Irons, M. S. 36, 346
 Iserloh, E. 146, 344
 Isha'dad of Merv 58–59, 267–269, 273, 289, 321

 Jenkins, A. 148, 346
 Jerome of Stridon 8–14, 43, 46, 49–52, 57–58, 60–61, 88, 91–92, 112, 121, 126–129, 131–132, 152, 154, 156, 158, 165, 182, 199, 201–202, 204–209, 211, 227, 231, 233–234, 240, 252, 259–260, 262, 265–267, 269, 271–272, 275, 283, 285, 293, 298, 301, 310, 317–319, 322–324, 327, 331, 333
 Jestice, P. G. 73, 346

 Jeudy, C. 53, 339
 John of Damascus 40–41, 266, 294
 Johnson, W. M. 68, 357
 Joo, J. H. 234–235, 346
 Jördens, A. 39, 347
 Jugie, M. 84, 346
 Jung, V. 225–226, 346

 Kallendorf, C. 189, 346
 Kallis, M. 41, 346
 Kalogeras, N. 84, 346
 Kannengiesser, C. 3–4, 26, 35, 40, 58, 344, 346
 Kaufman, S. 138, 356
 Keating, D. A. 107, 351
 Keene, N. 210, 346
 Kelly, J. N. D. 14, 111, 346
 Kienpointer, M. 187, 347
 Klancher, N. 221, 347
 Klink, T. 192, 347
 Klopffer, J. 160, 347
 Knape, J. 180, 347
 Knight, W. S. M. 213, 347
 Köhler, H. 39, 347
 Köhler, W. 214, 347
 Kok, J. E. 166, 214, 347
 Kolb, R. 137, 173–174, 347, 350
 Kooiman, W. J. 137–138, 347
 Kössinger, N. 49, 347
 Kottje, R. 48–49, 337, 342
 Krans, J. 3, 126, 171, 347
 Kraus, M. 156, 347
 Kraye, J. 183, 355
 Kretzmann, N. 106, 356
 Krey, P. D. W. 116–117, 347
 Kroeker, G. G. 129, 347
 Kuster, L. 247–248, 350

 Lampe, G. W. H. 6, 21, 347
 Lampe, P. 5, 11, 25, 312, 347–348
 Landgraf, A. 87–88, 97, 348
 Lane, A. N. S. 164, 348
 Lanfranc of Bec 68–73, 96, 267, 272, 274–275, 305, 313–315
 Lanham, R. A. 155, 186, 188, 197, 255, 348
 Larminie, V. 193–194, 348
 Laurent, M. H. 111, 348
 Laurentii, Georg Michael 240–245, 261–263, 266, 270–271, 273, 278, 287, 292, 304, 314, 316, 319, 324, 329, 332, 348
 Lausberg, H. 144, 155, 162, 180–181, 190, 192, 208, 229, 255, 286, 348
 Levy, I. C. 26, 53, 73, 88, 98, 116–117, 348

- Leys, K. 177, 348
 Liddell, H. G. 38, 191, 249, 348
 Lies, J. M. 173, 340
 Lifschitz, A. 251, 348
 Lindberg, C. 73, 125, 146, 152, 170, 338, 343,
 346, 351, 358
 Lindemann, A. 165, 349
 Lobrichon, G. 53, 339
 Lohse, B. 147, 349
 Lombard, Peter *see* Peter Lombard
 Longman III, T. 221, 353
 Lorrain, A. 62–63, 79, 349
 Louf, A. 73, 349
 Louth, A. 40, 349
 Louw, J. P. 349
 Lull, T. F. 137–138, 349
 Luther, Martin 92, 117, 126–127, 137–147,
 151–152, 158–159, 174, 262–263, 266, 268,
 273–274, 276, 285–286, 289–290, 292, 295,
 301–302, 306, 308, 315, 317, 324, 332–333,
 349
 Maag, K. 170, 349
 Macdonald, A. J. 69, 349
 MacDonald, M. J. 180, 349
 Mack, P. 187, 349
 MacLean, D. J. 218, 349
 Major, Georg 173–183, 261, 268, 273,
 275–276, 280, 285, 288, 290, 292, 299, 305,
 308, 311–312, 314–315, 319–321, 326, 349
 Mallinson, J. 170, 349
 Mälzer, G. 245–246, 349
 Manetsch, S. M. 167, 349
 Mann, H. K. 111, 349
 Marriott, C. 36, 349
 Matter, E. A. 92, 349
 Matthew, H. C. G. 193, 210, 218, 345–346, 348
 Mattox, M. L. 139, 349
 Mayer, John 210–212, 261, 265, 269, 278, 281,
 290, 298–299, 349
 Mayer, W. 14, 350
 McConnell, J. F. 198, 350
 McDermott, R. 116, 350
 McKim, D. K. 1, 39, 88, 116, 120, 125, 127, 137,
 164, 234, 245, 336, 338, 344–345, 349–352,
 354, 357
 McLean, M. 203, 342
 McLeod, F. G. 29, 350
 Mégier, E. 97, 350
 Melanchthon, P. 151, 166, 173–176, 180, 182,
 184, 189, 210, 280, 347
 Melion, W. 205, 357
 Merimée, J.-P. 112, 350
 Methuen, C. 137, 350
 Mews, C. J. 87, 350
 Mill, J. 247, 278, 350
 Miller, C. H. 185, 350
 Miller, J. 212–213, 350
 Mitchell, M. M. 3, 5, 14–15, 350
 Moritz, T. 200, 350
 Mortensen, J. 107, 350
 Moser, C. 152–153, 156, 336
 Muessig, C. 121, 357
 Müller, P. 152, 350
 Muller, R. 166, 347
 Muller, R. A. 125, 170, 184, 203, 210, 221, 351
 Mullett, M. 147, 351
 Mundle, W. 4, 351
 Murphy, F. A. 107, 351
 Murphy, J. J. 108, 279, 351
 Mursell, G. 73, 351
 Mynors, R. A. B. 128, 351
 Nänny, M. 11, 351
 Naphy, W. G. 164, 351
 Nasrallah, J. 41, 351
 Naumann, E. A. 116, 351
 Nellen, H. 213–214, 217, 226, 351, 356
 Neuser, W. H. 163, 351
 Ní Riain, Í. M. 121, 352
 Nicholas of Lyra 91, 92, 115–121, 124, 262,
 270, 272, 279, 307, 316, 318, 340
 Nida, E. A. 349
 Noll, R. 198, 351
 Noone, T. B. 120, 341
 Nordling, J. G. 11, 297, 352
 O'Connor, M. 147–148, 352
 O'Donnell, J. J. 39, 352
 O'Donovan, J. L. 59, 352
 O'Donovan, O. 59, 352
 O'Reilly, T. 121, 352
 Obolensky, D. 77–78, 352
 Ocker, C. 73, 346
 Olbricht, T. H. 155, 345
 Old, H. O. 234, 236, 352
 Opitz, P. 152–153, 338, 352, 358
 Origen 8, 78, 92, 128, 165, 265
 Osiander, L. 230, 352
 Ott, J. S. 67, 335
 Pabel, H. M. 128–129, 354, 357
 Papsdorf, J. 3, 352
 Parker, D. C. 62, 78, 84, 346
 Parker, T. H. L. 164, 352
 Partoens, G. 57, 337

