

# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RECENT RESEARCH ON 1 CORINTHIANS FOR HERMENEUTICAL APPROPRIATION OF THIS EPISTLE TODAY <sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

A flood of research literature on 1 Corinthians over the last fifteen years suggests an understanding of this epistle and of the ethos of the church in Corinth that resonates closely with issues in our culture today. The ethos of “secular” Corinth still heavily influenced the church in Corinth. It encouraged attitudes that today we associate with consumerism, postmodernism, and social construction, together with an over-preoccupation with autonomy, success, audience-pleasing rhetoric, and a “local” theology. The church sought to choose its own leaders, its own ethics, its own socio-political value-system, and its own criteria of spirituality. However, Paul sets forth a formative understanding of the cross; an understanding of the Church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic; a Christomorphic re-definition of “spiritual” and of the Holy Spirit; love and respect for “the other”; and the gift-character of grace and resurrection. How does this relate to hermeneutical distance and appropriation?

## **1. The Main Argument**

It has become almost axiomatic in hermeneutical theory that historical-critical methods and historical reconstructions of the situations behind New Testament texts tend to distance the texts in question from the horizons of modern readers (Gadamer 1989, 295-98; Ricoeur 1976, 91-2; Thiselton 1980, 51-84; 2006, 607-12). In a recent study of 1 Corinthians Cornelia Cyss Crocker (2004, 11) observes, “The historical-critical approach has

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helped ‘the process of distancing the text’ of 1 Corinthians by placing it firmly into the context within which Paul lived and worked” (citing Schneiders, 1999, 169). Crocker continues, “Approaching 1 Corinthians with the help of the various historical-critical methods can make one aware of how time-bound some of the problems are that the Corinthians are dealing with and that Paul is discussing” (25).

Such issues as eating food offered to idols (8:1—11:1) may seem to be remote from twenty-first century life. Nevertheless the present article seeks to engage with those aspects of recent research on 1 Corinthians that serve to present a contrary thesis with respect to this epistle. Contrary to the more usual expectations aroused by critical and historical enquiry, research on Paul’s Corinth brings to light features that appear to offer some unexpectedly close parallels with issues that belong also to the early twenty-first century. To apply such terms as *consumerism*, *local theology* or a *postmodern mood* either to Corinth or to the church in Corinth may seem initially to suggest an uncritical and premature hermeneutical assimilation and foreclosure. Yet patient exegesis and closer attention to several themes in recent research may lead us to reconsider such assumptions.

This is not to underestimate or to overlook cultural and historical differences. But if Ricoeur’s principle that “to ‘make one’s own’ what was previously ‘foreign’ remains the ultimate aim of all hermeneutics” (Ricoeur 1976, 91), the dimension of *appropriation* invites close attention, we shall argue, even if we must also clarify elements of strangeness or difference in this hermeneutical engagement. To cite one example, clearly we cannot apply the term *postmodern* to any first century culture if it denotes a stage of thought that follows modernity. However, a number of writers legitimately use the term *postmodern* less to denote a period that follows modernity than to denote a *mood*, *ethos*, or *attitude* of mind. I argue for the validity of this elsewhere (Thiselton 2000, 12-17; 2006, 581-606, 651-55 and 663-75). Similarly while Engels (1990) distinguishes *consumerism* from a “service economy” in Corinth in the context of economic history, in a more philosophical context *consumerism* may legitimately denote a consumer-related, audience-orientated, approach to questions of meaning and truth. This becomes applicable to value-systems and truth-criteria in Corinth. Pogoloff (1992, 26-69), Moores (1995, 132-56), and Winter (1997, 145-202), confirm this perception.

I argue further that many of those who called the tune in the church in Corinth assimilated from the culture of the city a sense of self-sufficiency

that over-valued “autonomy” over respect for the wider Christian community, and gave undue priority to a self-constructed local theology and ethics over apostolic traditions and received Christian values. They placed rhetorical success, personal status, and “winning”, above truth, above a cross-centred gospel, and above holiness understood in Christomorphic terms. Against this Paul insists that the church is one (1 Cor. 12: 4-6), holy (1:2; 3:17; 6:11,19), catholic (1:2; 3:22; 4:17b; 10:16-17; 11:2, 23; 12:12-21;14:32-33); and apostolic (3: 4,10; 4:17b;11:23; 15:3; also Eriksson, 1998, 77-304, Moores 1995, 24-32; 132-45). Is it inappropriate to suggest that Paul in effect formulates these four “marks” of the church, provided that we qualify this in the light of hermeneutical concerns (noted further in the next paragraph) and do not assimilate these terms uncritically into some prevailing use in dogmatic theology?

In suggesting parallels and resonances that allow for hermeneutical appropriation in the twenty-first century, this does not leave their currency unaffected within this single horizon of understanding. As Gadamer argues, in the engagement between horizons of the past and present neither horizon remains static or untouched by the other (1989, 300-307). Part of the hermeneutical task lies “in not covering up this tension [between the two horizons] by attempting a naïve assimilation of the two but in consciously bringing it out” (1989, 306). As Crocker (following Gadamer) rightly observes, such a process of engagement will be “transformative” (2004, 46). I have discussed this aspect elsewhere (Thiselton 1992, 31-47; 558-619; 2005, 3-53; and 2006, 798-807).

A careful scrutiny of the findings of much (although clearly not all) recent research on Corinth and on 1 Corinthians over the last fifteen- or-so years suggests that this proposal is neither fanciful nor historically uncritical, and that we are not foreclosing any assimilation of horizons prematurely. Given the contingency and particularity of how hermeneutical contexts and situations within each of these two horizons interact, we might well expect that exceptions to any generalising principle would be likely to occur in unpredictable, historically contingent, ways. Indeed Schleiermacher, the father of modern hermeneutical theory, argued that historical enquiry places us “in the position of the original readers” in such a way as to facilitate equally differentiation and resonance, creative surprise and appropriation (Schleiermacher 1977, 38, 42, 101, and 104-13).

Paul seeks to inhibit the desire of many leading figures in the church in Corinth to construct their own “local” theology; to choose their own leaders

(1:10-12); to formulate their own ethics (6:12—11:1); to forget the rest of the church (1:2; 12:14-26); and to substitute criteria of triumphalist “success” and other people’s recognition of their personal status. In place of all this he re-proclaims the gospel of the cross. Clarke (73-107), Witherington (1995, 19-29), and Welborn (2005, 1-116 and 248-53) stress this angle of approach, even if Horrell (1996, 91-198) rightly warns us that not all of the Christians of Corinth share these characteristics.

Further, Paul assesses Corinthian claims about the Holy Spirit and spirituality in terms of a different criterion from that of Christians in Corinth, namely a Christomorphic understanding of the Spirit and “spirituality” (among others, Hall 2003, 3-79, 129-73, and 199-222). From an entirely different angle Wire (1990, 49-54, 135-58, and throughout) also argues that Paul did not share the same view of the Spirit as many in Corinth. Paul affirms the role of apostolic witness and traditions (4:8-13; 15:3-5), and appeals to pre-Pauline traditions that he received and transmitted as an agreed and common basis for theology in contrast to the local church’s “making” its doctrine (Eriksson, 79-304; Moores, 21-31; 132-45). Apostolicity is linked not only with unity and “catholicity”, but also with the collaborative nature of apostolic leadership across the wider church (Harrington 1990, 62-79; Ellis, 1993, 183-80; Banks 1994, 49-63 and 149-58.; cf. and among earlier works, Holmberg 1978, 14-95 and 155-61; and Ollrog 1979, throughout).

