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UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Idolatry and Authority: A Study of 1 Corinthians 8.1-11.1  
in the Light of the Jewish Diaspora

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Divinity for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Phua, Liong Seng Richard

2002

**Idolatry and Authority: A Study of 1 Corinthians 8.1-11.1  
in the Light of the Jewish Diaspora**

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## Author's Declaration

I affirm that this thesis is entirely my own work and that all significant quotations have been acknowledged in the footnotes. No part of the thesis has previously been submitted for consideration for any degree.

Signature: Richard M. King



## Preface

I often wondered how Judaism had influenced Paul and his converts, particularly with regard to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Having worked through the epistle itself and pored through the burgeoning literature, I thought one of the most contentious issues must be that of the question of God/s. As different religions today make their claims as to the truth of their religions and their respective Gods, I realised that such claims were not new. In fact, the passage in 1 Cor 8.1-11.1 reveals a problem that concerns the question of God/s and the claims of different belief systems, i.e. Jewish, Christian, and Graeco-Roman. This question is important as 1 Cor 8.1-11.1 is about contact with other religions, and loyalty to Christ. The fact that Paul devoted three chapters to the discussion of this issue of idolatry suggests that it is not as simple as eating/not eating idol-meat. Thus, I was motivated to find out why there could be such differences of opinion with regards to the Gods and idolatry, and what parallels there might be, if any, in the Jewish Diaspora.

In order to be fair to all, I have decided to use the upper case for the letter 'G' in the noun 'God', whether I am referring to the God of Israel (i.e. Yahweh), or God of the Jews, or God of the Christians, or other people's Gods.

As to citation, I have used the 'author:date' style and left the full details of the secondary literature to the bibliography.

## Acknowledgements

It has taken longer for me to complete this research than I had originally expected. Many people and several organisations have been instrumental to my academic quest. First of all, I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to Professor John M. G. Barclay who, over the past four and a half years, has carefully and meticulously guided me through my research. As a scholar, he encouraged and continues to encourage me to leave no stone unturned and to pay attention not only to detail but also to the broad picture. He has demonstrated to me what it means to be a scholar. He has also displayed tremendous amounts of patience and skill in guiding a somewhat wayward student whose first language was Chinese, and leading him to a point where he was able to articulate more cogently. But Professor Barclay has done more than what a supervisor would normally do: he received my wife and myself at the airport when we first arrived, took us round Glasgow city for a short tour and, knowing that we would have difficulty finding our way round for the first time, bought two bags of groceries enough to last us almost a week! To help us feel at home in Glasgow, he took us to his own home to meet his family within a few days of our arrival, made arrangements for us to meet other postgraduates, and helped us throughout over other personal problems we faced. Professor Barclay will remain not only a mentor, but together with his family they have become our very close friends.

Several organisations have made it financially possible for me to undertake my studies in Glasgow: Orchard Road Presbyterian Church generously paid for three years of tuition fees amounting to S\$60,000.00; Brash Trust paid for my living amounting to S\$37,000.00. Mr Huang Yee Chong and his wife Ms Lim Yui Nguan, through the former's father, helped to secure a yearly support from The Lee Foundation which paid partially for our rent. The Divinity Faculty offered a small award during our first year.

Towards the end of my studies Singapore Bible College, where I now teach, offered a monthly allowance. The financial assistance of the last two organisations helped with our finances as my wife did not receive any financial assistance other than our meagre savings. To the above organisations, I wish to express my deepest appreciation and gratitude.

Many friends from our church in Singapore, Orchard Road Presbyterian Church, have been most encouraging. The former senior minister Rev Derek J. Kingston taught me English in the late 1970s. And I served as a preacher with him later in the early 1990s. He had been instrumental in securing a three-year tuition support for me from the church. The Board of Elders and Deacons encouraged us and many members of the church were behind us throughout. They emailed us, wrote us letters, and even telephoned us from Singapore. Some of them had even given financial help in the initial period. Dr and Mrs Christopher Khoo provided a yearly support of S\$2,000.00 for two years, which became the source of support for the commitments we had towards families and several poverty-stricken people. Similarly, Mr Tony Puah and his wife Ms Jehanne Koong, together with their Bible Study group showed their love through love gifts and their profound friendship. Rev Yap Wai Keong was a very wonderful friend and confidante throughout my own spiritual journey. When we were in Glasgow he kept in touch with us and took care of all our mails and legal matters for our flat in Singapore. To these wonderful friends, we are indeed grateful.

Human relationships are a very vital part of our stay in Glasgow. We have met many wonderful and caring people and I would like to say more about each of them, but space does not permit, I shall only mention them by name. I hope someday, my wife and I will be able to tell them how deeply they have touched our lives. The



former pastor of Park Church Uddingston, Rev Earsley White and his wife Silvia, took care of us in ways beyond description; David and Mary Graham; David and Jeanette Miller; Robert and Margaret Miller; David and Pauline Young; Kenneth and Cassie McClean and their three wonderfully lovely daughters, Katie, Margaret and Mairie; Ian and Liz Hutcheon; William and Isabel Bar; Elizabeth Thompson; and many members of Park Church unreservedly extended their love and hospitality to us. Dr Alistair May, Dr Steven Chester, and Miss Susan Miller have been encouraging in different ways. Mr and Mrs David Batteridge, our landlord, cared for us throughout and became our close friends.

My brothers and sisters, and my mother-in-law back in Singapore were encouraging and caring in different ways.

Finally, I want to mention the most important person in this whole journey. During a time when all her friends were actively and enthusiastically finding jobs and setting up their careers, Natalie packed up everything and left with a man for a totally unknown place. She left family, friends, the prospects of a good career and, without a single cent, joined me to come to Glasgow. Despite her weak health (which turned out to be strengthened by Glasgow weather!), she gave all her support. During our first year, she was so thrifty that we ended up spending only about 2,000 GBP! She fell quite ill during our first winter but did not once utter a single word of complaint. She endured all the loneliness and showed her love to a husband struggling for a PhD. It was in Glasgow that she first took to cooking and preparing all the wonderfully delicious meals for her hungry husband, including some of the most tasty traditional Asian pastries. She would encourage me when the path of research seemed rough and unpromising, and her lovely smiles and laughter simply kept me going. During our stay in Glasgow, she missed her mother and was totally devastated when she learnt,

belatedly, about her mother's hospitalisation. Similarly, she lost two uncles while we were in Glasgow. Natalie endured all this, and more, with patience and suffered very much because of me and this academic pursuit.

On 5<sup>th</sup> September 2002, Natalie joined me to return to Glasgow for the oral defence of this thesis, which was scheduled for 9<sup>th</sup> September 2002. When we returned to Singapore, Natalie suddenly became very ill the day after, i.e. 13<sup>th</sup> September 2002. Doctors could not tell exactly what she was suffering from, except that it was some mental illness. Natalie was in torment and continually pleaded with me to help her end her life. She never recovered from her illness and, on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2003, she took her own life by jumping down from our 17<sup>th</sup> storey apartment. She landed on a tiny triangular plot of soft soil where there was a small plant, with solid concrete surrounding the plot. The miracle was that her body was amazingly preserved and none of her bones were broken. I am reminded of Psalm 116.15, 'Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints'. Her suffering of almost four months finally ended. Her departure breaks my heart forever. Natalie, who is my best friend, my lover, my soul, my life, and my all, will always remain in my heart and I will love her forever. This thesis is submitted in loving memory of her.

## ABSTRACT

1 Cor 8.1-11.1 concerns the subject of idolatry in first-century Christianity and ancient Judaism. Jews and Christians differ over what constitutes idolatry; and even within ancient Judaism and early Christianity, there was no consensus on what it meant. The NT passage concerns three parties, i.e. Paul, the 'strong', and the 'weak', who differed over idolatrous practices. Scholarly opinions concerning this particular passage differ significantly and one of the most important reasons for this state of affairs is the ambiguity of the definition of idolatry. In this thesis, a set of definitions are set up which are applied to the examination of the various relevant Diaspora Jewish literature, inscriptions and papyri, and finally the NT passage. And this reveals that while there is a package of definitions of idolatry, these definitions do not always operate as a package. Jews adopted different definitions and so carved out spaces for themselves. Some Jews adopted a blanket condemnation of anything related to Gentile religions and idols, e.g. Philo, Josephus, Joseph and Aseneth, and such like. Such Jews operated with strict definitions of idolatry and condemned everything related to idols and their makers. Other Jews operated with different definitions, although they still held the view that there was only one God. They did not condemn other religious traditions but held a concept that allowed the identification of the one true God with other people's Gods, i.e. other people in fact worshipped the true God but called him by different names. These differences of opinion parallel those of the three parties in the NT passage under investigation. The 'strong' believed that there was only one God and that idols were nothing in the world. This view is held by both strict as well as accommodating Jews. But they differed over how this view might be applied. The 'strong' in Corinth applied this knowledge to justify their attendance at pagan temples and their consumption of idol-meat, and even possible participation in the pagan