- Pasztori-Kupan, I. 35, 352
 Payne, J. B. 127–128, 352
 Pederson, R. J. 218, 220–221, 336
 Peerbolte, B. J. L. 3, 347
 Pelagius 26–28, 60, 85, 93, 270–271, 297, 332
 Pelikan, J. 138–139, 245–247, 352
 Peter Lombard 69, 96–97, 111–112, 203
 Pirot, L. 28, 352
 Podskalsky, G. 78, 84, 352
 Porter, S. E. 155, 173, 345, 353
 Pragman, J. H. 243, 352
 Presta, J. 199, 353
 Preston, P. 148, 346
 Priesching, N. 199–200, 343, 350
 Pringle, W. 166, 353
 Pseudo-Oecumenius 61–67, 79, 82–83,
 85, 232, 261, 267, 277–278, 284, 292, 305,
 311–312, 314, 319, 327
 Pucci, J. M. 59, 344
 Pusey, E. B. 36, 349

 Quasten, J. 14, 353

 Rabbie, E. 213, 356
 Rabil, A. 126, 128, 352, 353
 Rader, W. H. 98, 353
 Rädle, F. 214, 351
 Raitt, J. 152, 170, 183, 341, 353, 357
 Rata, C. G. 221, 353
 Rayez, A. 112, 350
 Rees, V. 214, 351
 Rehbock, H. 162, 353
 Rehfeld, E. L. 165, 353
 Reid, H. M. B. 218, 353
 Reilly, D. J. 53, 357
 Reinhardt, K. 97, 353
 Reinmuth, E. 11, 348
 Reuss, E. 166, 336
 Reventlow, H. G. 117, 125–126, 213, 225, 251,
 353–354
 Ritter, A. M. 39, 347
 Robinson, M. R. 235, 353
 Rosemann, P. W. 353
 Rowe, G. O. 173, 353
 Rummel, E. 127, 353

 Saarinen, R. 183, 355
 Sacré, D. 214, 351
 Sakamoto, K. 222, 353
 Salembier, L. 202, 353
 Salomon, D. A. 92, 353
 Saunders, E. W. 78, 353
 Schaff, P. 14, 354

 Scheck, T. P. 9, 354
 Scheible, H. 173, 358
 Schindler, A. 153, 354
 Schloemann, M. 250–251, 354
 Schmeling, T. R. 225, 354
 Schmude, M. P. 188, 191, 354
 Schneider, H.-O. 174, 340
 Schumann, A. 240, 354
 Schumann, H.-G. 11, 354
 Schunka, A. 108, 279, 354
 Scott, R. 38, 191, 249, 348
 Sedulius Scottus 59–61, 266, 269, 304, 317,
 323
 Selderhuis, H. J. 163–165, 170, 183, 335–337,
 341, 344, 351, 354, 356–357
 Shepherd, V. 152, 354
 Shimahara, S. 53, 345
 Shoemaker, L. A. 88, 120–121, 354
 Sider, R. D. 128, 351, 354
 Simonetti, M. 39, 354
 Sinke, S. 108, 354
 Sloan, M. C. 59–60, 354
 Smail, T. A. 166, 354
 Smalley, B. 91–92, 354
 Smit, P.-B. 3, 347
 Smith, L. 53, 92, 116–117, 347, 355
 Smith, W. S. 128, 352
 Sorkin, D. 250–251, 257, 355
 Soulen, R. K. 188, 355
 Soulen, R. N. 188, 355
 Souter, A. 4, 27, 47, 60, 355
 Spurgeon, C. H. 210, 221, 236, 355
 Staab, K. 62, 66, 355
 Staats, R. 14, 355
 Stander, H. F. 25, 355
 Stanjek, H. 60–61, 266, 317, 342
 Stansbury, M. 49, 355
 Stegmüller, F. 69, 355
 Steinmetz, D. C. 152, 165, 355
 Stephens, W. P. 153, 355
 Stewart, A. 218, 355
 Stoelen, A. 73, 355
 Strohm, C. 183, 355
 Studer, B. 40–41, 355
 Stump, E. 105–106, 356
 Swete, H. B. 29, 32–34, 356

 Taheny, T. T. 199, 356
 Thanner, T. 203, 342
 Theodore of Mopsuestia 26–38, 49–50, 52,
 58, 68–69, 71–72, 78, 268–269, 273, 276,
 288–289, 294, 303, 305–307, 311–314, 318,
 320–321, 331, 333

- Theodoret of Cyrus 35–38, 41, 64, 129, 154,
171, 199–200, 203, 205, 211, 222, 227–230,
232–233, 241, 263, 277, 288, 291, 297,
303–305, 307, 314, 317, 321, 331, 333
- Theophylact of Ohrid 62, 77–84, 127, 184,
188, 194, 199, 208, 229–234, 270, 273–274,
284–286, 291–292, 295, 298, 301, 304, 310,
314, 319, 326–328, 333
- Theron, D. J. 4, 356
- Thompson, A. J. 246, 356
- Thompson, C. R. 78, 356
- Thompson, J. L. 165–166, 347, 356
- Thompson, M. D. 138, 356
- Thurén, L. 14, 356
- Tilley, M. P. 223, 309, 356
- Tolmie, D. F. 1, 5, 8, 10, 14–15, 17, 28–29, 37,
139, 340–342, 348, 356, 358
- Torrell, J.-P. 105–106, 356
- Townsend, D. 67, 344
- Trapman, J. 213, 356
- Trapp, John 220–224, 263, 266, 269, 277–288,
290, 304, 309, 314, 316, 324, 332, 356
- Trumbore Jones, A. 67, 335
- Turner, D. 121, 357
- Tweedie, W. K. 218, 357
- Ueding, G. 11, 156, 162, 180, 188–190, 192, 337,
339, 346–347, 353–354, 358
- Uffenheimer, B. 213, 353
- Urbainczyk, T. 35, 357
- Van Hogendorp Prosperetti, L. 205, 357
- Van Liere, F. 53, 357
- Van Poll-van de Lisdonk, M. L. 127, 129–130,
357
- Van Stam, F. P. 163, 357
- Van Unnik, W. C. 214, 357
- Vess, D. 68, 357
- Vessey, M. 128–129, 354, 357
- Viller, M. 112, 350
- Vogels, H. J. 4, 357
- Volgers, A. E. C. 3, 357
- Volk, R. 41, 357
- Von Liliencron, R. 240, 354
- Walchenbach, J. R. 165, 357
- Walter, N. 11, 348
- Walton, R. C. 152, 357
- Wartenberg, G. 173–174, 336, 344, 347,
358
- Watson, D. F. 138, 356
- Weaver, R. H. 73, 346
- Weborg, C. J. 245–246, 357
- Weemans, M. 205, 357
- Weinandy, T. G. 107, 351
- Weisheipl, J. A. 105–106, 357
- Wemple, S. F. 46, 67–68, 358
- Wengert, T. J. 173–176, 358
- Wessner, P. 216, 358
- Westerholm, S. 164, 348
- Wicks, J. 146–148, 358
- Wilken, R. L. 14, 358
- Williams, C. A. 218, 358
- Williams, J. B. 235, 358
- Wilson, A. 25, 358
- Withington, P. 210, 358
- Wöhrle, G. 162, 190, 358
- Wolter, M. 139, 358
- Wood, A. S. 116, 358
- Woods, M. 214, 351
- Wriedt, M. 173, 358
- Wright, S. D. 170, 358
- Wulf, C. 214, 351
- Yamauchi, E. M. 126–127, 359
- Yocum, J. P. 107, 351
- Zechiel-Eckes, K. 56, 359
- Zimmermann, H. 48–49, 337, 342
- Zwiep, A. 3, 347