All the same, if we suggest that such a term as *autonomy* facilitates hermeneutical appropriation, this also requires qualification. Richard A. Horsley (1997, 246-47) insists that Paul urged the Corinthian assembly to “conduct its own affairs autonomously”, as he writes in 1 Cor. 5-6. However, by this term Horsley is stressing “complete independence of the world”, not independence from “the group solidarity” of the wider church. Within the horizon of today, autonomy has multiple meanings, ranging from Kant’s notion in philosophical ethics to present debates about the autonomy of Provinces within the Anglican Communion. Indeed the Windsor Report (2004, 47-54, paragraphs 72-96) asks at what level such Provincial “autonomy” is legitimate, and concludes that while “house rules” may be determined autonomously; sexual ethics go beyond this, since the issue is whether unilateral actions by a Province “affect other people elsewhere”. We cite the Report only to illustrate how closely appropriation as well as distance operates in this present context of discussion.

Twenty-first century society, at least in the West, is all too readily shaped by criteria constructed by consumerist choice, by a desire for autonomy or for socially-constructed value-systems, and too often by the “virtual reality” formed by rhetorical spin (not least from politicians or media), by internal or “local” criteria, and even in some cases by a postmodern neo-pragmatism. Even some Christian churches find themselves, like Corinth, unduly seduced through uncritical assimilation of such features from society at large. Although the chosen span of fifteen years is somewhat arbitrary, the last fifteen-or-so years of research on 1 Corinthians, following the earlier foundational work of Theissen and Meeks, highlights points of legitimate hermeneutical appropriation broadly along the lines indicated.

## **2. Research on the Economic and Social History of First-Century Corinth**

### *2.1 The “Service Economy” of Corinth*

At the beginning of our fifteen-year period of research Donald Engels formulated fresh proposals about the economic structure of first-century Roman Corinth. In contrast to the prevailing notion of “the classical model” of a “consumer” city, namely a city that relied upon what its surrounding *territorium* produced, Engels sees Corinth as a business-orientated “service city”, virtually self-sufficient in its economic power and in its secure control of its surrounding *territorium* (1-65).

In his chapter on the service economy Engels underlines the geographical features that had established its reputation as “wealthy Corinth” even in its earlier Greek period (Engels, 49-65). Corinth was situated on a narrow neck of land in Greece with a harbour on each side of it. On the East side the harbour of Cencreae faced across the sea to the Roman Province of Asia and Ephesus. On the West side the port of Lechaemum faced Italy and ultimately Rome. Yet at the narrowest point of the isthmus the distance between the two sea coasts was barely nine kilometres, or less than six miles. Corinth was a favoured centre for international East-West trade, as Engels and others demonstrate. This was matched by an almost equally favoured position between Northern and Southern Greece. Corinth stood at the cross-roads or intersection between North and South and between East and West for business and trade. In Paul’s time it had

become a busy, bustling, cosmopolitan business-centre (Engels, 8-21 and throughout; Clarke, 9-39)

Engels further stresses the entrepreneurial character of the culture of the city, which stemmed initially from the composition of its first settlers from Rome when Julius Caesar re-founded the city in 44 B.C.E. especially for his veterans from the legions, and those who came to make their way as freedpersons, slaves, or entrepreneurial providers of goods and services of all kinds. Business people, traders and especially many with entrepreneurial skills were attracted to this hub of opportunity for new commercial ventures and contacts, new possibilities of employment, and quick deals of person-to-person agreements or transactions, with a large cosmopolitan pool of potential consumers.

By Paul's time tourists flocked to Corinth not least for the famous Isthmian Games, which were held every two years. Second only to the Olympic Games, the Isthmian Games were among the three great games-festivals of the whole of Greece. These visitors brought money to rent rooms; to buy necessary or exotic products; to hire dockers, porters, secretaries, accountants, guides, bodyguards, blacksmiths, carpenters, cooks, housekeepers, and both literate and menial slaves. They sought to employ or to hire managers, craftsmen, and people who could repair wagons, tents, ships, or chariots (Engels, 22-65; Clarke, 9-22; Witherington, 1-35; Murphy-O'Connor 1997, 252-90; Thiselton 2000, 1-12).

## *2.2 Competitive Self-Promotion, Self-Sufficiency, Pluralism, and Rhetorical Spin: Evidence from Historical and Archaeological Research.*

Among others Chow (1992, 38-82, and 113-166), Pogoloff (1992, 129-78; 197-212), Clarke (23-39) and Welborn (1997, 1-42; and 2005, 49-116; 249-53) demonstrate that the socio-economic climate in the city of Corinth generated a culture of self-sufficiency, competitive self-promotion, patronage, "consumerism" (in the sense defined above), and levels of "success" determined by multifarious criteria of money, power, or other forms of social recognition. Witherington speaks of "status-hungry people" (1995, 24), and Clarke notes that many were caught up in a "pursuit of esteem and praise" (25).

Archaeological research confirms this picture. The Peirene Fountains, still in part to be seen today, provided not only the domestic needs of a large, vibrant, expanding, city, but also a necessary resource for the

manufacture of bricks, pottery, roof-tiles, terra-cotta ornaments and utensils (Engels, 22-65). Engels calculates that the springs produced some 18 cubic metres of water per hour, in addition to some sixteen other water sources in the city (77). He examines in detail the city's commercial facilities, its public health, its economic trends, its provision of numerous services, and its socio-economic power as a centre of tourism, trade, and public events. The people of Corinth were fully aware of their self-sufficient status and socio-economic and cultural independence from others.

Temple-dedications to Apollo, Poseidon, Aphrodite, Asklepios and other Graeco-Roman deities bring home the *pluralism* of religious life. Appeals to "pluralism" as an explanation by some for difficulties in Christian proclamation may appear bizarre in this light. Archaeological evidence of a wide provenance and spread of coinage from afar in Corinth witnesses to the wide, cosmopolitan, scope of trade and culture, and to a diversity of visitors to Corinth (further, Thiselton 2000, 6-7). Those found in the area of Isthmia probably witness alike to the range of visitors to the Isthmian Games. Inscriptions from this period, again still to be seen, are in Latin, not Greek, and confirm the *Roman* character of many features of life in Corinth. This shapes our understanding of civil lawsuits in 6:1-11, of head-coverings in 11: 2-16; and of dining customs in 11:17-31 (Horrell, 102-19, 137-55, and 168-76; Winter 2001, 58-75; Rouselle 1992, 296-337; Martin 1995, 229-49). (On head-coverings Troy Martin 2004 offers a different view from Dale Martin and Rouselle, but argues from a Greek rather than the Roman background).

Several inscriptions concern significant individuals. One example concerns inscriptions for the Gnaeus Babbius Philinus monument, still to be seen. It appears to witness to the anxious concern of an upwardly mobile figure to promote his public recognition as a benefactor and his rise in status, power, and wealth. While some argue that we cannot generalise from one individual, a number of writers argue that this monument, with its double inscription as benefactor and as *duovir* (to authorise the benefaction) constitutes a model case of a wider desire for self-promotion and public recognition that characterized many in Corinth in the mid first century (Murphy-O'Connor 1983, 171; Engels, 68-9).