religious rituals. For them, their conversion to Christ had gained them the ‘freedom’ and ἐξουσία to behave in such a manner. The ‘weak’ most probably adopted a strict Jewish position and therefore rejected idolatry. However, they lived among the ‘strong’ who accommodated to idolatry. Their conscience therefore suffered. Paul, however, represents quite a different position. He was a Jew who converted to Christ’s gospel and became an apostle of Jesus Christ. Although he was brought up as a strict Jew, Paul no longer operated with strict Jewish definitions. He can share the position of the ‘strong’ that there is only one God and that idols are nothing. But he forbids any attendance at pagan temples or participation in their religious rituals, for he believes that such behaviour is unfaithful to the Lord and violates the covenant with Christ. Further, eating idol-meat in the presence of idols constitutes an act that dishonours the true God. The way to resolve the issue lies in who decides what constitutes idolatry and what is proper Christian behaviour. In this regard, Paul re-affirms his apostolic authority among the Corinthians which then became his basis for deciding and resolving the conflict over idolatry. Almost all the definitions set up are operative in Paul. And Paul’s injunction to the ‘strong’ is to flee from idolatry because idolatrous behaviour would incur the wrath of God and lead to God’s punishment, which is the loss of one’s eschatological salvation. For the Diaspora Jews, the ‘final court of appeal’ was the law; but for the Corinthian church, the authority Paul sets up is Christ, the gospel, salvation, and Paul himself as the founding apostle.

## Abbreviations

All biblical books, including OT pseudepigraphical books, follow standard abbreviations. The works of Philo and Josephus are abbreviated according to *SBL Handbook of Style*, edited by Patrick H. Alexander et al. Hendrickson, 1999. The abbreviations of all other journals, series, and works are as follows.

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i> . Edited by H. Temporini and W. Haase. Berlin, 1972-
BAGD	Bauer, W., W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and W. F. Danker. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . Chicago, 1979
BDB	<i>The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i> . Hendrickson, 1979
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CIG	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum</i> . Edited by A. Boeckh. 4 vols. Berlin, 1828-1877
CIJ	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum</i> . Edited by J. B. Frey. 2 vols. Rome, 1936-1952
CPJ	<i>Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum</i> . Edited by V. Tcherikover. 3 vols. Cambridge, 1957-1964
CRINT	Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
EDNT	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by H. Balz, G. Schneider. ET. Grand Rapids, 1990-1993
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
ERE	<i>Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics</i> . Edited by J. Hastings. 13 vols. New York, 1908-1927. Reprint, 7 vols, 1951
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUT	Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
ISBE	<i>International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JJP	<i>Journal of Juristic Papyrology</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSS	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LXX	The Septuagint
NCB	New Century Bible



<i>Numen</i>	<i>Numen: International Review for the History of Religions</i>
<i>NIB</i>	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i>
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDNTT</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> . Edited by C. Brown. 4 vols. Grand Rapids, 1975-1985.
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>OGIS</i>	<i>Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae</i> . Edited by W. Dittenberger. 2 vols. Leipzig, 1903-1905
OT	Old Testament
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>OTP</i>	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> . Edited by J. H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. New York, 1983, 1985.
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SNTSMS	Society of New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SNTW	Studies of the New Testament and Its World
SP	Sacra Pagina
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, 1964-1976
<i>TrinJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Studia theologica</i>
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

1 Cor 8.1-11.1 constitutes the key passage for examining and understanding the differences of opinion in early Christianity on idolatry, represented by three positions. There is no other NT text that devotes such length to the discussion of this topic. And how we explain these differences will help us understand where the battle lines on idolatry are drawn in the conflict within early Christianity and in the relation between early Christianity and early Judaism. Why is idolatry so important as to warrant Paul's lengthiest discussion in 1 Cor? What exactly is at stake? And why are there differences of opinion in early Christianity?

One of the key issues in the interpretation and understanding of 1 Cor 8.1-11.1 lies in the parties involved. Thus, the identities of the 'strong' and the 'weak' will illuminate the issue in the passage. Are the parties Jewish Christians or Gentile Christians? Or is it a question of conflict between a Jewish Paul and Gentile Christians' (converts') opinion? Or is it a conflict between a Christian Paul and his Jewish opponents? The identities of the groups will help us understand their ideologies, and therefore their actions.

But is this a question of ethnicity? It has been assumed by most scholars that the 'strong' and the 'weak' were either Gentile or Jewish Christians, simply on the basis of their opinions/practices. However, the issue of idolatry in this passage is much more complex and it may reflect the fact that Judaism and Jewish ethnicity need not go alongside each other. For example, the 'strong' need not be ethnically Jewish even though they may subscribe to a theology that is informed by the Jewish scripture, while their practice may be non-traditional. Similarly, the 'weak' may subscribe to a



theology shared by the ‘strong’, but adopt traditional practice, without necessarily being ethnically Jewish. What seems clear is that the ethnicity of the parties involved does not necessarily correlate with their practice. The only party whose theology is informed by the Jewish scripture, whose practice is somewhat modified (i.e. Christian), and who is clearly an ethnic Jew is Paul.

This chapter therefore seeks to survey the scholarly opinions on 1 Cor 8.1-11.1 and draw out the strengths and weaknesses of the various interpretations. This will throw light on how the passage may be viewed. The first step in my task is to carry out an initial analysis of the textual evidence concerning the parties of the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’.

## **1.2 Textual evidence – initial analysis/survey**

### **1.2.1 Two groups – the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’**

#### **The ‘weak’ – real or hypothetical**

Although the vast majority of scholars have accepted the existence of two groups in 1 Cor 8.1-11.1, it was J. C. Hurd who first suggested that there were not two groups in the church at Corinth.<sup>1</sup> He argues that at those three points where the two terms (i.e. ‘strong’ and ‘weak’) are used in direct opposition to each other (1 Cor 1.25, 26-27; 4.10), they do not refer to two parties.<sup>2</sup> Outside 1 Cor 8, Hurd does not see any consistent usage of the terms, nor any evidence supporting the notion of two groups. The problem of idolatry is basically between Paul and the Corinthians as a whole. He thus posits that Paul created the hypothetical ‘weak’ Christians as a way to discourage the Corinthians from eating idol-meat.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hurd 1983:125.

<sup>2</sup> Hurd 1983:124.

<sup>3</sup> This idea is followed by Fee 1980:176. However, in his commentary (1987:378) he seems to imply the existence of these ‘weak’ Christians.



Similarly, Gooch does not think that those passages indicating two groups (e.g. 8.7-13; 9.22; 10.28; 11.18-22, 33-34) support the notion of these groups' existence.<sup>4</sup> Gooch's argument is that 11.18-22, 33-34 have a different context, while the 'weak' of 9.22 are non-Christians. However, he offers no explanation for 10.28. And he does not think 8.1-13 reflects the existence of the 'weak' either. Although 8.1-4 'echoes the views of the strong, there are no similar echoes of the views of the weak; while in 8.1 and 8.4 we hear the *Corinthians*, in 8.7-13 we hear not the weak Corinthians but Paul'.<sup>5</sup> Noting the conditional nature of Paul's objections (e.g. 'lest in some way' [8.9]; 'if good is an obstacle' [8.13]), Gooch concludes that Paul sets up a hypothetical case of the 'weak' ('if someone sees you [8.10], and 'if someone says' [10.28]).<sup>6</sup>

Are the 'weak' real or hypothetical? In 1 Cor 8.1-6 Paul seems to agree with the basic position of the Corinthians. However, v 7, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐν πᾶσιν ἡ γνῶσις..., begins with a strong 'but'.<sup>7</sup> This gives another side of the situation. Indeed, 'we all have knowledge' (8.4), yet Paul in v 7 quickly points out that there are some who do not share the 'knowledge'. This statement of Paul is neither conditional nor hypothetical; but a bare assertion of a fact. The 'strong' Corinthians would know best whether or not all of them possess the same knowledge of vv 1 and 4.

Further, in 1 Cor 8.9, the 'strong' are reminded that they ought to ensure that their freedom does not become a stumbling block to the 'weak' (τοῖς ἀσθενέσιν), a reference to a specific group – the 'weak'. If Hurd and Gooch are right that Paul is

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<sup>4</sup> Gooch 1993:61-68.

<sup>5</sup> Gooch 1993:66. Cf. Hurd 1983:117-25. Gooch's argument basically follows that of Hurd.

<sup>6</sup> Gooch 1993:66. Cf. Fee 1987:385, and also his n50 where he argues that the urgency of Paul's response here and in 10.1-22 suggests that it is a 'real', not a hypothetical case. Similarly, Hays 1997:143 points out that Paul is 'worried' that the 'weak' will be 'drawn into the powerful world of pagan cult'.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Fee 1987:378 who says that the strong adversative 'but' indicates that Paul is about to qualify his statement.

trying to dissuade the Corinthians from eating idol-meat by setting up a hypothetical case of the ‘weak’, then it would only serve as a justification for the ‘strong’ to eat idol-meat, since there really are no ‘weak’ members: ‘since there are no “weak” members among us’, they might say, ‘we suppose we can therefore freely eat idol-meat’. The only way to understand v 9 seems to be to take the ‘weak’ to be a real group.