Subject Index

- a while (Philm. 15) 65, 82, 84, 86, 144, 168, 185, 196, 238, 311
Abelard 87–88
accommodation (Philm. 22) 7–8, 13, 15, 18, 38, 48, 52, 56, 63, 66, 76, 83, 87, 94, 96, 104, 110–111, 114–115, 118, 133, 137, 151, 158, 169, 183, 192, 198, 202, 209, 212, 220, 224, 228, 234, 239, 244, 252–253, 255, 257, 279, 281, 262–263, 279, 294, 325–328, 331
adjudation 76, 90, 95, 144, 315, 332
admiration (for Paul's rhetoric) 29, 38, 137, 176, 182, 204, 211, 221–224, 275–277, 305, 324
admonishment 64, 79, 94, 243, 284–285
Ado 227–278
advantage/benefit 13, 22–24, 31–33, 38, 41, 44, 47–48, 65, 71–72, 77, 82, 87, 89, 121, 132, 135–136, 157, 168, 180, 186, 190–191, 197, 206–209, 217, 220, 239, 273–274, 281, 299, 306, 311–312, 320–322, 324, 330
adverb 56, 182, 209, 233, 239, 322
affirmation 137, 168, 172, 209, 322
Agobard 56
allegorical interpretation 116, 165
allegorical sense 199
allusion 136, 149–150, 156, 172, 175, 180, 182, 196, 201–202, 206, 209, 212, 221, 224, 238, 249, 280–281, 306
ambassador 81, 84, 213–214, 304, 333
ambiguity 12, 67, 249
Ambrose of Milan 3, 57, 92, 96, 121, 154, 165, 199, 211
amen (Philm. 25) 244, 328–329
amplification 144, 161, 187, 189–190, 196–197, 296, 312
anagogical sense 199
anger 7–8, 16, 20–21, 23, 65, 81–82, 86, 112, 158, 168, 176, 178, 186, 190, 196, 231, 233, 236, 238, 264, 289, 302, 305–308, 311, 316, 332
Anselm of Laon 92, 96–97
Antiochian exegesis 36, 84
antithesis 138, 188, 201
Apollonarios 78
apostle *see* Paul, apostle
apostles 50, 129, 185
apostolic 12, 51, 103, 310
appeal 6, 11, 17, 20, 31, 33, 37, 40, 64, 67, 80, 86, 93, 140, 142, 145–146, 157–158, 161, 168–169, 172, 188, 190, 196, 206, 212, 216–217, 222, 231, 248, 255, 257, 279, 281, 291–292, 300–302, 313, 321–322, 330
appeasing/pacifying/soothing 12, 20, 65, 67, 70, 81–82, 95, 142–143, 145, 168, 196, 202, 249–250, 302, 307–308, 311, 322, 330
Apphia (Philm. 2) 10, 17, 29–30, 37–38, 47, 50, 54, 74, 77, 80, 85, 89, 91, 94, 101, 105, 114, 119, 123, 131, 135, 141, 146, 149, 154–155, 171, 177–178, 186, 195, 205, 219, 222, 229, 237, 242, 248, 254, 264, 282, 287–291, 293, 296, 330–331, 333
Apollonius Dyscolus 249
Archippus (Philm. 2) 10, 17, 30, 37, 47, 50, 54, 59, 74, 77, 80, 85, 89, 94, 101, 114, 119, 123, 131, 135, 141, 145–146, 149, 151, 154–155, 160, 167, 169, 171, 176, 178, 186, 195, 199–201, 205, 211, 215, 219, 222, 229, 237, 242, 254, 263–264, 282, 287, 289–291, 293, 330, 331
argument 9, 15–16, 18, 21, 26, 63, 73, 97, 111, 135, 137, 142–146, 149, 155–157, 161–162, 168, 175–176, 180–183, 186–193, 196–197, 207–212, 219, 227, 231–232, 237–239, 245, 248, 280–281, 296, 302, 305–308, 311–314, 319–320, 325
Aristotle 199, 222, 224, 324
Athanasius 78, 184
Augustine 26, 43, 46, 56–57, 68, 92, 96, 121, 128, 139, 165, 203, 223
authority of chains 10, 47, 50, 57, 58, 101, 283 (*see also* chains)
authority *see* Paul, authority
begging 6–7, 11–12, 24, 27, 29, 34, 36, 44, 47, 51–52, 55, 60, 64–65, 71, 80–83, 90, 93, 98, 100–103, 109–110, 113–114, 133, 135, 140, 149, 151, 156, 160–161, 166–167, 175–176, 179–180,

- 184–187, 190, 195, 201–202, 205, 216, 219, 223, 229, 237–238, 242–243, 253, 255–256, 273, 276, 283, 287, 291, 302–303, 305, 321, 328
- beloved 17, 23, 29–30, 32–33, 37, 56, 64, 78–80, 85–87, 93, 95, 101, 119, 123, 132, 140–141, 143, 145–146, 149, 157, 162, 177–178, 185–186, 190, 195–196, 200, 208, 229, 232, 236, 254, 279, 282, 286, 288, 298, 306–307, 309, 312, 333
- benediction (Philm. 25) 76–77, 124, 151, 220, 239, 244, 253, 257, 329
- benefit *see* advantage
- Bentley, Richard 81
- Bernard of Clairvaux 96
- bishop 46, 54, 58–59, 61–62, 67–68, 89, 96, 101, 105, 111, 114, 123, 135, 141, 147, 149, 154, 176, 178, 199–200, 204–205, 211, 215, 227, 229, 242, 261, 264, 277–278, 289–290, 331
- blame 28, 186, 189, 281
- blessing 118, 211, 241
- boast 37–38, 57, 129
- body 18–19, 99, 123, 149–150, 167, 192, 201, 206, 255, 260, 298–299, 307
- bold/boldness *see* confidence
- Bradford, John 223
- brevity 27, 154, 189, 197, 211, 276
- Bucer, Martin 158, 166
- Calendars of the Greeks 227–278
- Canisius, Henricus 205
- chains 9–12, 16, 20, 31–32, 47–48, 50, 57–58, 60, 71, 74, 79, 89, 98–99, 101–102, 132, 136, 150, 157, 167, 180, 215, 223, 240, 248, 259–260, 283–285, 300, 306, 309 (*see also* authority of chains)
- charity 113, 115, 129, 134, 228, 232
- chiasm/chiastic 11, 37, 136, 155, 161, 167, 187, 195, 201, 205, 215, 243, 248, 250, 297, 306, 331, 333
- childbirth 31, 306
- children 6, 21, 31, 47, 54–55, 89, 115, 132, 136, 178–179, 262, 298–299, 306, 332
- Church Fathers 3–40, 56, 151–152, 165, 199, 203, 210, 252
- Cicero 110–111, 200, 224, 262, 324
- classical rhetoric 11, 175, 193
- Clem. 6235 (document) 60
- Clementine Constitutions 227–278
- climax 33, 35, 313
- Colossae 9, 26, 36, 44, 46, 83, 94, 99, 108, 112, 114, 122–123, 141, 160, 176, 178, 194–195, 198–200, 204–205, 207, 210–211, 215, 219, 222, 227, 229, 236–237, 241–242, 252, 262–264, 290, 327, 332
- command/demand/order 6–7, 11, 19–20, 28, 30, 37, 44, 47, 51, 55, 60, 65, 71, 75, 93–94, 101–102, 104, 110–111, 113, 115–116, 119–120, 131–132, 136, 142, 145–146, 157, 161, 168, 172, 179, 191, 195, 206, 219, 221, 231, 238, 248, 255–257, 279, 284, 296, 301–303, 319, 327, 330 (*see also* force)
- Commentarius Cantabrigiensis* 87–91, 263, 267, 270, 284–285, 288–289, 298–299, 315, 319, 321, 323, 326, 328, 332
- communion 212, 281
- compassion 74, 89, 94, 101, 114, 181, 230, 284, 319
- compensation *see* Philemon, compensation
- conclusion 108–109, 114, 117–118, 155, 158, 162, 175, 182, 185, 190, 192, 197–198, 219, 237, 239, 242, 253, 257, 279–281, 313, 321
- confidence/boldness 6, 17, 19–20, 24, 30, 32, 45, 48, 51–52, 56, 58, 66, 70, 81, 83, 87, 94–95, 109, 115, 118, 124, 131, 136–137, 142, 145, 161, 163, 169, 182, 188, 192, 195, 197, 209, 212, 224, 231, 234, 239, 245, 248–249, 257, 276, 281, 286, 294, 300–302, 319, 323–325, 331
- conjecture 172
- conscience 153, 253, 258
- consent 10, 44, 54, 65, 82, 110, 144, 150, 172, 176, 190, 196, 223, 232, 254, 256, 274, 288, 300, 308–309
- consolation 30, 89, 100, 121, 128, 179, 181, 187, 192, 197, 201, 220, 230, 233, 293, 295, 299, 315, 326, 329
- contract 38, 87, 317
- correction 71, 162–163, 190–191, 196–197, 309, 320, 325
- co-writer 10, 29, 44, 50, 79, 85, 101, 123, 146, 149, 285, 330
- cruelty 83, 168, 188, 302, 308
- custom 29, 47, 54, 74, 100, 151, 166, 186, 191, 200, 228, 248, 260, 267, 288, 317
- Cyril of Alexandria 41
- De Bye, Nicolaes 214
- De iure belli ac pacis* 213–215, 217
- deacon 62, 77, 167, 184, 200, 205, 211, 290, 331
- death 75, 110, 132, 141, 179, 181, 205, 208, 222, 238, 278, 288, 290, 318–319
- debt/debtor 12, 22, 50, 74, 80, 82–83, 87, 103, 110, 124, 136–137, 140, 144, 169, 175, 178, 181, 186, 191, 197, 202, 208–209, 217, 220,