### 3. Evidence that these Characteristics Influenced Attitudes within the Church

#### 3.1 *Competitiveness, Self-Promotion, Triumphalism and Desire for “Success”*

Some or perhaps many Christians in Corinth still carried over into their Christian existence many of the cultural traits that characterized their pre-Christian culture, including attitudes of competitiveness, self-promotion, self-congratulation, and an over-valuing of “success”. When Paul carried the gospel to Corinth, he viewed the responsibility with fear and trembling (2:3). For the gospel of a humiliated, crucified Christ was *an affront* (σκάνδαλον) to people who cherished success and who loved winners. Schrage (1991, vol. I, 165-238), Pogooff (99-127, 197-235), Clarke (23-39, 73-88, 95-99), Brown (1995, 8-11, 89-104), Horrell (119-37), Thiselton (2000, 147-75), Hall (2003, 32-41 and 149-222), and Welborn (1997, 1-42, and 2005, 161-81), all urge, imply, or presuppose such a background to Paul’s concerns, most notably in chapters 1-4. Hall speaks of self-satisfaction in Corinth as “puffed-upness” (2003, 32-41) citing Paul’s use of the Greek words φυσιώω or φυσιοῦσθαι and καύχημα or καυχάομαι. Φυσιώω occurs six times in this epistle, namely in 1 Cor. 4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4; but only once elsewhere in Paul (Col. 2:18). καύχημα or καυχάσθαι occurs in 1 Cor. 1:29; 3:21; 4:7; 5:6; 9:15, 16; and 13: 3. The apostles, on the other hand, Paul observes with deep irony, have in the eyes of Corinth been “put on show” as a spectacle, as if in a gladiatorial combat, as “the lowest, the meanest, the basest of people” (Welborn 2005, 54; cf. 4:8-13). Hall (51-79) shows that the attitudes in question in Corinth are not restricted solely to those whom Theissen identifies as “the strong” or socially influential or well off.

The epistle contains many examples of competitive attitudes: “Where jealousy (ζήλος) and strife (ἔρις) prevail among you, are you not centred on yourselves and behaving like any merely human person?” (3: 3). Paul needs to appeal to them “that there be no splits (σχίσματα) among you” (1: 10). Welborn attributes this attitude in 1: 10 to “a power struggle, not a theological controversy” (Welborn 1997, 7; cf. 1-42). Paul declares, “Let no one be self-deceived. If any among you thinks he or she is wise in terms of this world-order, let that person become a fool in order to become wise ... God catches the clever in their craftiness” (3: 18, 20). “Let no one glory in

human persons” (3:21). “All of us possess knowledge”. This “knowledge” inflates; love, on the other hand, builds (8:1).

Comparisons of a competitive nature also too readily lead to “putting down” others, and to boasting or bragging about one’s own achievements. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I do not need you”, or the head cannot say to the feet, “I have no need of you”. “On the contrary ... those limbs and organs which seem to be less endowed with power or status than others are essential” (12:21, 22). Love does not brag; is not inflated with its own importance (13: 4).

Can this cohere with the message of the *cross*? Even those who had become Christians needed to assimilate and appropriate the preaching of the cross once again. Paul himself refused to carry himself like a professional lecturer or rhetorician, but insisted on working as an artisan. Paul “did not come ... with high-sounding rhetoric or a display of cleverness”; but this consumer-orientated culture wanted precisely what Paul refused to give. “The proclamation of the cross is for their part, folly to those who are on their way to ruin, even if it is the power of God to us who are on the way to salvation” (1:18).

Welborn expounds this aspect with an emphasis on the perceived “gallows humour” of the cross. The affront caused by the proclamation of a crucified Christ derived less from its supposedly anti-rational nature than from its apparent “stupidity” in terms of social stigma and what was perceived as vulgarity. The practical participation of the apostles in this social disgrace compounded this: “Because ... in the cross of Christ God has affirmed nothings and nobodies, he [Paul] is able to embrace the role of the fool as the authentic mode of his own existence ..., given the way that Jesus was executed” (Welborn 2005, 250). He adds, “Paul creates a discourse that is consistent with the event of the crucified Christ ... ‘Eloquent wisdom’ (σοφία λόγου) is abolished ... It signals the emergence of a discourse in which folly, weakness, and baseness are articulated almost without euphemism” (250-51).

Many in the church in Corinth desired Paul to don the mantle of the paid professional rhetorician (Clarke, 124-27; Pogoloff, 99-235; Mitchell 1992, 130-38). It embarrassed them that Paul preferred to labour as an artisan. Welborn (2005, 11) takes up Frederick Danker’s argument in *BDAG* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition) that Paul’s employment as a σκηνοποιός (Acts 18:3) is more accurately understood to denote “a maker of stage properties” rather than *tentmaker* (NRSV, REV, NJB), or *leather-worker* (Hock 1980, 60-79; cf.

Meggitt 1998, 75-6). The use of rhetorical irony in 4:8-13 provides a classic paradigm of Paul's disapproval of a triumphalist "success-orientated" gospel (Welborn 2005, 50-86). Witherington sums up the issue very well: "In Paul's time many in Corinth were already suffering from a self-made-person-escapes-humble-origins syndrome ... [Paul's] self-humiliation, his assumption of a "servant role", contradicted expected values "in a city where social climbing was a major pre-occupation" (20-21).

By comparison, from the viewpoint of Corinth the proclamation of a crucified Christ would be viewed as inexpressibly shameful, disgraceful and foolish: it is both folly and an affront (1:18, 24). The cross can have only the inevitable affect of *subverting* and *reversing* the value-system that dominated Corinthian culture. "The foolish things of the world God chose to shame the clever; and the weak things of the world God chose to shame positions of strength ... and ... to bring to nothing the 'somebodies'" (1:27-29). "We are 'fools' on Christ's account, but you are 'wise' ... We are 'weak', while you are 'strong' ... We have become, as it were, the *world's scum*, the scrapings from everyone's shoes" (4: 10,13; translation, Thiselton 2000, 344).

### 3.2 *A "Local" Theology? Social Construction and the Desire for "Autonomy"*

Many wanted and expected a "Corinthian" spirituality that we might describe in today's language as contextually re-defined or even constructed for Corinth. Paul has spoken of "wisdom", "knowledge", "Spirit", "spiritual", "free" and "saved". All of these terms, it seems, became re-defined to match a Corinthian understanding and context. David R. Hall expresses this well. He writes: "In both 1 and 2 Corinthians a contrast is drawn between two gospels and two lifestyles. Central to Paul's gospel was the crucifixion of Jesus. ... Apostles in particular were called to share the weakness and humiliation of their crucified Lord" (Hall, 163). Further, a different notion of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is part of this issue. So radical are the differences that they amount to appeals to "a different Spirit" (Hall, 183). Paul's opponents also use a vocabulary that features throughout, including "freedom", "foolishness", "testing and approval" and "measurement" (129-89).

Corinth demanded *freedom to choose*, whether leaders or life-styles; autonomy in ethics and church practice. Yet in Paul's view (and not Paul's alone) ethics contribute to the very identity of those who espouse and practise an ethical value-system. This has been well argued recently (May 2004, 34-42 and 92-143). On their side, however, many Christians in Corinth saw themselves as "*spiritual*" (πνευματικοί, 3: 1-3), they had "liberty to do all things" (πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν, 6:12; 10:23); they possessed "knowledge" (γνώσις, 8:1); so could choose their own preferred leaders (ἐγὼ μὲν ... ἐγὼ δέ ... 1:12). But Paul rejects their social construction of a local theology: they belong to one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. God called them "*together with all* who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ *in every place, both their Lord and our Lord*" (1:2). To follow a self-chosen leader isolates them from drawing on the wider resources of the catholic church (3:18). They cannot say, "I have no need of you" (12: 21). The ecclesial "order" enjoined in chapters 3-4 and 14 is a condition for the showing of love to the other elucidated in chapter 13. . Hence in several parts of the epistle *Paul re-defines* their terminology and identity again in accordance with the *received apostolic gospel*. Paul draws on common apostolic traditions.

