

McLuhan's "The medium is the message" overdid it, but it's true that form and content are closer, in the tissue of meaning, than the schools teach us. Spirit and style are more obviously, but no more, close than spirit and structure....This thinksheet is not about primary presence (face-to-face) or secondary presence (telephoning, on which see #1383) but tertiary presence, e.g. letter-writing/reading. My particular focus is the most influential letter-writer in the whole of human history, i.e. the Apostle Paul....Through the years I've known a number of scholars who've gotten their PhD on the structure and style of Paul's letters. The latest person to do so is Wm. G. Doty, published as LETTERS IN PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY (Fortress/73[7])--whose chart of the basic form of Paul's letters I've reproduced at the bottom of this thinksheet (his p.43). Quotations hereafter are from this book.

1. The letter is an on-the-wing type of occasional writing which presumes that both the relationship on both ends of the letter and the letter's content are in process of development. At the opposite end, in literary genre, is "the law of the Medes and Persians," mythologically unchanging.
2. This means that as to "doing theology," letters between leaders and churches have the quality of contextual-practical theologizing. This observation certainly applies to Paul's letters, though somewhat later Christian-leader letters are theologically more rigid.
3. In the development of a movement's literature, letters are the transitiongenre from oral to formal-written. They are a koine (common) form in koine language. One must not presume to develop out of a letter corpus a whole person or a whole theology, for they are on both levels fragmentary. But, in compensation, they have the slice-of-life quality of immediacy, spontaneity, vivacity....in touch with the "originative dynamics" and with "secular dynamics" (for the letter form in Paul is much more pagan than Jewish). Thus, the letter form fits the "linguistic and religious newness" of first-century Christianity, with no separation of sacred/profane or even of theological/economic (77): "It's ethics is contextual...guidelines," "not dogmatic laws."
4. "The epistle was just the form of language act necessary to the exploratory expansion of the primitive Christian movement." (80)

FORMAL PARTS OF THE PAULINE LETTERS

	Rom.	1 Cor.	2 Cor.	Gal.	Phil.	1 Thess.	Philem.
OPENING							
a. sender	1:1	1:1	1:1	1:1-2	1:1	1:1	v. 1-3
b. addressee	1:7	1:2	1:1	1:2	1:1	1:1	1-2
c. greeting	1:7b	1:3	1:2	1:3	1:2	1:1	3
THANKSGIVING/ BLESSING							
intercession	1:8-17	1:4-9	1:3+	missing	1:3-11	1:2-16	3-11
eschatological climax	1:9-10	1:8-9, 4:5	(Cf. 13:7, 9)		1:9-11	(Cf. 3:10)	6
BODY							
	1:13-8:39	1:10-4:21	1:8-2:13, 7:5-6, 2:14-7:4, 10:1-13:14	1:6-5:16 (-6:17?)	1:12-2:30	2:1-3:13	8-22
a. formal opening	1:13-15	1:10-16	1:8-12	1:6-14	1:12-18	2:1-4 (-12?)	7-14
b. eschatological conclusion	8:31-39, 11:25-36	4:6-13	missing or 6:1 ff.	6:7-10	2:14-18	2:13-16	
c. travelogue	15:14-33	4:14-21	12:14-13:13	4:12-20	2:19-24	2:17-3:13	21-22
PARAENESIS							
	12:13, 12:1-15:13	missing		5:13-6:10	missing	4:1-12, 5:1-22	cf. 21
CLOSING							
a. greetings	16:3-16, 23	16:19-21	15:12-13		4:21-22	5:26	23-25
b. doxology	16:25-27			1:5	4:20	5:23	
c. benediction	15:33, 16:20	16:23	12:14	6:18	4:22	5:28	25

THE PAULINE LETTERS