- 224, 230, 232, 239, 249, 256, 281, 292, 307, 317–320
- Decree of Gratian* 165
- deliberative mode 154, 211, 276
- demand *see* command
- Demas (Philm. 24) 61, 84, 108, 122, 148, 261, 328
- device, rhetorical/stylistic 11, 41, 148, 165
- devil/Satan 141, 181, 219, 243, 290, 319 (*see also* evil)
- Digest* (of Justinian) 216–217, 317
- Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite 121
- disciple 6, 27, 29, 38, 58, 87, 131, 140, 185, 203, 206, 227, 262, 270, 276
- dissimulation 141, 145, 286, 324, 333
- divine help 5, 93, 268
- divine plan/providence *see* providence
- divinity *see* God
- division (of the Letter to Philemon) *see* Philemon (Letter), division
- doctrine 98, 104, 121, 129, 131, 139, 170, 174–175, 177, 193–194, 218, 246, 270
- Donatus Veronensis 61
- Döring, Matthias 92, 117
- Dorotheus 184, 189, 227
- duty 139, 156, 168–169, 179, 185–186, 188, 190–192, 194, 222, 281, 287, 302, 312, 325
- elder 167–168, 184, 205, 290, 301, 331
- embarrassment *see* shame
- emotions *see* feelings
- encouragement 11, 18–19, 24, 26, 31, 75–76, 125, 142, 178, 186, 237, 239, 253–254, 292, 294–296, 325, 329
- entrails 6–7, 12–13, 15, 19, 23–24, 32, 38, 40, 45, 47–48, 51–52, 55, 61, 75–76, 82, 85–87, 89–90, 101, 104, 115, 119, 123–124, 132, 142–145, 149–150, 156–157, 167–168, 171–173, 179–180, 186, 188–189, 192, 196, 201, 206–207, 209, 212, 215–217, 219–220, 223, 230, 232–234, 238, 255, 262, 264, 281, 293–294, 298–300, 307, 313, 315, 320–322, 332
- Epaphras (Philm. 23) 24–26, 64, 66, 79, 83–84, 115, 133, 204–205, 211, 229, 234, 241, 249–250, 252, 257, 261–262, 265, 328–329, 332
- Ephesus 200, 204, 211, 215, 222, 227, 229, 252, 261, 277–278
- epilogue 219–220, 280
- epistolography 279–280, 295, 331
- epithet 229, 249–250, 286
- eternity 50, 57, 103, 110, 144, 157, 161, 166, 179, 208, 235, 267, 318
- ethics 41, 183, 228, 251, 329
- euphemism 82, 86, 217, 256
- Euthalian apparatus 62–64, 67, 85, 277–278
- evangelist 10, 50, 102, 185, 215, 229, 271, 290, 331
- evil 12, 28, 49, 98, 108, 139, 143–145, 194, 236, 267, 269, 310
- example 26–27, 73, 129, 139–140, 142, 155, 159, 171, 180, 223–224, 248, 253, 272, 292, 296
- excuse 95, 114, 118, 123, 144, 172, 192
- exhortation 28, 30, 51, 128, 197, 243, 245, 269, 294
- faith and love (Philm. 5) 47, 89, 93–94, 149, 155, 187, 279, 293, 296, 298 (*see also* love and faith)
- feelings/emotion 6, 12, 19, 24, 28, 30, 32, 35, 47, 55, 71, 76–77, 100, 108, 115, 122–124, 133, 144, 146, 155–156, 158, 167, 176, 179, 182, 188, 192, 206, 223, 228, 238, 232, 239, 276, 284, 298–299, 301, 305, 307–308, 321–323, 329, 332
- fellow-evangelist 10, 50, 102, 271
- fellow-prisoner 64, 66, 83, 249–250, 257, 328–329
- fellowship 18, 26, 80, 87, 142, 181, 187, 205, 212, 220, 244, 253, 293, 295, 314, 332
- fellow-slave 9, 50, 86, 178, 271
- fellow-soldier (Philm. 2) 17, 80, 141, 145, 154, 167, 186, 195, 205, 282, 287, 289–290
- fellow-worker (Philm. 1, 24) 17, 25, 37, 74, 79–80, 85, 112, 118, 135, 141, 154, 167, 176–177, 185, 195, 200, 205, 209, 211, 219, 229, 254, 264–265, 282, 286–287, 328–329
- flattery 115, 136, 141–142, 145, 210, 286, 290, 296, 324, 333 (*see also* holy flattery)
- for a while (Philm. 15) 82, 84, 86, 168, 185, 196, 238, 309–311
- for ever (Philm. 15) 70, 72, 75, 150, 196, 208, 217, 243, 249, 309–311, 313, 333
- force 10, 16, 29, 38, 86, 102, 140, 142–143, 146, 169, 176, 188, 196, 198, 208, 220, 237–238, 248, 286, 302–303, 308, 314, 320, 326–327 (*see also* pressure)
- forgiveness 5, 7, 15, 17, 28, 32–33, 50, 54, 58, 60, 74, 76, 80, 89, 91, 98, 100, 102–103, 105, 112, 123, 131, 141, 149, 159, 161–163, 166–168, 177–178, 184, 186, 197, 212, 230, 232, 236, 238–239, 242, 244, 264, 269, 273, 283, 289, 291–292, 295, 317–318, 321, 327–328, 331, 333
- free will 13, 45, 57, 196, 300, 324