"All of us possess 'knowledge'" (8:1)—but if anyone thinks he or she has achieved this 'knowledge', they have not yet come 'to know' (8:2). For my part, my Christian friends, I could not address you as people of the Spirit ... You are still unspiritual (3:1,3). "Liberty to do all things"—but not everything is helpful (6:12; cf. 10:23). Christian believers are on the way to salvation (present tense, 1:18).

The Corinthian concern for "autonomy" led them to devalue the trans-local character of Christian identity. In the very opening address Paul reminds them that they are called to be a holy people together with all who call on the name of the Lord ... in every place, both their Lord and ours (1:2). In 4: 7-8: Who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If, however, you received it [i.e. as a gift from another] why do you boast as if you did not receive it? Paul quotes their own triumphalist slogan with heavy irony: "We are rich ... We reign as kings" and comments, "If only you did 'reign as kings!' ... we, too, could reign as kings with you" (4:8). The apostles still struggle with weariness and wounds in the gladiators' arena while the Christians in Corinth look on and applaud (vv.9-12). The apostles are "scum" (v.13). This is partly due to a

misapprehension of “realised eschatology” (Thiselton 1978, 510-26), but no less due to success-orientated triumphalism.

Is *autonomy* the right term to describe this outlook? In the twenty-first century the term strongly resonates with political and social issues, and at the time of writing also features in world-wide Anglicanism in terms of debates about the “autonomy” of Anglican Provinces. In philosophical thought and ethical theory Kant attempted to elevate the term to denote responsible ethical judgment and mature, adult, thinking, but in the secular thinking within Enlightenment rationalism the term denoted a throwing off of all respect for “given” authorities. Only with the counter-reaction of hermeneutical thinkers such as Gadamer has a new incisive critique of Enlightenment autonomy re-emerged (1989, 271-85). In Paul neither the individual nor the local church is a self-contained or self-enclosed entity. The self and the local church exist as inter-subjective or reciprocally relational entities for whom mutual respect and love is the appropriate attitude. As we earlier observed Horsley’s comment that Paul urged the Corinthian assembly to “conduct its own affairs autonomously” (1997, 246-47) relates to independence from “the world”, not from other Christians or from other churches.

Hence *love* remains a broader and more positive theme in chapters 11 through to 14 than most appear to recognize. Chapters 8-14 place individualism, individual freedoms, and “autonomy” under a relativizing question-mark. In these chapters even “being right” is not enough if this brings damage to another. “Knowledge” not only risks inflating the ego of the one who lays claim to it (8: 1); it also risks damaging and dividing the community of the church into “informed”, “mature”, “strong”, or “secure” in their faith and those who are supposedly ill-informed, less mature, “weak”, or insecure (in the sense of uncertain) in their belief-system and Christian identity. This argument continues even into chapter 11 and beyond. Hence in 11:2-16 Paul emphasizes complementarity, reciprocity and mutuality in gender-attitudes, in contrast to assimilation of differences or uniformity. Chapter 11:17-end protects the socially vulnerable against those who fail to show them respect in the context of the Lord’s Supper.

The chapter on love stands at the very heart of the theology of this epistle (13: 1-13). Virtually all the qualities ascribed to love resonate with features (or the absence of these features) in Corinth (Thiselton 2000, 1026-74). Love shows kindness. Love does not burn with envy, does not brag—is not inflated with its own importance. It does not behave with ill-mannered

impropriety; is not pre-occupied with the interests of the self (13:4b-5a). This colours, in turn, how gifts that come from the Spirit should be exercised in worship (12:1-14:40).

### 3.3 *Audience-Orientated Rhetoric and a “Postmodern” Style of Outlook*

Bruce Winter and others have demonstrated the influence on the Corinth of Paul’s day of the Sophists, or “the Second Sophistic” (1997, especially 1-15 and 126-202). “To win admiration” was the aim of the Sophists; to present truth persuasively and clearly was the different aim of the classical rhetoricians of Rome. Sophist rhetoricians aimed to win competitions. By contrast the Schools of Cicero, Quintilian, and Seneca the Elder (c.55 B.C.—A.D.40) aimed to serve education, society, and truth (Pogoloff 1992, 7-172 and especially 173-96).

Quintilian expresses serious disquiet about those less educated rhetoricians who separate truth-content from rhetorical form or effect. Some “shout on all and every occasion and bellow their utterance ‘with uplifted hand’ (to use their phrase), dashing this way and that, panting and gesticulating wildly ... with all the frenzy of people out of their minds” (Quintilian, *Inst. Or.*, II. 11. 9-11).

Quintilian laments the prostitution of rhetoric into the status of “mere performance” by media stars and public cult-figures. They behave like athletes or singers; their oratorical flourishes and “spin” are “greeted with a storm of ... applause ... shouts of unseemly enthusiasm ... The result is vanity and empty self-sufficiency ... [They become] intoxicated by the wild enthusiasm of their fellow-pupils”, and truth is sacrificed to what the audience want to hear (Quintilian, *Inst. Or.* II. 2. 9-12). Quintilian is not alone in such a complaint. Seneca complains that too often the goal is “to win approval for yourself, rather than for the case” (Seneca, *Decl. Contr.* 9. 1).

### 3.4 *Pogoloff and Moores on Audience-Pleasing Rhetoric, Social Construction and a “Postmodern” Ethos*

In incisive and convincing studies Pogoloff and Moores, among others, find resonances between this pragmatic, audience-pleasing, sophistic rhetoric and the mood of many postmodern attitudes and values today. Sophistic rhetoric is largely concerned with the verdicts and applause of communities of power and influence, adopting a radical “anti-foundational” (not simply non-

foundational) stance, “constructing” texts and truth “only within social-linguistic worlds” (Pogoloff, 27). The assimilation of truth into techniques of persuasion evaluated by audience or consumers betrays a different “world-view” which stands “in contrast to modernist epistemologies” (27 and 30).

The very notion of being “recognized” as successful, gifted, wise, or influential confirms this point, for it is the audience or “consumer” who grants or withholds recognition, irrespective of whether it is deserved or corresponds with the truth. The fame of media stars and sports heroes is contrived and constructed by audience votes and consumer-purchases in the market-place. Value is determined by an audience of “consumers”, as if in the market. But the market is not as free or value-neutral as some might assume. It is manipulated and shaped by sophistic rhetoricians in ancient Corinth, and by the “spin” of mass media in the post-modern mind-set of many in the world of the early twenty-first century. Do teenagers genuinely *choose* whether to opt for an item of designer-clothing, or has mass advertising and peer-group pressure predisposed what they seek to buy? Sophistic rhetoricians, like much of the mass media of today, did *not* describe truth, they promoted attitudes. They devised seductive, persuasive, strategies of presentation. The literature that expounds this phenomenon as an aspect of a postmodern mind-set is vast. We select only by way of example Harvey (1989, 3-65), Derrida (1982, 207-72), Lyotard (1984, xxiv, 82), Denzin (1991, vii), Lyon (1994, 2-7; cf. also 37-99), Rorty (1998, 1-42), Thiselton (1995, 3-43 and 2006, 581-682)

John Moores also offers a parallel analysis with reference to “post-foundational” epistemology and rhetorical form and style in Paul’s Corinth (1995, 1-32 and 132-60). Paul appeals to scripture, to reason, and to common apostolic traditions within the church, as the basis on which to promote truth. He never suggests that it is the audience that constructs what counts as “gospel” (21-23). Indeed Paul remains on the watch for “code-switching” by the audience (i.e. changes of linguistic code that give new meanings to a familiar vocabulary).