1 Cor 8.10 indicates further that the ‘weak’ are a real, not a hypothetical group of Corinthians. ‘For if others see you, who possess knowledge...’. Who are these ‘others’? They are contrasted with ‘you’, i.e. the ‘strong’ Corinthians who possess knowledge. The context shows they cannot be unbelievers. In other words, these ‘others’ have to be those members who do not possess the knowledge of the ‘strong’ and they are none other than the ‘weak’ referred to in 8.9.

1 Cor 8.11 refers to the one who is ‘weak’ (ὁ ἀσθενῶν) and attributes his/her destruction if he/she eats idol-meat to ‘your knowledge’ (τῇ σῇ γνώσει).<sup>8</sup> Those who have knowledge in v 11 are those of v 10; and the ‘weak’ of v 11 would be the ‘others’ of v 10.

From the textual evidence of 1 Cor 8, it is highly probable that the ‘weak’ group is not hypothetical but real. Horrell argues, ‘there are no compelling grounds to doubt that differences of opinion and practice existed at Corinth; indeed, much of Paul’s exhortation would be rather pointless if it did not’.<sup>9</sup> We can thus proceed on this assumption of the existence of the ‘weak’ group. Who they are and what viewpoint they represent is less agreed, and is to be surveyed below.

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<sup>8</sup> ἐν τῇ σῇ γνώσει... has strong textual support: P<sup>46</sup> & A (B) D<sup>(2)</sup> F G 33 *pc* latt; Ir<sup>lat</sup> (Cl).

<sup>9</sup> Horrell 1997a:85.



### The ‘strong’ – a question of label

There is no dispute among scholars over the existence of the ‘strong’. The issue is with who they are and what viewpoint they represent. This question will be left to a later section (1.2.3). We will for now look at the text to see what Paul calls them.

To be sure, Paul never refers to this group as the ‘strong’, whereas in Rom 14.1-15.7 Paul specifically mentions two groups: the ‘weak’ and the ‘powerful’. Is the use of the term ‘strong’ therefore justifiable?

From 1 Cor 8.1, it seems clear that this group of Corinthians possess knowledge, which refers to the knowledge of the ‘One God’ and the non-existence of idols. They may therefore be called the ‘knowledgeable’. A further hint about the ‘strong’ is seen in 1 Cor 8.9 – they believe they enjoy a liberty that allows them to freely eat idol-meat at pagan temples (8.10), at the homes of unbelievers (10.27), and that bought from the market (10.25). This is in contrast to the ‘weak’ who have difficulty with such meats.

Since Paul mentions the ‘weak’ (i.e. in conscience, 8.7b, 9, 10b, 11), we may assume that there is a group of the ‘strong’ in contrast to the ‘weak’. And the texts above indicate the existence of a group which may be variously called the ‘strong’, the ‘knowing’, or the ‘knowledgeable’. The reference to the group who have *γνῶσις* as the ‘strong’ is therefore made in this thesis for the sake of convenience. The term is chosen as a contrast to the ‘weak’. By using this term, I mean no more than that the ‘strong’ behave in a certain way that is informed by their knowledge and they have a ‘strong’ conscience. Although the term ‘Gnostics’ is a possible description of the ‘strong’, its use is not helpful as it is normally associated with second-century

movements. The use of the term could risk reading into a first-century text the ideas and thoughts of the second-century.<sup>10</sup>

We now move to a closer look at the text to glean what may be deduced concerning the identities of the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’.

### 1.2.2 The ‘weak’

Central to our understanding of the ‘weak’ and their identity is the passage in 1 Cor 8.7, 9ff. We will look at 1 Cor 8.7b first and only at 1 Cor 8.7a later since the latter is linked to 1 Cor 8.9ff. In 1 Cor 8.7b, *τινὲς δὲ τῇ συνηθείᾳ ἕως ἄρτι τοῦ εἰδώλου ὡς εἰδωλόθυτον ἐσθίουσιν, καὶ ἡ συνείδησις αὐτῶν ἀσθενὴς οὖσα μολύνεται*, there is a hint that the ‘weak’ are former pagans since they were ‘accustomed’ to idols. The word translated here ‘accustomed’, *συνηθεία*, has a variant reading, that is, *συνείδησει*, found in several Western texts (e.g. D G Vulgate  $\aleph^2$ ) and some Latin Fathers. However, the former, *συνηθεία*, is to be preferred to the latter, as it is well supported by  $\aleph^*$  A B P  $\Psi$  33 81 630 1739 *al.* According to Metzger the latter reading ‘arose through assimilation to the following *συνείδησει*’.<sup>11</sup> But are the ‘weak’ necessarily Gentiles? Scholars in general tend to adopt this interpretation on the basis that Jewish Christians cannot have been accustomed to idols.<sup>12</sup> However, 1 Cor 8 does not explicitly state that the ‘weak’ are Gentile Christians. While Gentiles are accustomed to idols, the ‘weak’ referred to above could possibly be ‘liberal’ Jews who accommodated themselves to idolatry in the past, before their conversion to

<sup>10</sup> Fee 1987:365, n32 argues against calling the Corinthians ‘Gnostics’ as this is anachronistic ‘since those systems do not emerge until the second century’.

<sup>11</sup> Metzger 1971:557; cf. Fee 1987:376, n1 who agrees with this conclusion. Cf. Murphy-O’Connor 1978b:551.

<sup>12</sup> E.g. Fee 1987:378 suggests their former lives were pagans; similarly Hays 1997:141 says, these are ‘Gentile converts from paganism’; Conzelmann 1975:147.



Christ (see chapter 4, and especially 4.6 below). Thus, we cannot be certain as to whether the ‘weak’ are Gentile Christians on the basis of 1 Cor 8.7.

We need to consider the συνείδησις of the ‘weak’. What does Paul mean when he refers to the weak συνείδησις? Robertson-Plummer explain it in terms of an ‘unilluminated conscience’, that is, the ‘weak’ lack the knowledge of the ‘strong’ to enlighten them in their practice.<sup>13</sup> Fee defines this as the experiential, emotional level of a person.<sup>14</sup> That is to say, although some people may have the knowledge that there is only one God and idols are non-existent, emotionally they are unable to let their ‘knowledge’ inform their practice because of their past association with idolatry. But why is their conscience defiled (μολύνεται, 8.7)? And why would they be destroyed (ἀπόλλυται, 8.11)? And why would their conscience be wounded (τύπτοντες, 8.12)? There are two important points to note. The first is by eating idol-meat the ‘weak’ face ‘destruction’. This suggests that the question of ‘salvation’ is involved here, which further suggests that the ‘faith’ of the ‘weak’ is undermined. The second is the two words ‘defile’ (8.7) and ‘wound’ (8.12) probably mean the same effect of eating idol-meat.

This leads to the consideration of 8.9ff. Because the ‘weak’ believe that the idols still hold power, they believe it totally wrong to eat idol-meat. Thus, if they eat idol-meat, they will be defiling and hurting their ‘conscience’, that is, acting against their belief and destroying their ‘faith’ in Christ.<sup>15</sup> In this case, the ‘conscience’ of the ‘weak’ may be described as a kind of ‘spiritual condition’ that undergirds their relationship with Christ which, if it is not carefully handled, can also undermine that

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<sup>13</sup> Roberson-Plummer 1911:168-69.

<sup>14</sup> Fee 1987:379.

<sup>15</sup> Robertson-Plummer 1911:169, ‘they cannot eat ἐκ πίστεως (Rom 14.23)’. Similarly Héring 1962:73.

relationship. Hays is right to say that Paul is worried that the ‘weak’ would be drawn into the pagan cult.<sup>16</sup> This makes sense for Gentile Christians who have ‘turned to God from idols’ (cf. 1 Cor 12.2; 1 Thess 1.9-10), i.e. their *συνείδησις* has been significantly ‘Judaised’ when they become Christ-believers. But these are the only cases Paul records. Further, the use of *ὡς εἰδωλόθυτον* in 8.7 also suggests a Jewish influence on the ‘weak’, as the term is clearly a compound of *εἰδωλον*, and the suffix *-θυτος*.<sup>17</sup> Further, in 1 Cor 10.28, Paul advises abstention from the food that has been specifically pointed out to be sacrificial food. The term appears to be attributed to unbelievers and in that case it is *ἱερόθυτον*, thus suggesting that Paul in 8.7 is representing the ‘weak’ in their use of the term *εἰδωλόθυτον*. We cannot, therefore, conclude about the ethnicity of the ‘weak’ simply on the basis of their former idolatrous practice (see chapter 4 below). All that can be said about the ‘weak’ is that they used to worship idols; but as Christ-believers they now believe it is wrong to continue their idolatrous practice.