- freedom *see* liberty
- friend/friendship 17, 23–24, 33, 35, 80, 85, 98, 104, 109, 126, 129, 151, 160, 179, 185, 191–192, 194–195, 202, 204, 208, 216–217, 220, 223, 229, 237, 253, 255, 261–262, 268, 286, 289, 314, 316, 319, 327, 329, 331–332
- fright/frighten/fear 7–8, 83, 143, 146, 237, 260, 267, 303, 306, 315, 326, 332
- gentleness 7, 23, 124, 129, 172, 180, 190, 249–250, 309, 316, 320
- glory 6, 40, 130, 236, 283
- Glossa Ordinaria* 52–53, 91–97, 117, 262, 264, 268, 271–272, 279, 284, 288, 290, 301, 305, 312, 316, 321, 324, 326, 332
- God 4, 10, 12–13, 17, 22, 27, 30, 33–34, 37, 44–45, 47–48, 52, 56–57, 66, 72, 80, 84, 86–87, 89, 93, 98, 103–104, 106, 109–110, 114, 116, 128, 132, 134, 139, 141, 143, 150, 152, 154, 157–159, 161–162, 165–167, 172–174, 178–179, 181, 187, 194, 196, 202, 208, 212, 217, 219–220, 224, 228, 230, 233, 236, 241, 243–244, 251, 253–257, 267–268, 270, 273, 279, 281–282, 292–293, 296–299, 303, 310, 315, 318, 321, 324, 329 (*see also* providence)
- good deed/work 10, 48, 55–57, 59, 80, 82–83, 86, 98, 123, 131, 134, 142, 145, 149, 160, 173, 194, 206, 230, 241, 254, 256, 262, 274–275, 294–296, 308, 321
- good 5–7, 10, 12, 18, 20, 27–28, 51, 57, 61, 64–65, 71, 75, 79–80, 94, 98, 103, 109, 129, 132, 139–140, 142–143, 145, 160, 168, 194, 196, 205, 207, 212, 216, 219, 232, 235–236, 238–239, 253–254, 256, 262, 275, 281, 285, 293–296, 300–301, 305, 309–310, 312, 330
- goodwill 47, 82, 89, 108, 118, 141, 155, 161, 168, 175, 178, 183, 189, 219, 222, 279, 286, 296, 308
- gospel 9–11, 23, 32, 37, 44, 47–48, 54, 93, 101, 105, 128–131, 135, 138–139, 143, 148, 154, 160, 163, 176, 185, 189, 194–195, 205, 217, 222, 229, 236, 253, 262, 264–265, 268, 270–272, 275, 300, 304, 306, 309, 313
- grace 17, 26–27, 41, 57, 64, 66, 76–77, 80, 98, 106, 109, 118, 139, 141–142, 159, 161, 173, 178, 183, 192–193, 204, 211, 219, 230, 234, 239, 244, 253–254, 257, 270, 282, 286, 292–293, 296, 314, 328–329, 332
- greeting 108–109, 113, 118, 122, 163, 185–186, 192–193, 195, 198, 209, 220, 228, 242, 244, 253–254, 257, 279, 292, 328–329, 331
- guilt 16, 81, 144, 168, 266, 284, 317
- heart 6, 12, 47, 55, 116, 124, 134, 140–144, 146, 158, 162, 172, 179–180, 182, 194, 196, 198, 222–224, 230, 234, 244, 253, 267, 276, 286, 298–299, 305, 307, 322, 324, 327
- heaven 156, 162, 221, 249, 277, 303, 318
- hint 79, 81, 135, 168–169, 221, 256, 274, 308, 322
- holy flattery 141–142, 145, 290, 296, 333
- Holy Spirit *see* Spirit
- honour 15, 17, 19–25, 30, 38, 58, 66, 75, 81, 85–86, 100, 103, 105, 110, 112, 119, 123, 179, 184–186, 188–189, 198, 205–206, 208, 213, 216, 219, 223, 231–232, 237, 273, 284, 287, 289, 291, 304, 307, 312–313, 326 (*see also* respect)
- hope 93, 108–109, 148–149, 151, 155, 161, 169, 182, 187, 198, 211, 220, 228, 233, 238–239, 244, 257–258, 260–261, 271, 279, 296, 325, 327, 329
- Humanism 125, 127–128, 133, 163, 173–174, 203, 213–214, 221
- humility *see* Paul, humility
- idiom 206, 299
- imitation *see* example
- implicit 18, 24, 30, 33, 35, 130, 196, 229, 265, 271, 295, 318, 322
- in Christ 12–13, 19, 45, 51–52, 54, 59, 81, 83, 94, 101–102, 110, 115, 134, 142, 161, 167, 188, 195, 217, 220, 238, 244, 256–257, 262, 293, 296, 298, 300, 302, 314, 320, 322, 328–329
- in the Lord 6, 12, 24, 37–38, 40, 76, 87, 100, 144–145, 155, 172, 181, 217, 223, 239, 244, 273, 297, 309–310, 312, 320–321
- inscription 195, 228, 253, 281
- insinuation 19, 188, 196, 208, 231, 295, 319
- insult 24, 66, 83, 319
- integrity 153, 157, 271
- intercession 5, 21, 23, 63, 75, 101, 131, 168–169, 178, 184, 191, 195, 205, 216, 228–231, 253–254, 268, 277, 281, 288, 290–291, 306, 316
- irony 76, 169, 323
- joy 6, 12, 19, 30, 57, 70, 79, 100, 109, 155, 161, 169, 178, 187, 197, 219, 228, 230, 236, 239, 248, 250, 254, 256, 285, 293, 295–296, 298, 320, 322, 327
- justice 143, 146, 189–190, 309
- kerygma 79–80, 85, 153, 286
- kindness 33, 75, 81, 83, 89–90, 102, 109–110, 120, 133, 141, 160, 162, 178, 186, 204–205, 212, 215–217, 232, 236, 247–248, 250,