Moores declares, “[Paul] does not think ... that the identity of the *message* ... is in any sense determined by what it means for those at the receiving end. It is rather *their* identity than that of the message that is determined by their response” (133-34). Christians do not construct the criteria of what counts as gospel proclamation. Hence Schrage entitles the

section 1:18 - 2:5, “Das ‘Wort vom Kreuz’ als Grund und Kriterium von Gemeinde und Apostel” (volume I, 165).

Many today may recognize some of the less desirable features of a postmodern, consumerist-orientated pluralism. We cannot simply re-define truth in terms of what appeals to “our” community. Two of the most influential American postmodernist writers today are Stanley Fish and Richard Rorty. From the side of post-modern neo-pragmatism Fish approves the stance of “rhetorical man” as against “serious man”. “Rhetorical man is trained not to discover reality but to manipulate it. Reality is what is accepted as reality, what is useful” (1989, 483).

The same might be said of Rorty’s claim that there is no task of “getting reality right”, because “there is no Way the World Is” (25). Truth is no more than what can be “justified” as useful to this or that “local” community. Not surprisingly, Rorty shares with the spirit of first-century Corinth the view that a “local” community, in effect, can define its own criteria of truth, since no criteria apply to all contexts. Paul, by contrast, perceives the cross as “ground and criterion” (Schrage, as cited above) for the Christian identity of “male and female, slave and free, Jew and Gentile” (Gal. 3:28).

Paul’s rejection of *sophistic* audience-pleasing rhetoric is apparent in 1 Cor. 2:1-5. But Paul draws upon those standard forms of *classical* rhetoric that clarify argument and articulate truth. One outstanding example comes in the chapter on resurrection. The declaration of the common apostolic tradition begins a statement of what is the case (the *narratio*, 15:1-11). The consequences of denying the resurrection constitute a first *refutatio* (vv.12-19), involving deliberative rhetoric. This outlines advantages of the case (Eriksson, 86-97; 232-78, and Mitchell, 1992, throughout). The next section affirms positive declarations and constitutes a rhetorical *confirmatio* (vv.20-34). Wuellner and McCant show convincingly that much of 1 Cor. 4:1-21 and 9:1-23 embodies not only irony (e.g. “Without us you came to reign as kings—If only you did reign!”, 4: 8), but also parody. Parody uses “satire, burlesque, irony and sarcasm” not least to puncture the pomposity of “pretentious people” (2004, 179; cf. 175-92, and Welborn 2005, 50-86).

#### 4. “Free”?—Or Sharing a Cruciform Identity with Christ as Lord?

##### 4.1 *Purchased to be Free, or Purchased to Belong to a New Lord?*

In 1 Cor 6:19b, 20 Paul writes: “You do not belong to yourselves, for you were bought with a price. Show forth God’s glory, then, in how you live your bodily life”. The imagery of the purchased slave has significance for Paul’s theology of the work of Christ. In the 1920s Adolf Deissmann, who otherwise produced often illuminating research into ancient inscriptions, led New Testament specialists astray on this particular matter. He appealed to inscriptions for the view that in the context of Graeco-Roman religions purchase from slavery amounted to an act of manumission to freedom. Deissmann cited examples of manumission at Delphi under the authority of the Temple of Apollo; and from the second century BC, an example of a “sale” to Athena. This reflected “the fictitious purchase of the slave by some divinity” by means of which now “he is a completely free man” (Deissmann 1927, 319-32; figure 59, 323).

This is not Paul’s point in 1 Cor 6: 19, 20, however. The key point which Paul makes about the purchase (*ἀγοράζω*) is that the slave has now become *the property of a new master*. To the new master he or she owes a new trust, loyalty and obedience. The researches of Bartchy (1973), Martin (1995), Harrill (1994, 1995, 1997); and Combes (1998) place this virtually beyond doubt. Martin declares, “Most scholars have agreed that Deissmann’s explanation of *buy*, *ἀγοράζειν*, to mean redemption *from* slavery by way of sacral manumission must be rejected . . . *ἀγοράζειν* refers . . . to the ordinary sale of a slave by one owner to another owner . . . The salvific element of the metaphor is . . . to a higher level of slavery (as the slave of Christ)” (63; also Wolff 1996, 131-32).

The relative status of slave, freedperson and free person depends less on these categories and their supposed differences in the abstract “than the question of *whose* slave or freedman he was or had been” (de Ste Croix, 1981, 175). Martin presses this point in detail. The status of a slave was exceedingly complex, depending partly on his or her role within a household (which might range from menial drudge or labourer to estate manager or secretary) and even more decisively on the character, expectations and will of the master (Martin, 1990, 1-49).

Johannes Weiss long ago argued that what it is to utter the acclamation κύριος Ἰησοῦς (1 Cor 12:3) is best understood by the correlative attitude and behaviour of what it is to be ὁ δοῦλος τοῦ χριστοῦ (Rom 1:1; Gal 1:10; Phil 1:1) (Weiss 1959, vol. 2, 458). On this basis, as Rudolf Bultmann has argued, the status of security and privilege invites an attitude of trust, loyalty and obedience. The believer no longer bears the care for himself or herself, but lets this care go: “If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or die we are the Lord’s” (Rom 14:7-8; Bultmann 1952, vol. 1, 330-33)

All of this has a bearing on the notorious crux of 7:20-24. Martin’s research on “upward mobility” gives pause for thought before rushing too hastily into the traditional exegesis that Paul’s maxim is “stay as one was when called”. The problematic phrase is the aorist middle imperative μάλλον χρῆσαι, from χρᾶομαι, *to make use of*. Paul leaves open precisely what it is that the person concerned is *to make use of*. One view represented by AV/KJV, RSV (but not NRSV) Origen (*1 Cor. Fragment* 38: 5-21), Jerome (Against Jov. 1:11), and Erasmus (*Omn. Op.* 881F), interprets Paul to mean *make use of freedom* if it is offered. A second view (NRSV, Allo 1956, 173-74, Collins 1999, 273-87, and Martin 1990, 65-6) applies the same verb to mean *make use of the status of being a slave*. The issues are complex (Thiselton 2000, 544-65 including an extended note; Wiedemann 1997, 1-46, especially 3 and 33). Bartchy attempts a “middle” way. He applies *make use of* to κλησις to convey the sense: “Not slavery but vocation is the main thing . . . to be a Christian . . . in all possible circumstances. Slavery may perhaps bring distinctive roles and opportunities; but *being a freedperson*, no less, may open up the possibilities of influence” Bartchy 1973, 155-59). As Martin urges, Paul is well aware both of the extremes of painful suffering and positive opportunity that slavery, with its spectrum of conditions, may bring (63-68).

