

"Letter from Birmingham Jail" by Martin Luther King

Arrangement of Material

Introduction: the author indicates the occasion and the objective of his letter.

(Para. 1)

I. Answering the specific questions asked by the clergymen in their public statements (paragraphs 2-22)

A. First Quest: Why did you come to Birmingham? (2-4)

B. Second Quest: Why demonstrate and not negotiate? (5-11)

C. Third Quest: Are not your actions untimely? (12-14)

D. Fourth Quest: How can you justify breaking the law? (15-22)

II. In defense of his argument (23-47)

A. Grave disappointment with white moderates (23-32)

B. Grave disappointment with white church (33-44)

C. Grave disappointment with the eight clergymen (45-47)

Conclusion: the author makes some conciliatory gestures toward his immediate audience and broadens the context of the discussion (48-50).

Analysis of Style

I. Three Appeals: logos, ethos, & pathos

II. Allusions to historical figures → give strength to argument

III. Metaphorical language

IV. Conciliatory tone

V. Personal pronouns → I, me, mine

VI. Elaborate parallelism

VII. Periodic sentences

Pathos seems the strongest

January 1963 - still continues

January 1863 - Emancipation Proclamation

Forever Conciliatory → never angry (different than Clever's Soul on Fire - violent, hostile)

letter is very much like an epistle of St. Paul