- 254–255, 272, 281, 286, 298, 304, 311, 318,
323, 326–327, 333
- letter closing 83, 99, 328
- letter of guarantee 61, 317
- letter of mercy 139
- letter of petition 123
- letter of recommendation 79, 84, 160, 176,
195, 200, 204, 273
- letter of request 176–177, 181
- letter opening 282–293, 330
- liberty/freedom 100, 139–140, 145, 189, 267,
269, 274
- literal sense 39, 116–117, 138, 147–148, 165,
199, 203, 226, 299, 307, 332
- litotes 248, 250, 306
- love and faith (Philm. 5) 11, 51, 55, 75, 80,
89, 94, 102, 110, 123, 155, 161, 167, 178, 201,
243, 247, 250, 254, 272, 293, 295, 297–298,
331, 333
- manumission *see* Onesimus, manumission
- Marcionite prologues 4, 43, 46, 69, 73, 93,
98, 112, 117, 272
- Menologium Graecorum* 205, 288
- mercy 50, 74, 76, 80, 89, 94, 106, 122, 131,
139, 144, 178, 185, 273, 284, 287, 292, 295,
317
- minister 9–10, 13, 44, 48, 51, 57, 94, 103, 167,
171, 176, 184, 194–195, 211–212, 222–223,
229, 237–238, 243, 271, 283, 290, 331
- mitigation/softening 22, 24, 65–67, 76–77,
80, 82–83, 136, 157, 162, 168–169, 172,
176–180, 188, 190, 196, 202, 207, 209, 216,
224, 231, 238–239, 248–250, 255, 276, 286,
295, 306, 308, 311, 316, 322, 324, 329–330
- mollifying *see* mitigation
- morality 98, 128–129, 139, 147, 166, 199, 224,
226, 240, 267, 269
- mother 30, 172, 201, 289
- mystical sense 98, 116
- natural order 30, 34, 72, 289 (*see also* rank)
- Nero 149, 177, 228, 260–261
- Notkerius 227, 278
- obedience *see* Philemon, obedience
- objection 21, 136, 155, 157–158, 163, 175,
180–181, 190–192, 196–198, 207–208, 212,
220, 233, 239, 244, 281, 308–309, 311,
316–317, 325, 327, 330
- obligation 65, 158, 181, 217, 248, 317, 319
- offense 5, 17, 32, 74–75, 93, 102, 105, 143, 168,
176, 178, 188, 207, 216, 231, 237, 239, 276,
288, 291, 303, 306
- Onesimus
- age 154
 - baptism 5, 9, 15, 27, 36, 47, 50, 54, 60,
63, 70–71, 74–75, 77, 79, 84, 93, 98, 100,
104, 108, 112, 122, 130, 132, 200, 204, 210,
268–270, 305, 332
 - carrier of the Letter to Philemon 36, 46,
49, 54, 69, 73, 99–100, 112, 130, 148, 171, 176,
204, 215, 236, 253, 275
 - character 5, 22, 25, 28, 31–32, 34, 36, 49,
58, 63, 65, 70, 74, 79, 84, 86, 103, 108, 118,
130, 135–136, 139–140, 157, 161–162, 166, 169,
176, 189–190, 194, 196, 200, 219, 226, 236,
242–243, 247, 267, 269–270, 277
 - Colossian 99, 176, 252, 266
 - conversion 9, 12, 44, 47, 50, 54, 63, 71,
74–75, 88–89, 91, 100, 102, 104, 108, 112–113,
118, 122, 130, 135–136, 160, 166–167, 169, 176,
194, 200, 204, 210, 215, 219–220, 226–227,
236, 245, 247–248, 250, 253, 267–269, 271,
273, 310, 318, 330
 - flight from Philemon 5, 9, 25, 28, 47, 49–
50, 54, 60, 62–63, 70, 74, 78–79, 82, 84, 86,
88, 93, 98, 105, 112–113, 122, 132, 135–136,
139–140, 145, 153–154, 156, 158, 160, 168,
172, 176, 190, 200, 202, 204, 207–208, 210,
222, 226, 233, 236, 241, 245, 247, 249, 252,
258, 265–268, 288, 302, 310–312, 330, 332
 - fugitive/*fugitivus* (*see also* Onesimus, run-
away) 5, 157, 166–167, 176, 184–185, 190,
204, 267, 283, 311
 - Gentile 227
 - manumission 28, 70, 72, 140, 143, 146,
204, 207, 209, 215, 232, 253–258, 274–275,
277–288, 330, 333
 - martyrdom 63, 101, 105, 129, 200, 211, 222,
247, 266, 277–278
 - ministry, nature of his 9–10, 13, 44, 47–48,
54–55, 61, 63, 65, 71, 74, 76, 79–80, 82, 86,
95, 103–104, 108, 113, 118, 122, 129–130, 140,
144, 157, 168, 176, 201, 204, 207, 226, 236,
238, 242–243, 253, 270–275, 286, 312, 318,
331
 - name 130, 132–133, 136, 143, 150–151, 157,
162, 172, 180, 196, 202, 206, 209, 212, 216,
222, 224, 238, 249, 252, 265, 281, 305–306,
322, 331
 - obedience of 23, 28, 41, 49, 70, 71, 140,
269
 - Phrygian 200, 266
 - related to Philemon 222

- return to Philemon 5, 36, 47–48, 54, 56, 60, 63, 70, 79, 81–82, 84, 95, 103, 112, 122, 129–130, 143–144, 162, 168–169, 172, 180, 189, 195–196, 200, 204, 207, 212, 215, 219–220, 226, 228, 237–238, 243, 256–257, 270, 274, 277, 281, 307–308, 333
- Paul's spiritual child/son 6, 11, 20–23, 25, 31, 35, 37–38, 40, 45, 47–48, 51, 55, 61, 65, 71, 75, 81, 86, 89–90, 94, 115, 119–120, 123–124, 131, 136, 143, 145–146, 150, 157, 162, 168–169, 172, 179–180, 186, 188, 191, 201, 207, 212, 219, 223, 231–232, 238, 245, 248, 270–271, 273, 281, 305–308, 313, 322–323, 332
- receiving by Philemon *see* Onesimus, welcoming of
- runaway (*see also* Onesimus, fugitive) 9, 36, 41, 93, 130, 135, 139, 145, 160, 188, 196, 211, 266–268, 271
- theft 9, 15, 23, 36, 41, 44, 47, 50, 54, 60, 63, 70, 74, 77–78, 84, 88, 90, 98–99, 113, 118, 122, 129–130, 135–136, 139, 153–154, 158, 160, 163, 166, 176, 184, 194, 196–197, 200, 204, 210, 219, 222, 226, 228, 233, 236, 241, 252, 266–268, 271–272, 306, 316–317, 330–331, 333
- usefulness/uselessness 11, 20–21, 26, 31, 35, 37–38, 47, 51, 54, 60, 63, 65, 70–71, 74–75, 79, 81, 85–86, 90, 93, 95, 101, 103, 109–110, 113, 118, 130, 136, 142–143, 145, 150, 157, 162, 172, 176, 180, 186, 189, 196, 201, 206–207, 216–217, 219, 228, 231–232, 238, 243, 252, 255–256, 265, 267, 271, 274, 281, 300, 305–308, 312, 331
- welcoming of Onesimus by Philemon 24, 32, 38, 40, 65, 75–76, 82, 90, 101, 103–105, 120, 122, 162, 200, 202, 207, 217, 222, 232, 238–239, 242, 244, 247, 249, 253–256, 273, 275, 279, 281, 287, 302, 307, 313–315, 321–322
- order *see* command
- pacify *see* appeasing
- pardon 21, 33, 49, 52, 64, 66, 89–90, 93–94, 100–102, 105, 132, 146, 186, 195, 219–220, 227, 236, 247, 286, 292, 317–318
- parents 47, 75, 85, 132, 224
- partner/partnership 23, 33, 38, 52, 70, 72, 82, 90–91, 118, 132–133, 144, 157, 163, 181, 183, 190, 197, 202, 208, 219, 223, 228–229, 233, 239, 256, 271, 313–315, 332
- pastor 167, 169, 183, 195, 219, 222, 229, 264, 278, 290–291, 331
- Paul
 - age 6, 11, 20, 31, 35, 44, 47, 55, 57, 60, 65, 71, 75, 77, 84, 86, 89–90, 95, 102, 105, 110, 115, 119, 123, 131, 136, 142, 146, 149, 151, 156, 168, 177, 179, 188, 194, 196, 206, 212, 216, 219, 223, 238, 241, 243, 248, 255, 265, 281, 303–305, 330, 333
 - apostle 29–30, 34, 50–51, 54–55, 70–71, 74–75, 94, 101, 103, 114, 119, 123, 131, 135, 143, 145, 156, 161–162, 167, 181, 185, 206, 219, 253, 283–284, 301–304, 319
 - authority/apostolic authority 5–7, 10–11, 29–30, 44, 47, 50–51, 54–55, 57, 60, 74–76, 101, 103, 113, 115, 130–131, 135, 140, 149–150, 167, 177–178, 196, 207, 209, 231, 238, 248, 257, 283, 285–286, 290, 301
 - biography 174
 - character 20–21, 26–27, 31, 65, 81, 86, 103, 139, 155, 175, 181–183, 188, 197, 212, 216, 303, 332
 - humility 6–7, 27–29, 33, 35, 37, 56, 80, 94, 114–115, 123, 128–129, 134, 160, 219, 244–245, 253, 256–257, 275–276, 284, 291, 319, 328
 - name 31, 35, 37, 51, 57, 65, 101, 131–133, 149, 255, 283, 303
 - Onesimus's spiritual father 20–21, 31, 52, 70–71, 81, 83, 85, 89–90, 131, 135–136, 140, 143–144, 146, 150, 157, 162, 168, 172, 179, 189, 196, 204, 212, 231–232, 245, 248, 259, 281, 305, 306–308
 - poverty 56, 191, 318, 327
 - preaching 13, 54, 129–130, 135, 139, 153, 161, 189, 194, 210, 219, 227, 236, 241, 267–270
 - prisoner/imprisonment 5–7, 9, 11, 15–16, 20, 28, 36, 44, 47–50, 54–55, 60–61, 64–65, 69, 71, 73–75, 77, 79, 81, 83, 85–86, 88–90, 94–95, 98–99, 101, 104–105, 108, 112–115, 117, 122–123, 129–131, 133, 135–136, 140, 143, 145–146, 148, 150, 153, 156, 160, 176–179, 184–185, 188–189, 194, 198, 201, 204, 215, 219–220, 226–228, 231, 236, 240–241, 248, 252–253, 255, 259–261, 268–270, 272, 281, 283, 285, 290, 303–306, 308–309, 327, 330–331, 333
 - prisoner of Christ 10–11, 29, 31, 37, 40, 44, 47, 51, 54–55, 57, 70, 75, 85–86, 94, 102, 105, 123, 130, 133, 140, 142, 145, 162, 167–168, 179, 185, 195, 200, 205–206, 211–212, 216, 237, 242, 255, 275, 282–284, 301, 304–305
 - relationship to Philemon 22, 24, 32–33, 44–45, 55, 88–89, 103, 118–120, 122, 129,