The connection with the previous paragraphs rests especially on the crucial role of the character and attitude of the slave-owner (ὁ κύριος) in the lord’s purpose in purchasing the slave. A slave who was entrusted with significant responsibility perhaps involving greater literacy or numeracy than that possessed by the master might be placed in managerial charge of a household or an estate, and as one who “belonged” to the master might enjoy greater security and even status than a free person. On the other hand a slave was never more in law than the property (Latin, *res*) of the master, in whose hands the slave’s welfare and happiness rested. Hence the metaphor

of slavery as applied to Christian living entailed not only “status improvement” (Martin), but also trust, obedience, and “belonging” (Bultmann), and a new identity and *persona*. Hence, as May (1994) has argued, Christians cannot choose their own ethical value-systems without compromising their Christian identity as those who belong to Christ. In daily life, Paul reminds them, they are “members of Christ ... precisely as embodied beings, whose bodily engagements indicated the quality and character of their commitment and discipleship ... Corporate relationship as members of Christ’s body should be decisive” (Dunn 1998, 58). In view of the history of slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, we need to recall Ricoeur’s comment that “to ‘make one’s own’ what was previously ‘foreign’ remains the ultimate aim of all hermeneutics” (91), and that if or when the dimension of *appropriation* comes to the fore, we shall need to retain all the more rigorously and critically those aspects of the world of the New Testament that also reflect cultural or historical distance.

#### 4.2 *The Context and Relevance of the Confession “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor 12: 3)*

Paul’s declaration, “No one is able to declare ‘Jesus is Lord’ (Κύριος Ἰησοῦς) except through the agency of the Holy Spirit” (12:3) has been widely understood as the expression of a mark of Christian identity. However, if such a confession, creed, or acclamation is a mark of authentic Christian faith prompted by the authentic work of the Holy Spirit, it is likely that this confession entails *more* (although not less) than a cognitive proposition expressing right belief. It denotes an attitude which finds its currency in life and life-style as well as in cognitive belief. It is like nailing one’s colours to the mast, in what philosophers of language term a self-involving or existential speech-act. It is an illocutionary *act* in which *speech involves living out what it is to be Christ’s slave or Christ’s freedperson* (Thiselton 1992, 283-307; 2000, 924-27; Briggs 2001, 184-203).

An explanation of the notoriously difficult parallel in the first half of 12:3 sheds still further light upon the incompatible relation of jealousy and strife (3:3) and cruciform, Christomorphic discipleship under the Lordship of Christ. In my commentary I considered no less than twelve possible interpretations of the difficult utterance in v.3a, οὐδεις ἐν πνεύματι Θεοῦ λαλῶν λέγει, Ἀνάθεμα Ἰησοῦς. I had then favoured two front-runners among the twelve: (1) Cullmann’s proposal that the utterance tested faith in

a context of persecution; and (2) perhaps more likely W. C. van Unnik's hypothesis that the utterance alludes to belief in the atoning work of Christ's bearing the "curse" for human sin (Gal. 3:13), but with a failure to extend this to faith to the living Jesus Christ of the resurrection. Arguably such a reduced faith does not come from the Spirit. Thiselton (2000, 903-27) provides full documentation of the twelve views discussed. However, more recently Winter proposed a solution that seems more convincing than any of the twelve others.

The key to Winter's new interpretation is twofold (Winter 2001, 164-183). First, because the Greek contains no verb but simply has ἀνάθεμα Ἰησοῦς we need not translate, "Jesus *is* a curse", or "*is* accursed"; the Greek may be translated, "Jesus *grants* a curse". Second, in recent years archaeologists have unearthed some twenty-seven ancient curse tablets made of lead in or around Corinth (fourteen on the slopes of Acrocorinth in the precincts of pagan temples), and these witness to the practice of people's appealing to pagan deities to "curse" their rivals or competitors often in business, love, litigation or sport.

In the light of 3:1-3, 6:1-8 and other passages, it is plausible to suggest that some Christians claimed to be "spiritual people" at the same time as asking Jesus to impose some "curse" against those who had earned their disfavour. Paul declares that this *contradicts* any claim that the Holy Spirit is manifest in their life. This is a more probable explanation than others, and witnesses to Paul's concern that competitiveness and envy of "success" on the part of others does not fit well with claims to be "spiritual". Such could not be inspired by the Holy Spirit; the criterion of this is Christomorphic (v. 3b).

#### 4.3 *Different Understandings of the Spirit and "Spiritual"*

The final part of our case for hermeneutical appropriation along the lines suggested concerns notions of "spirituality" in Corinth and today. 1 Corinthians reveals a difference of understanding between many in the church in Corinth and Paul. We have already noted Hall's comment: "In both 1 and 2 Corinthians a contrast is drawn between two gospels and two lifestyles ... So radical are the differences that they amount to appeals to "a different Spirit" (163, 183). Significantly Wire, as we noted, also asserts that Paul's view of both the Spirit and "wisdom" differs strongly from that of many in Corinth, writing from the standpoint of a feminist writer whose

sympathies are closer to Christians in Corinth than to Paul (Wire 1990, 12-24, 47-71, 135-58, and 181-96).

Paul's opponents in 1 and 2 Corinthians, Hall adds, also use a different vocabulary (199-222). Does "spiritual" (πνευματικός, 2:13, 15; 3:1; 9:11; 10:3; 12:1; 14:1, 37; 15:44, 46) denote some "higher" capacity of the inner self for God, or that which characterizes the activity of the Holy Spirit? In 2:5-16 Paul appears to define the word or concept in terms of transcendent, transforming power "from without" (τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ 2:12) and in terms of reflecting "the mind of Christ" (2:16).

Smit's constructive rhetorical analysis of chapters 12-14 convincingly shows their rhetorical unity, and that τῶν πνευματικῶν (12:1) provides a rhetorical *insinuato for this unity* (Smit 1993, 211-29). For some or many in Corinth πνευματικός denoted a quality of *spirituality* capable of conferring status, admiration, recognition or respect; for Paul the term usually denotes that which pertains to the Holy Spirit. Hence he *consciously re-defines* πνευματικός, as he also does σοφία, through "code-switching" (Moores 26-8, 133-35). His Christomorphic criteria mean that Paul cannot apply the term πνευματικός to them in his sense of the term without strong qualification (3: 1-3).

Vielhauer argues that Paul envisages the possibility of a "spirituality" which may be *self-induced*, not least in his use of the phrase ἑαυτὸν οἰκοδομεῖ (14: 4; Vielhauer 1940, 91-98). Schrage seems sympathetic with this suggestion (volume 3, 388). If the heart of a Christomorphic Spirit-inspired experience and mind-set is Christ's concern for "the other" (as it is throughout this epistle), then to *build only the self* denotes a scale of priorities which does not cohere with what the Holy Spirit promotes.

This assists us with the long-standing debate about whether we should translate περὶ δὲ τῶν πνευματικῶν as *Now about spiritual persons*; or as *Now about spiritual gifts* (AV/KJV, NRSV, NIV) or *gifts of the Spirit* (NJB, REB, Collins). Allo despairs of finding any criterion by which to reach a decision (320). Paul clearly prefers to use the term χαρίσματα (12:4-11). The code-switching conveyed initially in the rhetorical *insinuato* which Paul uses *both* as a favourable term in the eyes of the readers *and* as a lever for the issue of a Christomorphic criterion for what is "of the Holy Spirit" is therefore best conveyed *in this context* by translating: "*Now about things that 'come from the Spirit'*". Paul does not use the term *spiritual* loosely or to denote an entirely human quality.

4.4 *A Related Note on Prophecy and Glossolalia, and on the Meaning of σώμα πνευματικόν in 15:44.*

*Prophecy* (v.10) appears to offer no problem of translation. On the level of vocabulary alone, προφητεία may denote a gift or activity as broad and general as declaring or telling forth the revealed will of God. The canonical prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries BC also “tell forth” the divine word. Amos views prophetic speech as synonymous with proclamation or preaching (Amos 7:16).