### 1.2.3 The ‘strong’

In 1 Cor 8-10, there are a few important probable quotes from the Corinthians which will illuminate the identity of the ‘strong’, namely, 8.1, 4, and 8.

1 Cor 8.1 appears to be a quote from the Corinthian ‘strong’, ‘we all possess knowledge’.<sup>18</sup> The fact that this is a quote from the ‘strong’ may be seen in Paul’s immediate corrective statement, ‘knowledge puffs up, but love builds up’, and from 8.7a where a similar corrective statement is made. It is also seen in the use of *οἶδαμεν ὅτι* both here and in v 4, which is a formula to introduce what the ‘strong’

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<sup>16</sup> Hays 1997:142.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Büchsel 1964:378-79.

<sup>18</sup> This is well accepted by scholars; e.g. Robertson-Plummer 1911:163; Héring 1962:67; Barrett 1968:189; Conzelmann 1975:140; Murphy-O’Connor 1978b:545; Fee 1987:365; and Hays 1997:136.



have said.<sup>19</sup> It shows that the ‘strong’ are those who have a particular type of knowledge. What is this ‘knowledge’?

The knowledge of the ‘strong’ is probably summed up in 8.4: ‘we know that there is no idol in the world and there is no God but one’. Apart from the οἶδαμεν ὅτι formula, Paul’s qualifying statement in 8.5-6 further shows that 8.4 is a slogan of the ‘strong’.<sup>20</sup> Conzelmann rightly says that v 5 introduces Paul’s criticism of the knowledge of the ‘strong’, i.e. there are indeed so-called ‘Gods’ and ‘lords’, with v 6 acting as the basis of Paul’s argument.<sup>21</sup> There are two clauses in 8.4. The first is the rejection of idols (οὐδὲν εἰδωλον ἐν κόσμῳ). The second seems to reflect the monotheistic nature of the *shema* (οὐδεὶς θεὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς, cf. Deut 6.4), which would suggest Jewish influence. Although the Jewish influence of the second clause cannot be fully confirmed, since pagans can equally adopt the same belief, the use the word εἰδωλον in the first clause suggests it is more likely Jewish. Further, Paul’s inclusion of the Christian confession in 8.6 suggests that he thinks the ‘knowledge’ of the ‘strong’ is inadequate.<sup>22</sup> Scholars agree that in 8.6 Paul is setting out the Christian tradition of redemption and creation in Christ.<sup>23</sup>

1 Cor 6.12 and 10.23 reveal more about the ‘strong’. In both of these, the clause πάντα (μοι) ἔξεστιν is a claim of the ‘strong’ that they have

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. *BAGD* on ὅτι. See also Fee 1987:365, n31 and 370, n6; and Robertson-Plummer 1911:163, 166.

<sup>20</sup> Like 8.1a, 8.4 is well recognised by scholars as a slogan of the Corinthian ‘strong’; e.g. Robertson-Plummer 1911:166; Barrett 1968:189; Conzelmann 1975:142; Fee 1987:370-71; Hays 1997:138-39.

<sup>21</sup> Conzelmann 1975:143-44. Cf. Fee 1987:370 who agrees with this basic point that Paul is qualifying in vv 5-6 what the ‘strong’ have said in v 4 (Fee provides a detailed exegesis in 370-76). See also Hays 1997:139.

<sup>22</sup> While some scholars see 8.6 as clear evidence of Paul’s belief in the pre-existence of Christ (e.g. Robertson-Plummer 1911:168; Conzelmann 1975:144-45), this is not the main point of 8.6 as Hays (1997:140) rightly points out; it is in fact Paul’s qualification of the ‘knowledge’ of the ‘strong’ with a Christological twist, thus setting out the basic principle of his argument throughout 1 Cor 8-10.

<sup>23</sup> E.g. Robertson-Plummer 1911:168; Barrett 1968:193; Conzelmann 1975:145; Fee 1987:375-76.

ἐξουσία/ἐλευθερία. Robertson-Plummer think these are Paul's own words to mean all things '*indifferent*', which however have been misused by the Corinthians.<sup>24</sup>

Others, however, generally take this to be a claim of the 'strong'.<sup>25</sup> The general consensus among scholars is that the 'strong' claim their 'freedom' in Christ to do what they like. Hence Paul in 6.12 and 10.23 immediately negates this principle of the 'strong' by arguing that not all things 'benefit' (6.12) or 'build up' (10.23). He implies in 6.12b that the Corinthians have allowed such things as food and sexual immorality to 'enslave' them. And in 10.23, he suggests the exercise of the 'rights' of the 'strong' does not benefit/edify the 'weak'.

The above textual evidence raises several questions about the 'strong': who are the 'strong'? Are they Jewish Christians who, after becoming Christ-believers, adopt a 'liberal' stance towards idolatry? Or are they Gentile Christians (including former God-fearers) who have come to view idols as nothing and therefore feel at liberty to eat idol-meat? Or could they be a combination of Jewish and Gentile Christians, both of whom have come to believe in Christ but are equally influenced by Judaism, as seen in 1 Cor 8.4? Or should we proceed on the question of their ethnicity? In other words, can the ethnicity of the 'strong' be determined and depended upon to illuminate the issue of idol-meat in 1 Cor 8-10? Or should we not search for the answer concerning the issue of idol-meat in different places? In other words, should we not look at their belief and practice, instead of their ethnicity, to enlighten our understanding of 1 Cor 8-10? This leads to another set of questions. What is the basis of the viewpoint of the 'strong'? 1 Cor 8.4 suggests that the Jewish *shema* is the basis of their viewpoint. Does that suggest that the 'strong' might have been influenced by Judaism? If the

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<sup>24</sup> Robertson-Plummer 1911:121, 219.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Hering 1962:97; Barrett 1968:239; Conzelmann 1975:108, 176; Fee 1987:251-52, 478-79; Hays 1997:101, 175.



‘strong’ have been influenced by Judaism, can we find parallels to their behaviour in the literature of about the same period and in a similar social context (i.e. the Diaspora)? What about their claim that they have ἐξουσία/ἐλευθερία? If the ‘strong’ have Jewish influence, are there Jewish parallels to such claims? These are questions which we will seek to explore and answer in the course of our study below.

We will now proceed to survey the literature on the interpretations of the situation at Corinth in general, and of 1 Cor 8-10 in particular.

### 1.3 Survey of interpretations of conflicts in Corinth

#### 1.3.1 The influence of a Petrine party in Corinth

##### *F. C. Baur*

It was F. C. Baur who in 1831 suggested that there were two opposing groups within early Christianity, namely the party of the older apostles and that of Paul. Although the relationship between the older apostles and Paul appeared harmonious superficially, there were tensions and disagreements.<sup>26</sup>

Paul had built his Gentile churches without requiring them to keep the Jewish laws and traditions. This alarmed the Jerusalem apostles who sent representatives to Antioch to see what was happening. It was there that a confrontation took place between Paul and Peter.<sup>27</sup> This same problem continued at the church in Galatia where the opponents of Paul had confused the Christians with the requirement of the law.<sup>28</sup>

While in Ephesus, Paul heard news of a renewal of the Galatian experiences at the church in Corinth where the opponents of Paul were the itinerant pseudo-apostles who invoked or bore the name of Peter.<sup>29</sup> Peter himself never came to Corinth.

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<sup>26</sup> Baur 1876:127.

<sup>27</sup> Baur 1878:52-4.

<sup>28</sup> Baur 1878:56f.

<sup>29</sup> Baur 1878:61; Kümmel 1972:129.

However, those opponents of Paul were in fact trying to infiltrate the Corinthian church where, knowing that imposing Jewish requirements would not be effective in a predominantly Gentile church, they sought to attack Paul's apostolic authority.<sup>30</sup> These opponents were almost entirely Gentile Christians who attached themselves to Peter and fought the cause of the Jewish Christians.<sup>31</sup> This resulted in the Corinthian church members dividing themselves into parties of whom the majority were the most faithful to Paul.<sup>32</sup>

For Baur, Apollos never posed a problem since he was a friend and successor of Paul.<sup>33</sup> The real problem lies with the parties of Peter and Christ. But these are in fact the same party under different names: the Peter party was so called because Peter held the primacy among the Jewish apostles while the Christ party was so called because the members asserted direct contact with Christ to be the chief requirement of apostolic authority.<sup>34</sup>

Baur does not mention how this perspective may apply to 1 Cor 8-10. And it is not clear how the conflict affected the issue of idol food. Baur's thesis suggests that there is a Jewish influence in 1 Cor, including 8-10. However, Baur's thesis is not without problems. First, in 1 Cor 8-10 Paul does not explicitly reject Jewish requirements of the law. Had the same Judaizing opponents from the Galatian church been present at Corinth, Paul would have countered them with further condemnation. However, there is neither such a condemnation nor any specific reference to the encounter at Galatia, nor the confrontation at Antioch. It appears that Baur's thesis may over-simplify the multiple kinds of conflicts in Pauline churches.

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<sup>30</sup> Baur 1876:259, 266.