- 140, 146, 149–150, 160, 181, 185, 191, 193, 197, 202–204, 206, 220, 233, 241, 248, 252, 256, 262, 270, 281, 286, 301, 307, 309, 319–320, 332
- rights 12–13, 45, 103, 144, 146, 180, 190, 309, 318–319, 330
- peace 17, 64, 66, 80, 141, 178, 193, 217, 223, 230, 237, 254, 282, 292
- Perotti, Nicolò 172–173
- persecution 99, 139, 194, 254, 292
- personal letter 4
- Philemon
- age 5–6, 55, 60, 71, 75, 77, 89, 95, 102, 119, 123, 142, 151, 265, 303
 - character 5–7, 15, 17–19, 25, 28, 30, 36, 49, 51, 54, 58, 63–64, 71, 75, 78, 80, 84–85, 89, 93–94, 100, 102, 108, 112, 122, 141, 149, 155, 160, 175, 178, 180, 182–184, 192, 195, 199, 203, 210–211, 215, 219, 222, 224, 228–229, 232, 234, 236, 238–239, 241, 252, 262–263, 267, 281, 287, 294–296, 301–302, 325, 330
 - Colossian 9, 25–26, 44, 64, 79, 83, 84, 93, 99, 112, 122, 149, 154, 176, 199, 227, 236, 241, 252, 261, 263–264, 330, 332
 - compensation 13, 118, 120, 123–124, 129–130, 132, 144, 169, 197, 202, 208, 212, 217, 224, 239, 244, 249, 256, 281, 315, 317–319, 333
 - ecclesiastical office 4, 93, 112, 154, 167, 184–185, 211, 215, 222, 229, 236, 252, 264–265, 287, 331
 - family 76–77, 89, 114, 149, 155, 167, 186, 193–195, 208, 229, 236–237, 239, 291–292, 329
 - house 36, 199–200, 203–205, 210–211, 215, 229, 241, 254, 263, 265, 290–291, 306, 326, 331
 - household 17, 32, 34, 75, 80, 85, 94, 101, 105, 110, 114, 119, 131, 135, 139, 145, 167, 171, 181, 196, 219, 222, 230, 241–242, 247, 254–255, 262, 267–268, 291–292, 319, 331
 - name 222, 253
 - obedience 6–7, 48, 52, 56, 65–66, 95, 111, 115, 118, 122, 142–143, 145, 156, 161, 163, 168, 175, 190, 192, 196–197, 212, 233–234, 245, 248, 255, 257, 262, 280–281, 294–296, 302, 323–327, 331
 - Phrygian 63, 78, 129, 154, 210, 236, 238, 261, 264
 - wealth 54, 89, 111, 130, 141, 160, 179, 194, 222, 224, 241, 252, 263
- Philemon (Letter to)
- date of writing 200, 227–228, 240, 252, 260–261
 - dictated 9, 44, 47, 49–50, 54, 98, 100, 106, 123, 181, 208, 233, 275, 330
 - division 64, 67, 85, 108–109, 111, 113, 115, 120, 175, 185, 237, 247, 252–253, 278–282, 331
- Phrygians 63, 78, 129, 154, 200, 210, 236, 238, 261, 266
- piety 85–86, 117, 119, 122, 126, 128–129, 166, 176, 179, 184, 192, 204, 207, 226, 236, 246, 261, 267, 325
- pity 74, 76, 156–158, 162, 177, 195, 205–206, 253, 255, 284, 288, 299, 304, 321
- plea *see* begging
- pleasantry *see* wit
- pledge 38, 82, 133, 327
- praise 11–12, 18, 30, 37, 44, 47–48, 51, 55, 64, 67, 80, 85–86, 102–103, 124, 157, 161, 166–167, 172, 174, 182, 187–188, 192, 195, 201, 205, 207, 209, 211–212, 231–232, 243, 248, 276, 278, 281, 291, 294–297, 301–302, 324–325
- prayer 18, 27, 30, 56, 80, 110, 122, 141, 146, 155, 161, 186, 192–193, 195, 198, 212, 219, 223, 228, 237, 239, 242, 254, 263, 270–271, 281, 293–298, 318, 325, 327
- pressure 8, 25–26, 80, 82, 196, 216, 295, 300, 307, 309, 325, 328, 329, 331 (*see also* force)
- priest 67, 125, 133, 151, 198
- prisoner of Christ *see* Paul, prisoner of Christ
- private letter, Letter to Philemon as 4, 9, 43, 46–50, 69, 73–74, 88, 93, 98–100, 112, 117, 139, 171, 176, 247, 272–273, 330
- promise 27, 30, 33, 40, 45, 60–61, 77, 103, 119–120, 130, 158, 197, 212, 228, 233, 239, 244, 269, 281, 315, 317, 319
- proof 76, 144, 157, 189, 192, 308, 318
- proverb 129, 223, 261–262, 266, 309, 314
- providence 22, 48, 56, 82, 86, 132, 150, 157, 172, 181, 196, 202, 208, 217, 219–220, 233, 256, 268, 310–311, 330
- public letter 100, 176
- pun 331
- punishment 54, 99, 104, 113, 215, 217, 253, 267, 275
- rank 6–7, 30, 33–34, 72, 112, 114, 287, 294 (*see also* natural order)
- rebuke 71, 76, 95, 163, 325
- receiving Onesimus *see* Onesimus, welcoming of