All the same, does prophetic speech in Paul denote short staccato utterances of a spontaneous, unprepared, nature? If so, then criteria of the Spirit’s inspiration may seem to apply to form no less than content, which Pogoloff questions in relation to σοφία (Pogoloff, 99-128). Hill (1979, 110-40), Müller (1975, 47-108), Gillespie (1994, 130-150), and Thiselton (2000, 956-65 and 1087-94) urge the near-equivalence between prophecy and “pastoral preaching” in Paul. Héring observes that since Paul explicitly defines the aim of prophetic speech as “to edify, exhort, and encourage, it coincides therefore to a large extent with what we call a sermon today” (1962, 127)

Three further factors perhaps support this. First, Paul regarded his personal calling to apostleship as also, in effect, a call to prophetic ministry, akin to the call of Jeremiah, whose call is described in similar terms (Gal. 1:15; and Jer. 1: 5; Sandnes 1991). Might this suggest that he perceived his preaching and possibly even his letters as falling into this broad genre?

Second, this approach in line with the Old Testament stands in contrast with many examples of prophecy in the Graeco-Roman world. The “prophecies” of the Sibyll and other Graeco-Roman oracles were often uttered in an ecstatic or trance-like state. The most notorious example is the frenzied cries of the Bacchae depicted by Euripides. This would account in part for Paul’s vehement emphasis on “controlled” speech (1 Cor. 14:29-33). In spite of Forbes’ insistence that a comparison with ecstatic pagan prophecy is irrelevant, Boring and Hall insist that notions of prophecy *in Corinth* were more oracular, ecstatic, and individualistic than *Paul’s* view (Forbes 1995; Boring 1991; Hall 2003).

Third, prophetic speech “built up” the church, both by convincing “outsiders” of the truth of the gospel (1 Cor. 14: 24-25) and by the nurture of faith. Zwingli and Bullinger were nearer to the view outlined here than some

are today. They identified prophetic discourse with scriptural reflection leading to pastoral application and nurture.

On the phenomenon of “glossolalia” Paul uses the generic phrase “species or *kinds* of tongues (Greek, γένη γλωσσῶν, 12:10). Within the New Testament and even in Paul’s epistles there is more than one unitary phenomenon that may be called a tongue. Hence the general question “What is speaking-in-tongues?” hardly helps anyone until we specify what the term denotes in this or that context of the New Testament. However, two key contrasts help to explain Paul’s approach. Whereas prophetic discourse is articulate and understandable, “tongues” remain inarticulate and unintelligible unless this utterance is transposed into articulate speech. Second, tongues are addressed by or through human persons *to God* (14:2); prophecy is addressed to human persons *from God* (14:3)

Some five views about speaking-in-tongues find a place in scholarly literature. These include (1) the notion of tongues as angelic speech; (2) as miraculous power to speak foreign languages; (3) as liturgical or archaic utterances; (4) as ecstatic speech; or (5) as mechanisms that release pre-conscious longings or praise. I have documented the standard sources for each of these five views elsewhere (Thiselton 2000, 970-88). I have also long held this last view (Thiselton 1979, 15-36). I agree with the Pentecostalist writer F. D. Macchia who, with Käsemann, Stendahl and Theissen, sees a very close parallel with the Spirit’s speaking in or through a Christian “with sighs too deep for words” in Rom. 8:26-27 (Macchia 1996, 63-69; 1998, 149-73; Theissen 1987, 276-341, This “sighing” or “groaning” in Romans is a longing for eschatological fulfilment and completion in the light of a glimpse of what God’s glory can and one day will be. It combines praise and yearnings that go beyond words.

Insight, feeling, or longing, at the deepest level of the heart need an outlet; they need to be “released”. Theissen offers a convincing scenario. The Holy Spirit gives the capacity to plumb the depths of the unconscious as a genuine *gift*. The Holy Spirit sheds abroad the love of God (Rom. 5: 5). *Heart* (καρδιά) frequently includes what nowadays we call the unconscious (1 Cor. 4:4-5). Hence “Glossolalia is language of the unconscious—language capable of consciousness”, which makes “unconscious depth dimensions of life accessible” (Theissen, 306).

The only way in which the gift of tongues may be used for public benefit is for the speaker (the Greek text in 14:13 does not refer to a *second* person called an “interpreter”) to receive the further gift of being enabled to

communicate the content in articulate speech (“Anyone who speaks in tongues should pray for the ability to interpret”, REB, 14: 13). Indeed ἑρμηνεία (12:10) may denote *articulation* rather than *interpretation*. This meaning is well attested among writers contemporary with Paul. Josephus writes to his Roman readership that he longs to convey the indescribable wonders of Herod’s temple, but he cannot quite articulate (ἑρμηνεύω or διερμηνεύω) them, i.e. cannot quite put them fully into words (*War* 5: 176, 178 and 182). Many more examples have been offered (1979, 15-36). It is unfortunate that the NRSV retains the more traditional phrase “unless *someone* interprets”, even when τις is absent from the Greek text, and REB recognizes this.

Does it add anything further to these arguments to explore the meaning of σῶμα πνευματικόν in the resurrection chapter (15:44)? Among recent writers on this chapter N. T. Wright provides a careful understanding of the issues that also supports our case. He understands Paul’s argument in terms of (1) the role of God as resourceful Creator who raises the dead; (2) resurrection as a divine gift of grace; (3) the existence or possibility of “different types of physicality throughout creation” (Wright 2003, 340), and (4) the σῶμα πνευματικόν not as an immaterial mode of being or light-substance, but as “a body animated by, enlivened by, the Spirit of the true God” (354).

If there is a body for the human realm, Wright perceives Paul as arguing, there is also a body for the realm of the Spirit (v.44). The translation “*sown a physical body ... raised a spiritual body ...*” (NRSV) is misleading. The contrast in these verses is not between physical and non-physical. The Greek πνευματικός does not mean “composed of non-material spirit”. Paul uses the adjective *spiritual* (πνευματικός) in this epistle to denote that which reflects the presence, power and transforming activity of *the Holy Spirit*. The raised body is characterized by the uninterrupted transforming power of the Holy Spirit of God. The resurrection mode of existence stands in contrast with the ordinary human body that has been open to the influence of the Holy Spirit, but in partial ways, still marred by human failure, fallibility and self-interest. The perfect openness to the Holy Spirit characteristic of the resurrection mode of being therefore brings together decay’s reversal, splendour or *glory*, power and a mode of being constituted by the Spirit (vv.42b-44a; cf. Thiselton 2000, 1257-81 and 1995b, 258-89). Might not the resurrection σῶμα be said to constitute a trans-physical counterpart to what allows for

those aspects of “embodied” existence needed for identity and communication?

Such notions of “spirituality” are determined by what it is to be transformed by the Holy Spirit into the image of Christ; “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man from heaven” (15:49; cf. 45-48, 56-57). This is a long way from notions of a human or self-constructed spirituality. This distinction is not fanciful. Paul implies it in the syntax of 2:10-12, and Irenaeus observes here that “to be ‘spiritual’ is the handiwork of God” (*Against Heresies* 5.6.1). Gregory of Nazianzus also urges this distinction on the basis of 1 Corinthians (*Theol. Or.* 5:2 and 12). Athanasius makes the point with reference to Paul’s ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ in 2:12 (*Letters to Serapion* 1. 22). Above all, however, the resurrection chapter stresses that resurrection is not an innate capacity of the human self, but is *sheer gift* (15:38; and Thiselton 1995b). Like the gospel, God gives it by grace; it is not self-constructed.

