LEXICAL EVIDENCE ON TWO PAULINE PASSAGES

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The interpretation of τὸ δὲ θεῷ χάρις τῷ πάντων θριαμβεύοντι ἡμᾶς ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ καὶ τὴν δόξαν τῆς γνώσεως αὐτοῦ φανερῶντι δι' ἡμῶν ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ (II Corinthians ii 14).

ἀπεκδιωκόμενος τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας ἐδειγμάτασεν ἐν παρεξήγη θριαμβεύσας αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ. (Colossians ii 15).

The interpretation of θριαμβεύω in these two passages, the only two in which the verb occurs in the New Testament, has long been problematic. Perhaps the earliest indication of uncertainty about the meaning can be seen in John Chrysostom's labored and far from lucid attempt at an explanation of the passage from II Corinthians.

1) An abbreviated version of this article was read at the meeting of the Philological Association of the Pacific Coast in San Diego, Calif., on Nov. 30, 1974.

2) References to a representative sampling of the modern literature on the various interpretations can be found in BAUER'S article on θριαμβεύω in A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, trans. W. F. ARNDT and F. W. GINGRICH, (Chicago, 1957). DELLING'S article on θριαμβεύω in KITTEL'S Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, trans. W. BROMILEY, Vol. III, (Grand Rapids, 1966), is disappointingly brief and uninformative. I shall not attempt to present a systematic historical survey of the problems and their treatment. An outline of the history should in any case emerge in the course of the discussion. A good picture of the history of the controversy can also be found in Lamar WILLIAMSON, Jr., "Led in Triumph. Paul's Use of Thriambeuo", Interpretation, 22 (1968), 317-332. Although I disagree with WILLIAMSON'S general conclusion, and several of his subsidiary points and interpretations as well, the present paper is in a real sense inspired by his treatment. I consider his arguments against some of the interpretations altogether sound, but I consider it important to present another perspective on these passages which involves some evidence which WILLIAMSON does not use. This seems particularly urgent in view of the fact that his article has been accepted in some quarters as authoritative. See e.g. M. RISSI, Studien zum zweiter Korintherbrief, (Stuttgart, 1969), 17, note 20. Such views, if unchallenged, will contribute further to the perpetuation of some already entrenched, but (I believe) dubious, assumptions.

3) Hom. V in Epist. II ad Cor., MPG, LXI 429 (quoted and discussed below).
In more recent times George FINDLAY addressed himself to the problem in the *Expositor* of 1879 where he querulously remarked that "the idea of the Roman triumph dominates and perplexes the entire exegesis of both passages" 4). FINDLAY adduced some serious, and still unanswered, objections to the triumph interpretations and suggested as an alternative that the Pauline imagery is of Dionysiac derivation on the grounds that "hymn in honor of Dionysus" is among the attested meanings of the noun θηλαμβος 5). He concluded that the meaning of the verb was "to lead in festal or choral (dithyrambic) procession, but as the inspiring Deity his exultant worshippers, not as the Roman conqueror his wretched captives" 6). I consider FINDLAY’s arguments against the traditional interpretations to be of considerably greater merit than his alternative proposal 7), and one suspects that the former have been vitiated through association with the latter. In any case his ideas have won virtually no adherents 8), and now, almost a century later, the image of the Roman triumph tenaciously endures, finding expression in every translation, every annotated New Testament, every commentary on either Epistle, all our standard lexica, and several special studies. This situation prevails despite the fact that a few years after the appearance of FINDLAY’s article, and apparently independently of it, Frederick FIELD used what was then new lexical evidence to support a suggestion that the meaning in II Corinthians was nothing like "triumph", but rather something like "display, reveal, manifest" 9). It will be my position here that the

5) Authorities cited by *LSJ*, s.v. θηλαμβος.
6) P. 416.
7) I would, however, consider his proposal almost as plausible as any of the "triumph" interpretations. The main flaw in it is that the meaning he proposes is itself unattested and rests on some purely hypothetical stages of semantic development (p. 416) from the Dionysiac meaning of θηλαμβος.