<sup>31</sup> Baur 1878:64f.

<sup>32</sup> Baur 1876:259.

<sup>33</sup> Baur 1876:260f.

<sup>34</sup> Baur 1876:267.



*T. W. Manson and A. Ehrhardt*

Manson and Ehrhardt separately suggested a somewhat modified version of Baur's thesis, that Peter was the one behind the conflict between the Corinthians and Paul. Manson suggested that when Paul in 1 Cor 3.10-17 mentions there is another trying to build on his foundation, it is either 'Peter himself or someone acting on his behalf' who was trying to mar the work of Paul and provide the alternative foundation (cf. Matt 16.18).<sup>35</sup>

According to Manson, after James had taken over the leadership of the Jerusalem church where Peter used to take the leading place, there is 'evidence of attempts to assert the authority of Peter in the sphere of Paul's work',<sup>36</sup> hence the Cephas party. The Christ party stood at the 'opposite extreme' to the Cephas party. They believed Christ to mean something like 'God, freedom, and immortality', where God meant a refined philosophical monotheism, freedom meant 'emancipation from the puritanical rigours of Palestinian barbarian authorities into the wider air of self-realisation', and immortality meant 'the sound Greek doctrine as opposed to the crude Jewish notion of the Resurrection'.<sup>37</sup> Thus Paul in Corinth is fighting on two fronts.

Of particular relevance to 1 Cor 8-10, Manson posited that it was the Cephas party who raised the issue of idol-meat (i.e. in reference to the decree).<sup>38</sup> For Jewish conscience and sensitivity about idolatry leads to the objection being raised, and whenever such an objection is raised, 'Jewish or Jewish-Christian scruples are involved'.<sup>39</sup> For Paul, Jewish 'taboos' do not apply to a predominantly Gentile Christian community, and the decree is meant only for the church at Antioch. Thus,

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<sup>35</sup> Manson 1962:194.

<sup>36</sup> Manson 1962:196.

<sup>37</sup> Manson 1962:207.

<sup>38</sup> Manson 1962:200.

<sup>39</sup> Manson 1962:200.

his way of dealing with the objection, even though he had to agree with the basic principle of Peter, was to insist on a Christian basis.<sup>40</sup>

Following almost the same line of argument, Ehrhardt puts forward the hypothesis that it was Peter who came to Corinth and insisted on the 'general validity' of the apostolic decree (Acts 15.20, 28-29).<sup>41</sup> And Paul not only accepted the decree but also strongly commanded it for the sake of the 'weak'.<sup>42</sup> Ehrhardt draws two conclusions from Paul's various statements in 1 Cor 8.4, 7, 13: (1) that Paul did once eat sacrificial meat at Corinth; but (2) that Paul abandoned this practice of eating idol-meat at Peter's remonstrations 'for conscience sake', though not 'entirely without a certain acerbity directed at the address of St. Peter'.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, Manson and Ehrhardt are in agreement that Paul had accepted the decree,<sup>44</sup> though each sees the acceptance a little differently. For Manson, Paul did so with an insistence on supplying the decree with 'an entirely Christian basis' and meant his acceptance to be a snub.<sup>45</sup> For Ehrhardt, Paul did it with a certain acerbity against Peter.<sup>46</sup>

Manson and Ehrhardt showed that there are multiple kinds of Jewish influence in Corinth. It was through Paul, or Peter, and the decree. However, there is no evidence of a Jewish party under Peter which insisted on the decree; nor is there any mention of the decree, nor of Paul's agreement or acceptance of it in the text. Paul's insistence that the 'strong' consider the 'weak' arises out of his concern for 'love' (1

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<sup>40</sup> Manson 1962:202.

<sup>41</sup> Ehrhardt 1964:277.

<sup>42</sup> Ehrhardt 1964:277.

<sup>43</sup> Ehrhardt 1964:278.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Barrett 1982:46.

<sup>45</sup> Manson 1962:200-2.

<sup>46</sup> Ehrhardt 1964:278.

Cor 8.1-2, 13), rather than an acceptance of the decree. Manson's suggestion that the 'strong' held to a philosophical monotheism is weak in that the monotheism of the 'strong' seems distinctively Jewish (cf. 1 Cor 8.4).

*C. K. Barrett*

Following Manson, Barrett posits that Peter probably had been to Corinth.<sup>47</sup> He had not demanded circumcision but 'attempted to impose a Judaic pattern of thought and religious life upon a Gentile community'.<sup>48</sup> Thus, Peter had to be vigorously resisted for he not only represented 'a legalistic perversion of the gospel',<sup>49</sup> but also was 'a more dangerous potential cause of schism in Corinth'.<sup>50</sup>

The Jewish Christians under Peter sought to introduce the decree to the Corinthian church, a decree they themselves not only retained but also obeyed.<sup>51</sup> This is seen in 1 Cor 8-10 where the Cephas party raised the objection against eating idol-meat since it constitutes a breach of the decree. And because the Cephas party, that is, the Jewish Christians, were teaching under the name and authority of Peter, Paul had to devote some considerable space to a defence of his apostolic authority in 1 Cor 9.<sup>52</sup>

Barrett further argues that Paul was not a practising Jew with regard to εἰδωλόθυτα.<sup>53</sup> And in permitting the eating of εἰδωλόθυτα he contradicted the decree and thus was brought into controversy with the Cephas party.<sup>54</sup> The 'strong' are, it seems, another group of Corinthians whom Barrett terms 'Gnostics' whose main

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<sup>47</sup> Barrett 1982:21, 32.

<sup>48</sup> Barrett 1982:21.

<sup>49</sup> Barrett 1982:12.

<sup>50</sup> Barrett 1982:32.

<sup>51</sup> Barrett 1982:44.

<sup>52</sup> Barrett 1982:53; Cf. 1 Cor 9.

<sup>53</sup> Barrett 1982:50.

<sup>54</sup> Barrett 1982:52-4.



emphasis is γνῶσις. The ‘Gnostics’ adopted the following:<sup>55</sup> (a) a practical γνῶσις about idol-meat, that they believed that since their bodies are not raised, they could go on eating and drinking with full freedom (1 Cor 6.13); (b) a strict monotheism on a rationalistic basis; (c) a strict dualism in a rational and logical way so as to refuse a separation between the liberty to eat and the liberty to commit fornication; and (d) a moral indifference, drawing from their rationalistic dualism.

Barrett’s findings with regard to idol-meat conclude that there is a group of Jewish Christians under Peter who raised the issue of idol-meat because the ‘gnostic’ Christians had freely eaten such meat. This group cannot be the ‘weak’ as the ‘weak’ cannot be of Jewish origin due to their past association with idols.<sup>56</sup> Barrett therefore concludes,

In Corinth, and not here only, Paul had to walk the tightrope between the legalism of Jewish Christianity and the false liberalism of gnostic rationalism....Paul’s attitude to the question of εἰδωλόθυτα was too closely bound up with the gnostic wing for the main body of Christians to accept it.<sup>57</sup>

Barrett is right that there is a Jewish element in this passage, but there is no evidence that this is connected to the Petrine party or the decree. And if the ‘weak’ and the ‘strong’ are both Gentile, then where is the evidence of a Jewish party raising the objection to idol meat in 1 Cor 8.1-11.1? The Jewish influence seems to be found in the monotheistic language of the ‘strong’, which is inspired by Judaism, not ‘gnosticism’ or ‘rationalism’.

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<sup>55</sup> Barrett 1982:54-6.

<sup>56</sup> Barrett 1968:194. Barrett, however, is not clear on this. In his commentary, he states that the ‘weak’ cannot be Jewish Christians. However, in his essay of 1982, he suggests that it was the Petrine party who raised the objection. This means the ‘weak’ did not raise the objection. Why then did Paul tell the ‘strong’ to consider the ‘weak’? This weakness in Barrett’s thesis is also raised by Gooch (1993:146).

<sup>57</sup> Barrett 1982:56.

This view of the Corinthian situation as represented by Baur, Manson, Ehrhardt and Barrett became quiet for some years before M. Goulder recently revived it.

*M. Goulder*

In his book, *A Tale of Two Missions*, Goulder posits that there was a basic tension between Paul and the Jerusalem apostles.<sup>58</sup> The Jerusalem leaders had required that Gentile believers keep certain aspects of the laws. Paul, however, adopted a liberal policy of requiring the Gentile believers to keep the moral commandments while turning a blind eye to the ceremonial commandments.<sup>59</sup> This tension exploded when some representatives from Jerusalem were sent to Antioch where Gentiles were eating meat that was not slaughtered according to the *kosher* law.<sup>60</sup> The same problem was also extended into Galatia where Judaisers sought to impose the law's requirements such as circumcision on the Gentile believers.