## **5. Concluding Hermeneutical Reflections: Distance, Appropriation, Formation, and Moving, Expanding, Horizons**

The upshot of these explorations is to underline the gulf between two understandings of the gospel and of the Spirit and “spirituality” that separated the church in Corinth from Paul, at least at the time of his writing 1 Corinthians. This difference sets the scene for exploring issues of hermeneutical distance and appropriation today. Paul re-proclaims the apostolic proclamation of the cross as “the ground and criterion” of Christian identity (Schrage, vol.1, 165). Triumphalism (Welborn 2005), self-chosen ethics (May 2004), or “post-modern”, local, social construction (Pogoloff; Moores) undermine such identity. These issues have returned to us in some form or degree today, and provide a frame of reference for issues about hermeneutical distance and appropriation in the early twenty-first century.

All the same, in the first section of this study we argued that there is no merely straightforward one-to-one correspondence between the meaning of the terms *social construction*, *autonomy*, *postmodern*, *consumerist*, *triumphalist* and *local theology* as these terms are customarily used in the twenty-first century, and their proximate counterparts as they may be applicable to Paul’s Corinth. Even the theological terms *one*, *holy*, *catholic*,

and *apostolic* as they are used in contemporary Christian thought do not yield a precise, straight forward, one-to-one match with their near-equivalents in Pauline thought.

This is what we might expect in the light of the hermeneutical explorations of Gadamer and Ricoeur. To be sure, Gadamer writes that “the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past”, and observes that “*understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves* (1989, 306, his italics). But the phrase “fusion of horizons” (*Horizontverschmelzung*) is too often made a court of appeal without due respect for its proper context, in which Gadamer rejects “a naive assimilation of the two” in favour of deliberately “not covering up” any residual tension between them (306). The historical horizon remains “different” from the horizon of the present. In what sense, then, does Gadamer speak of a “fusion of horizons” at all? Hermeneutical distance is never entirely eliminated. This is part of maintaining “respect” for each different horizon of understanding. Nevertheless in the very *process* of seeking to understand what is “other”, horizons *move and expand*. Gadamer declares, “The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. *Horizons change for a person who is moving* [my italics]. Thus the horizon of the past ... is always in motion” (304). A “closed” or fixed horizon is “an abstraction”; frozen and lifted out of the flow of a history of effects (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). A closed or fixed horizon is generated only by a single point of view or by a “position”.

When they move and begin to merge, *horizons expand* and begin to form “the one great horizon that moves from within and then, beyond the frontiers of the present, embraces the historical depths of our self-consciousness ... embraced by a single historical horizon. [This] shape[s] this moving horizon out of which human life always lives” (304). What can make us “aware of the otherness, the indissoluble individuality of the other person” is “putting *ourselves* in his position”, namely when we try to “put ourselves in someone else’s shoes” (305). This brings us to the heart of “understanding” (*Verstehen*).

This is why, Gadamer observes, we may *use*, but must always *go beyond*, historical method. He notes, “It is a hermeneutical necessity always to go beyond mere reconstruction” (374). If we view the historical situation of Paul’s dialogue with the church in Corinth as merely generating free-floating “problems” to be addressed, we shall be dealing in “an empty abstraction ... The concept of the problem is clearly an abstraction” (375-

76). To be immersed in the hermeneutical dialectic of distance or otherness and appropriation “transforms problems back to questions that arise, and that derive their sense from motivation” (377). To embrace a dialectical process of question-and-answer within the larger, moving, and expanding horizon of an interactive past and present understanding is to move equally beyond both abstraction and historicism to a deeper hermeneutical understanding that is *formative*. The application of this insight from Gadamer to New Testament studies is probably the most significant achievement of a recent work by Brook Pearson (2001, 94-99).

It is precisely the dialectic between distance and appropriation that will enhance reciprocally or interactively *both* our understanding of the church in ancient Corinth, with its competitiveness, triumphalism, self-sufficiency, desire for autonomy, demand for audience-pleasing rhetoric, “local” theology, and perhaps “postmodern” cast of mind *and also* the implications and entailments of social construction, ethnocentric neo-pragmatism, postmodernism and radical pluralism in our own century.

We do not have space to trace how this dialectic features in other thinkers in the field of hermeneutics. In brief, it has points of close affinity with Paul Ricoeur’s dual emphasis upon critical suspicion, which resists premature assimilation, and his hermeneutics of retrieval that draws on symbol and multi-layered re-figuration, and which facilitates appropriation. Ricoeur writes, “Hermeneutics seems to me to be animated by this double motivation: willingness to suspect, willingness to listen; vow of rigor, vow of obedience. In our time we have not finished doing away with *idols* and we have barely begun to listen to *symbols*” (1970, 27, his italics). Even Schleiermacher earlier noted the tension in hermeneutics whereby simply to restrict interpretation to linguistic and historical factors alone would nurture hermeneutical “pedantry”, while simply to work along the lines of supra-cognitive “divination” alone, without due criticism and distance, would, he urged, encourage the outlook of a hermeneutical “nebulist” (205). The interpreter must learn how “the first readers could understand”, and “do justice to the rootedness of the New Testament authors in their time and place” (104, 107); yet also “transform himself” for other levels of understanding (150). Of these comparative and “divinatory” levels of interpretation, as well as those of “grammatical”, “technical” and “psychological” dimensions, he observes that “each operation presupposes the other” (69). Schleiermacher began a path that reached hermeneutical maturity in Gadamer and Ricoeur.

If an active engagement between the horizons of the interpreter and those of the text takes place, this process will become *formative* in terms of the reshaping the interpreter's horizons of understanding. The interpreter's understanding of the text will undergo re-formation, but in the very process of expansion and enlargement the interpreter's horizons of understanding will also become re-configured or transformed in terms of understanding his or her own conceptual world afresh or more deeply. The interpreter acquires an enlarged understanding of his or her own world. Such concepts as *autonomy, local theology, consumerism, triumphalism, social construction, or postmodern mood*, will come to resonate in extended ways.

For the sake of balance, we add a final footnote. Wire (1990) and Økland (2004) have also emphasized the effect of a certain gulf between Paul and the church in Corinth. But for Wire it is Paul, rather than Corinth, who disengages thought from reality, and who uses "persuasive" rhetoric in place of truthful description. If Paul and Corinth hold different views of the Spirit, as Hall also stresses, she sees more merit in the robustly liberating understanding of the Spirit in Corinth than in Paul's more manipulative appeals to the Holy Spirit to impose a hierarchical "order". Økland goes further. By imposing "body of Christ" language onto the definition or identity of the church, even "gender difference remains unrepresented" (219). Hence Paul's language yields no more than a superficial illusion about mutuality and reciprocity in 11:2—14:40.

Far from undermining our main question about hermeneutical distance and appropriation, these approaches underline its importance, and extend its agenda. How do the epistemological questions about truth and rhetoric raised by Pogoloff and Moores shape our understanding of this epistle and of parallel questions in our day? In what sense does the cross remain as a critique of, and criterion for, authentic Christian faith and life? Does belief in the resurrection point to the gift-and-given character of the new creation, as against a socially constructed religion? Does Paul reflect the solitary judgments of a lone individual figure, or does he (as Eriksson, Holmberg, Ellis, Olrog, and others imply) communicate the shared premises of a transcontextual and collaborative apostolate? How do "our" notions of autonomy, consumerism, "successful" religion, or local theology, relate, if at all, to possible counterparts in Corinth? If Gadamer and Ricoeur are right, to address this agenda is simultaneously to facilitate an understanding of this epistle and also to broaden our understanding of our own times.

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