- recipients (of Letter to Philemon) 9, 13, 17, 74, 77, 91, 108–109, 154, 195, 211, 237, 242, 244, 252, 254, 257, 279, 286–290, 330, 333
- recommendation 9, 15, 63–64, 67, 71, 79, 84–85, 93, 98–99, 143, 146, 149, 155, 157, 160, 168, 176, 185, 189, 200, 211, 236, 271–273, 279, 296
- reconciliation 64, 74, 80, 87–89, 91, 107, 112, 122, 130, 139–140, 153, 157, 160, 177, 180–182, 194, 204, 209, 213, 219, 230, 237, 253–254, 258, 268, 270–271, 285, 292, 315, 319, 322, 326, 332
- refreshing of the “entrails” (Philm. 7, 20) 6–7, 10, 12–13, 15, 18–19, 24, 61, 76, 85, 87, 101, 104, 124, 142, 145, 149, 167, 171, 173, 186, 209, 212, 215, 217, 219–220, 232, 244, 256, 262, 281, 293–295, 298–299, 320, 322–323
- respect 16, 19, 29, 31, 35, 37, 51, 55, 71, 85–86, 136, 143, 145, 162, 195, 223, 252, 257, 263, 284–285, 288, 303–305, 329 (*see also* honour)
- restitution *see* Philemon, compensation
- rhetorical device *see* device
- rhetorical situation 4, 9, 13, 15, 17, 25, 27–28, 36, 41, 43, 46, 49, 54, 58, 60, 62–63, 69–70, 77–78, 84, 88, 91, 93, 98–99, 104, 108, 117, 122, 129, 135, 139, 148, 153, 160, 166, 169, 184, 194, 199, 203, 210, 215, 219, 222, 226, 236, 240, 249, 259–281
- salutation 17, 26, 94, 99, 110, 195, 198, 211, 239, 291
- salvation 26, 37, 64, 71, 85, 110, 128–129, 157, 159, 173, 181, 186, 189, 226, 235, 251, 279, 281, 297, 309, 318
- Satan *see* devil
- Scripture 11, 102, 107, 116–117, 121, 128, 138, 148, 152–153, 159, 165, 184, 187, 198–199, 203, 206, 214, 226, 235–236, 246–247, 251, 298–299
- Semler, Johann 251
- Seneca 163, 216, 222, 224, 263, 277, 309
- Sentences* (of Peter Lombard) 96, 111–112, 121, 203
- separation (Philm. 15) 22, 32, 48, 65, 82, 86, 132, 162, 185, 190, 196–197, 207, 217, 238, 248, 256, 309–313, 330
- shame 6, 13, 15–16, 18–26, 30–31, 37, 45, 51, 64, 66, 79–80, 82–83, 86–87, 91, 104, 140–141, 145–146, 208–209, 233–234, 238, 247, 268, 283–286, 288, 295, 312, 314, 316, 326–327, 329, 333
- sign 76, 87, 130, 167, 189, 228, 242, 244, 257, 283, 308, 317–318, 329
- slave of Christ 10, 29, 70, 102, 185, 284
- slaves/slavery 12, 16–17, 20–21, 25, 28, 30, 32–35, 37, 41, 51, 54, 56, 64, 79–80, 83, 85, 94, 103, 119–120, 129–130, 160, 166, 178, 200, 207, 216–217, 230–231, 241, 252, 262–263, 266–268, 274, 284–285, 291, 310, 312, 318, 331 (*see also* Onesimus)
- softening *see* mitigation
- soothing *see* appeasing
- soul 39, 59, 188, 215, 298–299, 321
- Spirit 151, 179, 187, 212, 219, 253, 296, 298
- spirit 27, 57, 76, 90, 172–173, 215, 239, 257, 299, 328–329
- spiritual sense 116, 200, 235, 237
- spirituality 11, 13, 32, 35, 38, 46, 59, 65, 70, 79, 82, 87, 98, 109, 116, 120–121, 124, 127, 138, 148, 189, 200, 210, 237, 241–242, 262, 270, 273, 312, 314, 318, 321, 324
- Strabo, Walafrid 52, 91
- stylistic device *see* device
- suffering 11, 21, 25, 27, 31–32, 40, 50–51, 54, 63, 66, 74, 79, 83, 99–100, 123, 135–136, 150, 165, 178, 186–187, 194, 196, 200, 206, 211, 216, 234, 241, 259–260, 277, 283, 285, 299, 305–306, 329
- superscription 211
- sympathy 75, 155, 186, 296
- synonym 162, 189, 249–250, 307, 316
- tact 130, 276
- taking Onesimus back *see* Onesimus, welcoming of
- teacher 80–81, 95, 139, 200, 240, 242, 277, 295, 304
- Tertullus 63, 277
- testimony 45, 102, 138, 144, 187, 197, 296
- textual variants/textual criticism 6, 16, 21, 29, 55, 60, 69, 71, 74–75, 81, 85–86, 90, 95, 102, 110, 112, 119, 123, 126–127, 131–133, 141, 149, 151, 170, 178, 201, 203, 206–207, 226, 246, 249, 255, 265, 272, 282, 288, 293, 297, 300, 303, 309–310, 313, 315–316, 328–330, 332
- thanking/thanksgiving 4, 30, 41, 44, 64, 67, 70, 85, 93–94, 109, 113, 133, 142, 145, 178, 186, 195, 201, 212, 219, 228, 230, 237–238, 242, 254, 273, 278–279, 293–299, 327, 330
- threat 161, 182–183, 248, 326
- Timothy (Philm. 1) 10, 16, 29, 44, 47, 50, 54, 64, 79, 84–85, 89, 98, 101, 110, 119, 123, 130–131, 135, 140, 145–146, 149, 160, 171, 176–178, 185, 195, 200, 204–205, 209, 211,

- 219, 222, 227, 229, 237, 242, 252–253, 261,
268, 277–278, 282, 285–286, 290, 328, 330
titillation 142, 145, 296, 333
Trajan 200, 211, 222, 277–278
transgression/trespassing 23, 168–169, 311,
316, 330
translation error 32, 59, 127, 131, 133, 141, 147,
149, 151, 170, 206–207, 265, 303, 330, 332
trespassing *see* transgression
trust 21, 40, 66, 90, 151, 156, 182, 220, 233,
244, 254, 327
Tychicus 9, 36, 50, 99, 176, 204, 219, 253,
275, 277
typological interpretation 165

Ufferius 227–278
Ulpian 185

understatement 188, 302
university exegesis 108, 112, 279, 331
usefulness/uselessness *see* Onesimus,
usefulness

Vatablus, François 199, 201
virtue 12, 16, 18, 28, 31, 41, 85–86, 98, 108,
110, 189, 227, 269, 295, 303
Vulgate 4, 6, 43, 46, 69, 74, 93, 112, 117, 127,
131, 141, 147, 149, 151, 201, 206–207, 265,
272, 303, 330

WB. (document) 60
wisdom 44, 47–48, 55–56, 80, 82, 103, 106,
117, 231, 273, 295, 309
wit 24, 66, 82–83, 180, 246, 322
wordplay 131–133, 180, 216, 303