The basic tension was to continue into all other epistles. According to Goulder, the Corinthian church members were Greek people and thus great admirers of wisdom. When the Jewish opponents of Paul came and settled in Corinth, they presented their religion as the highest form of wisdom. He cites 1 Cor 1.19f and 2.5, 13 as proof of this idea.<sup>61</sup> And when the Jewish missionaries arrived in Corinth, they began to teach the Corinthian Gentile Christians that many detailed rules could be derived from the law. Paul became worried, though not about the decree, as he concurred with it.<sup>62</sup> So he insisted on the *Bible and the Bible only*.<sup>63</sup> Thus the issue is between the Jerusalem apostles wanting to impose legal requirements and Paul resisting it. Because the

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<sup>58</sup> Goulder 1994:1-7.

<sup>59</sup> Goulder 1994:1.

<sup>60</sup> Goulder 1994:3.

<sup>61</sup> Goulder 1994:25.

<sup>62</sup> Goulder 1994:25-26.

<sup>63</sup> Goulder 1991:530; 1994:25f.

Jewish Christians of the Corinthian church knew about the law and did not want to break it, when it came to food, these members would want to ensure that the meat was not tainted.<sup>64</sup> Thus, the issue at Corinth ‘was between the Pauline and Petrine Christians on the interpretation of the law’.<sup>65</sup>

Although Goulder does not make specific mention of the situation with regard to εἰδωλόθυτα, we can well see the implication of his argument. It seems that the ‘strong’ of 1 Cor 8-10 would be the Gentile Christians who were faithful followers of Paul. These members, being ‘Gentile’, would have no scruples over the eating of idol-meat. However, the ‘weak’, the Jewish Christians who were representative of Peter, raised objection against the practice of these ‘strong’ Gentile Christians.

Goulder’s thesis is questionable for several reasons. First, the evidence for Judaizing in Corinth is strikingly absent, compared to Galatians. Second, Goulder does not deal adequately with 1 Cor 8-10, perhaps because his thesis precisely does not hold here. For example, the Jewish ‘wisdom’ of 1 Cor 1-4 is quite different from the ‘knowledge’ of 1 Cor 8-10. Third, as Christopher Tuckett has shown, the general thesis is weak, even within 1 Cor itself, and Goulder’s overall argument depends on a global theory that is too ‘simplistic’ and his hypotheses are too ‘simple’. Further, the evidence of 1 Cor 8.7 is fatal to a reconstruction of the ‘weak’ as Petrine bearers of the decree.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Goulder 1994:26.

<sup>65</sup> Goulder 1991:526.

<sup>66</sup> See Tuckett 1994:201-19 for a detailed argument. This essay was written as part of a festschrift for Goulder, in which Tuckett focuses on Goulder’s essay ‘Σοφία in 1 Corinthians’. Tuckett takes issue with Goulder for trying to solve highly complex issues in the Pauline corpus with too simplistic hypotheses which failed to consider important questions, such as the possible circumstantial change between 1 and 2 Cor, the chronology of the Pauline corpus, the identity of Paul (particularly when Goulder seems to turn Paul into all but a ‘Sadducee’ and his opponents all but ‘Pharisees’), the key text such as 1 Cor 9.19-23 in the discussion of Paul’s insistence on the ‘Bible only’ and his own statement that he is ‘all things to all people’, the ambiguity of Paul’s own view of σοφία (Goulder simply presses the two words, σοφία and λόγος into a single mould) and his partial agreement with some of the



The above theories argued for the influence of either a Petrine party or the ‘apostolic decree’ on the ‘weak’ or on Paul. Although theoretically, there could be such an influence, there is no positive evidence to support such a theory. The scruples of the ‘weak’ are Jewish, but these are new scruples, following their conversion. It appears that the view of every party in Corinth is ‘Jewish’ in some respects. And since Jews in antiquity represented a spectrum of practice and beliefs, we need to depart from the simple ‘Jewish’ vs ‘Gentile’ Christianity hypothesis and explore the hypothesis of movements and opinions as all ‘Jewish’ but in varying ways and to varying degrees.

### 1.3.2 The Corinthians as Jewish Gnostics

W. Schmithals has suggested that the situation in the Corinthian church was one of conflict between Paul and his opponents over the latter’s teaching, while the latter charged that Paul was not a true apostle.<sup>67</sup> According to Schmithals, 1 Cor 9.24-10.22 did not belong to 1 Cor 8-10, while 1 Cor 8.1-9.23 + 10.23-11.1 together form one fragment.<sup>68</sup>

Schmithals argues that the Corinthians hold to a system of Gnosticism which is pre-Christian.<sup>69</sup> The system involves a ‘Christ Gnosticism’ of which the ‘Christ’ is ‘man himself’.<sup>70</sup> Because the figure and name of the messiah are central in this system, it is a system of Jewish Gnosticism.<sup>71</sup> This system was influenced by Christianity which venerated Christ as the prophet promised by Moses.<sup>72</sup> This Jewish

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concepts such as γνῶσις, and the like. Thus, by raising many questions over Goulder’s thesis, Tuckett demonstrates the fragility of Goulder’s thesis.

<sup>67</sup> Schmithals 1971:116, 142.

<sup>68</sup> Schmithals 1971:90-95.

<sup>69</sup> Schmithals 1971:36.

<sup>70</sup> Schmithals 1971:50.

<sup>71</sup> Schmithals 1971:36, 51.

<sup>72</sup> Schmithals 1971:51.

Gnosticism was what the opponents of Paul were preaching, whose theology was the ‘doctrine of knowledge’.<sup>73</sup> They make up just one Jewish group (cf. 2 Cor 11.22),<sup>74</sup> who have come into the Corinthian community from outside and carried with them letters of recommendation. Thus, these opponents of Paul are apostles who not only preach at synagogues, among the Gentiles, but also in the Christian communities. Not only σοφία, but above all γνῶσις is used as a *terminus technicus* for their preaching as seen in 1 Cor 8.1.<sup>75</sup> They speak of Gnosis in a Hellenistic sense, that is, γνῶσις θεοῦ as the understanding of the being of God.<sup>76</sup> Thus, for them, Gnosis is gospel.<sup>77</sup> When it comes to idol-meat, Paul had forbidden participation in pagan cultic meals in his preceding letter (i.e. 1 Cor 10.14-22). This has raised the question in the minds of the Gnostics in 1 Cor 8 whether it is permitted to eat meat that is sold in the marketplace.<sup>78</sup> The Gnostics, at the time of writing their letter to Paul, thought all of them were ‘strong’ because of their possession of Gnosis.<sup>79</sup> Schmithals then argues that the Corinthian Gnostics, based on the above, are preaching ‘another gospel’ without Paul’s realising it at first.<sup>80</sup> He only realised it much later and thus was of the opinion that some of the Corinthians had unacceptably returned to paganism.<sup>81</sup> Paul is therefore addressing the incorrect view of the Corinthians concerning the gospel which

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<sup>73</sup> Schmithals 1971:143.

<sup>74</sup> Schmithals 1971:115.

<sup>75</sup> Schmithals 1971:143.

<sup>76</sup> Schmithals 1971:146 explains that for the Jews γνῶσις θεοῦ would mean the knowledge of the will of God, on the basis on Hos 6.6. However, he does not explain how the Corinthian Gnostics, who were of Jewish origin, came to speak of γνῶσις θεοῦ in a Hellenistic sense.

<sup>77</sup> Schmithals 1971:150.

<sup>78</sup> Schmithals 1971:143, 227.

<sup>79</sup> Schmithals 1971:229.

<sup>80</sup> Schmithals 1971:116.

<sup>81</sup> Schmithals 1971:225.

to him tends towards paganism.<sup>82</sup> However, despite their acceptance of Paul's statements, the Corinthians' appeal to 'knowledge' remains typically Gnostic in form and content.<sup>83</sup> Thus for Schmithals the Corinthian idolatry may be traced to a pronounced Gnosticism.<sup>84</sup>

Schmithals is right in emphasising the Jewish aspect of the Corinthian epistles. However, his treatment of the text does not appear to be fair or justified. The text of 1 Cor 8-10, especially that of 1 Cor 8.7, 9ff, speaks clearly of a situation in which some (i.e. the 'weak') in the church have had scruples over others' partaking of idol-meat. Thus, there are explicitly two groups (see above 1.2.1). His suggestion that Paul was not aware of the problem and had not fully understood the Corinthians' situation is unfounded, and threatens to undermine any attempt to reconstruct the Corinthians' position.

Schmithals' removal of 9.24-10.22 from the literary context of 8-10 and combination of 8.1-9.23 and 10.23-11.1 as one fragment lose the overall thrust of Paul's argument and are again highly questionable. In fact, 9.24 seems quite a natural flow from 9.23 as the passage (9.24-10.1-22) is an explanation of 9.19-23 by an analogy of athletic competition and the warning of the danger of idolatry.<sup>85</sup>

Schmithals' attribution of the idolatry of the 'strong' in 1 Cor 8-10 to a 'pronounced Gnosticism' in a Hellenistic sense is not helpful. The word γνῶσις in the context of 1 Cor 8-10 appears to be explicated in 1 Cor 8.4 and we have to deduce its content from there. Besides, the γνῶσις in 1 Cor 8.4 is about the monotheistic

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<sup>82</sup> Schmithals 1971:226.

<sup>83</sup> Schmithals 1971:229.

<sup>84</sup> Schmithals 1971:229.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Conzelmann 1975:161-62; Fee 1987:365, n32, and 433 who argue for the unity of 1 Cor 8-10; and Hurd 1983:131-42 who provides a detailed argument against partition theories. Most commentators seem to assume the unity of these chapters, although Weiss thinks otherwise. See below.



quality of God and the non-existence of idols. Thus, 'Jewish Gnosticism' has neither historical nor textual foundation.<sup>86</sup> Schmithals is right to indicate that the 'strong' are 'Jewish' in some sense (as 1 Cor 8.4 suggests). But his general thesis is untenable and we need to explain how all three parties in Corinth can be 'Jewish' in different senses.

### 1.3.3 Hellenistic Jewish philosophy

R. A. Horsley has advocated a Hellenistic Jewish philosophy after the model of the kind found in Philo and Wisdom of Solomon, by examining such terms as 'pneumatikos-psychikos', wisdom (Sophia), consciousness and freedom, resurrection, and gnosis in 1 Cor.<sup>87</sup> His main thesis rests on the distinction between 'pneumatikos' and 'psychikos', which he identifies as the 'perfect' and the 'child' respectively.<sup>88</sup> He posits that in 1 Cor 15.44-50, the 'pneumatikoi' refers to 'heavenly persons' while 'psychikoi' refers to 'earthly persons'.<sup>89</sup> These two types of humanity are paradigms of different levels of religious/spiritual achievements,<sup>90</sup> which are seen in the Corinthians' self-designations such as 'wise', 'powerful', 'nobly born', 'kings', 'rich'.<sup>91</sup> These, argues Horsley, are the highest religious status established through an intimate relation with Sophia.<sup>92</sup> Sophia is the means, agent, and content of salvation,<sup>93</sup> which is found in the Hellenistic Jewish tradition (cf. Wis 7-10; Philo, *Migr* 28-40; *Her* 247-83; *Post* 124-29; *Abr* 255-76; *Virt* 179-80; *QE* 2.39-40).<sup>94</sup> In order to attain

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<sup>86</sup> Wilson 1972:74 cautions against indiscriminate use of this term as it can be dangerous and misleading. See n10 above.

<sup>87</sup> Yeo 1995:130 assumes a proto-Gnostic audience whose theology is that of Hellenistic Jewish Philonic type. Unfortunately, Yeo does not explain himself but states more assumptions on the next page (131).

<sup>88</sup> Noting that Philo does not make a distinction between 'pneumatikos' and 'psychikos', Horsley looks to Philo's interpretation of Gen 2.7 and argues for such a conclusion.

<sup>89</sup> Horsley 1976:274.

<sup>90</sup> Horsley 1976:278-80.

<sup>91</sup> Horsley 1976:281; cf. Horsley 1977:231 and 1980:43.

<sup>92</sup> Horsley 1976:281, 288; 1979:46-51.

<sup>93</sup> Horsley 1977:244; 1979:48f.

<sup>94</sup> Horsley 1979:48.

such a spiritual level, one must escape from bodily matters and sensual perceptions. The Corinthians therefore see themselves as freed from all bodily pleasures as to be able to say, 'all things are possible for me' (cf. 1 Cor 6.12; 10.23). Horsley argues that 'gnosis' is given by God to those who have attained the highest religious achievements and this 'gnosis' is the Philonic monotheism of the 'one God',<sup>95</sup> which provides the Corinthians a 'strong consciousness'.<sup>96</sup> It is this 'strong consciousness' that gives the Corinthians the liberty/authority to freely eat idol meat. But the ignorance of this monotheistic confession equals the belief that idols are Gods.<sup>97</sup> Horsley argues that Paul's response is an insistence that the effect of one's behaviour on others is the criterion for ethics,<sup>98</sup> which involves viewing Christ as the Sophia of God, thus allowing himself to assert and insist on the lordship of Christ to the Corinthians.<sup>99</sup>

Horsley's argument is quite similar to that of B. A. Pearson, who argues that Paul's Corinthian opponents' view of wisdom and Paul's differ. The former believe wisdom to be the attainment of a spiritual plane of existence at which they are a spiritual elite, the terminology of which is found in Hellenistic Diaspora Judaism, represented notably by Philo.<sup>100</sup> Paul's view of 'wisdom', however, is the salvific plan of God the centre of which is the crucifixion of Christ.<sup>101</sup> 'Sophia' is understood as the 'Lord of glory', which comes about as a result of Hellenistic-Jewish-Christian confession of Christ as the exalted one.<sup>102</sup> They were interested in the exalted state of

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<sup>95</sup> Horsley 1978a:575-76.

<sup>96</sup> Horsley 1978a:581 terms it interchangeably with 'inner consciousness' or 'awareness'.

<sup>97</sup> Horsley 1978a:576.

<sup>98</sup> Horsley 1978a:586.

<sup>99</sup> Horsley 1980:48-51.

<sup>100</sup> Pearson 1973:28.

<sup>101</sup> Pearson 1973:31.

<sup>102</sup> Pearson 1973:33.

Christ, i.e. his glory, on the basis of Phil 2.9-11. Paul's concern, however, was the cross.

Horsley and Pearson are right in drawing on the Diaspora Jewish authors to clarify the situation at Corinth. Their theses, however, do not resolve the problem in 1 Cor 8-10. Horsley's theory assumes that the 'weak' do not have the same monotheistic confession. However, not all who share the monotheistic confession of the 'one God' would necessarily have 'strong consciousness' and be able to eat idol meat without scruples (see 1.2.2 above and chapter four below). Further, 'Sophia' is never an issue, nor is Christ replaced with 'Sophia' in 1 Cor 8-10.<sup>103</sup> We need to look at other Jewish material to see if there are Jewish parallels to all the parties concerned in 1 Cor 8-10 to enable us to understand better the situation.

#### 1.3.4 Non-Jewish interpretation

In the following, I will briefly summarise the central thesis of each scholar who adopts a non-Jewish interpretation of 1 Cor 8-10, with a similarly brief critique of each.

##### *W. L. Willis*

Willis argues that the earlier 'sacramental' and 'communal' interpretations of 1 Cor 8-10 are insufficiently proven.<sup>104</sup> Instead, he argues that religious 'meals' in the Graeco-Roman period were often social occasions for the participants. The Gods were therefore observers, not participants.<sup>105</sup> This is termed the 'social' interpretation. He concludes the following: (1) 'sacrifices and common meals were normative features of Hellenistic cults and associations'; and (2) since neither a 'sacramental' nor

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<sup>103</sup> With regard to Pearson's theory, Paul never once mentions in 1 Cor 8-10 the cross of Christ. Pearson's theory that the opponents of Paul were interested in the 'exalted state of Christ' only helps to explain 1 Cor 1-4, 12, 15 and perhaps elsewhere, but not 8-10, where it is totally absent.

<sup>104</sup> Willis 1985a:21-47 surveys extensively both literary and inscriptional sources and shows that these are not as weighty as his 'social' interpretation (47-61).

<sup>105</sup> Willis 1985a:20.



‘communal’ interpretation is valid, in 1 Cor 10.14-21 Paul is not warning against the dangers of pagan sacraments.<sup>106</sup> From these conclusions, Willis posits that Paul is concerned that the Corinthians not be partners with idolaters, not because of the partnership with demons the meals will effect.<sup>107</sup> Thus, Paul’s objection to the Corinthians’ participation in pagan idol meat is due to his concern with what effect it will have on the ‘weak’.<sup>108</sup> Although Willis is right in pointing out the Hellenistic aspects of religious meals, he does not consider the possibility of Jewish influence on the three parties in 1 Cor 8-10.

#### *D. Newton*

One of Newton’s aims is to listen to the Corinthians’ viewpoints in 1 Cor 8-10, as he argues that there are ambiguities, boundary definition difficulties and conceptual differences in the ancient Graeco-Roman world of the Corinthians.<sup>109</sup> This results in differences of opinion not only between Paul and the Corinthians, between the Corinthians, but in all directions.<sup>110</sup> And these could all be valid opinions. Paul is left with no possible solution but to shift the argument from the individualism of the Corinthians to the importance of a non-individual perspective in which love and consideration for others play a higher priority.<sup>111</sup> While Newton’s aim is to ‘expose and dissect its (Corinthian situation’s) underlying dynamic’, his thesis seems to lean too much on the Graeco-Roman background of the Corinthian situation, while passing

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<sup>106</sup> Willis 1985a:62-64. He has five conclusions, the first two have already been mentioned, that of the invalidity of the ‘sacramental’ interpretation and the plausibility of the ‘social’ interpretation. His last conclusion includes two tangential discoveries which he concedes cannot be proven.

<sup>107</sup> Willis 1985a:191.

<sup>108</sup> Willis 1985a:184-192; 227-28.

<sup>109</sup> Newton 1998:22, 118-19.

<sup>110</sup> Newton 1998:22. Thus, Newton is of the opinion that the issue in 1 Cor 8-10 is not about who is right or wrong, but is about a wide spectrum of viewpoints and viable individual interpretations on Christian involvement in cultic meals.

<sup>111</sup> Newton 1998:276, 372-74, and cf. 379, n209 where he argues that Paul tried to mediate between the two parties by steering them away from individualism to community (see also 389, 393).

over the possible Jewish influence on the parties in 1 Cor 8-10 in almost complete silence. For example, Newton's treatment of εἰδώλα and the clause οὐδεὶς θεὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς failed to take into consideration their strong suggestion of Jewish influence. Further, Paul's use of the Old Testament in 1 Cor 10 suggests familiarity with it on the part of the 'strong', which further indicates Jewish influence, an area that needs investigation.

### *B. Witherington III*

In an earlier article, and later in his commentary, Witherington argues that it is doubtful whether εἰδωλόθυτον was a polemical term coined by early Jews to refer to idol meat.<sup>112</sup> It is a Jewish-Christian term quite possibly coined by Paul himself for the purpose of dealing with this issue.<sup>113</sup> The issue in 1 Cor 8-10, Witherington argues, has to do with members of different social statuses. The 'strong' were members of the well-to-do who wanted to be true Romans.<sup>114</sup> By being present in pagan temples and eating idol meat, the 'strong' maintained their status. Their approach is therefore either very individualistic or very status conscious, which leads to Paul's concern about the social and moral effects of eating idol meat on the 'weak'.<sup>115</sup> Even though Witherington points out that v 4 is reminiscent of the *shema* and that v 6 is Paul's adaptation of it,<sup>116</sup> he does not seem to think that the 'strong' have had Jewish influence. He maintains that the 'strong' were Gentile Christians who had read Paul's monotheistic teaching through an Epicurean lens.<sup>117</sup> Paul in 1 Cor 8-10 tries to correct their view by pointing out that Christian love is to be the guide to one's life and

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<sup>112</sup> Witherington III 1993:237-39; cf. 1995:189 where he argues that the term arose in early Christianity.

<sup>113</sup> Witherington III 1993:254.

<sup>114</sup> Witherington III 1995:195, 201.

<sup>115</sup> Witherington III 1995:196, 187, 200.

<sup>116</sup> Witherington III 1995:197-98.

<sup>117</sup> Witherington III 1995:188, and also his n9.



conduct. He does so by turning upside down the conventions and exhorts the Corinthians to imitate him. Witherington is right to point out the possible background of the Jewish *shema* behind 1 Cor 8.4. However, the slogan of the ‘strong’ in v 4 seems to suggest more than just an Epicurean understanding on the part of the ‘strong’. The *shema* and the term εἰδωλον both point to possible Jewish influence on the ‘strong’. The scruples of the ‘weak’ similarly suggest that they have been influenced by the teaching of the *shema*. We need to investigate how the two parties may have been influenced by Judaism to varying degrees.

*J. Murphy-O'Connor*

Murphy-O'Connor's interpretation of 1 Cor 8-10 to some extent is similar to most of those who advocate a non-Jewish interpretation, i.e. the mediation of the two factions by Paul via love.<sup>118</sup> He recognises the existence of two parties. The ‘strong’ do not need any monotheistic arguments, nor do they need to justify their eating of idol meat.<sup>119</sup> But because of the criticism of the ‘weak’, they developed their slogans of 1 Cor 8.1, 4. and 8 in order to counter it (the criticism).<sup>120</sup> The ‘weak’ are Gentile Christians who have not fully imbibed their intellectual conviction of the ‘one God’, which Murphy-O'Connor argues is the fundamental element of Paul's preaching.<sup>121</sup> Murphy-O'Connor's theory is that Paul agrees with the basic position of the ‘strong’ but urges them to be sensitive about the social and moral reality of eating idol meat, particularly the concern for the ‘weak’. Although Murphy-O'Connor rightly points out that the ‘weak’ have received Paul's preaching of the ‘one God’, he does not tell us how or from where Paul derived his theology of the ‘one God’. Nor does he tell us

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<sup>118</sup> Murphy-O'Connor 1978b:556-74.

<sup>119</sup> Murphy-O'Connor 1978b:547; cf. 1978c:391-96.

<sup>120</sup> Murphy-O'Connor 1978b:547-48.

<sup>121</sup> Murphy-O'Connor 1978b:545.



how the ‘strong’ developed their monotheistic knowledge, if Jewish influence is absent. There is again a need to consider the possibility of Jewish influence on the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’, which the text of 1 Cor 8 seems to warrant.<sup>122</sup>

*G. D. Fee*

In both his essay and commentary, Fee consistently argues that the ‘weak’ are Gentile Christians.<sup>123</sup> For him, Paul’s concern in 1 Cor 8-10 is with the eating of idol meat in a pagan temple, before the idols, which Fee argues is a common Gentile practice in the Hellenistic world of the first century CE.<sup>124</sup> And these meals were common in Corinth. The situation in Corinth is that some Corinthian Christians have turned back to pagan temple attendance after Paul’s departure from there. For Fee, the meaning of εἰδωλόθυτον is to be found in the nature of idol-worship in pagan antiquity, not in Jewish abhorrence of it. The monotheistic statement of 1 Cor 8.4 is for Fee the teaching of Paul and is therefore Jewish-Christian monotheism.

Throughout, Fee does not think that Jewish influence on the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’ might be an important factor. Yet, in 1 Cor 8.4, the slogan of the ‘strong’ resembles more the *shema* rather than Paul’s teaching, given the fact that Paul almost immediately corrects or modifies it with the inclusion of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 8.6).

Further, Fee’s attribution of εἰδωλόθυτα to Hellenistic idol-worship appears weak, given that the term ἱερόθυτα was the term used by pagans in referring to sacrificial food. Fee rightly points out that Paul’s single concern in 1 Cor 10.1-13 is to use Israel’s history to warn the Corinthians and that Paul does not elaborate on the

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<sup>122</sup> Gooch 1993:152, is right to criticise Murphy-O’Connor for not taking into consideration Paul’s warning against the danger of participating in the table of demons, and his reference to the Israelites’ examples in 1 Cor 10.

<sup>123</sup> Fee 1980:189; 1987:370, n7.

<sup>124</sup> Fee 1980:184-85.

Israelites' idolatry.<sup>125</sup> But this only serves to suggest that the 'strong' had knowledge of the Jewish scripture, which further implies Jewish influence. Fee argues that the 'weak' failed in their 'conscience' not because of Jewish scruples but because of pagan temple attendance.<sup>126</sup> However, if the 'weak' had been Gentiles, what then informed their belief? Could it not be Jewish scruples, since Paul would have preached with much of his teaching based on the Jewish scripture, as he does in 1 Cor 10.1-13? And could it not be possible that the 'weak' had had Jewish influence that caused them to have scruples about idol meat? And if Jews have been found to practise idolatry (see chapter four below), does this mean that we cannot make conclusive statements about the ethnicity of the parties involved? This is a question that we will have to explore further below.

### *P. D. Gooch*

Gooch argues that idol food was a problem for Paul, who urged it as a problem for the Corinthians.<sup>127</sup> He argues that Paul advocates that the exclusive allegiance to Yahweh is to be seen in the avoidance of any participation in idolatrous rites, including the eating of idol food.<sup>128</sup> And Paul carries out his argument by creating a hypothetical 'weak' group and urging the Corinthians to consider this group.<sup>129</sup> Having surveyed the social importance of meals in the Graeco-Roman world, Gooch concludes that most of these meals would have involved religious rites. It was difficult to avoid such meals as they were means to maintain social relationships.<sup>130</sup> Paul's prohibition therefore created tremendous difficulties for the Corinthian Christians.

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<sup>125</sup> Fee 1980:185-86.

<sup>126</sup> Fee 1980:189.

<sup>127</sup> Gooch 1993:61-72.

<sup>128</sup> Gooch 1993:129.

<sup>129</sup> Gooch 1993:66-68.

<sup>130</sup> Gooch 1993:27-46.

There are two kinds of eating which Paul prohibits: eating in contexts that effect partnership with demons and thus break partnership with the Lord; and eating that results in the breaking of others' partnership with the Lord.<sup>131</sup>

Gooch has rightly pointed out the twin concerns of Paul and argued persuasively the reasons for Paul's prohibitions. However, his thesis works only because he treats the 'weak' as a hypothetical group. This has been dealt with in 1.2.1 above. Like other scholars who adopt a non-Jewish, Hellenistic interpretation of 1 Cor 8-10, Gooch does not consider the possible Jewish influence on the 'strong' and the 'weak'.

The majority of the above scholars are inclined towards the idea of Paul mediating between the two parties, with the primary aim of discouraging the 'strong' from eating idol meat. This is somewhat similar to the rhetorical studies which argue that in 1 Cor 8-10 Paul is trying to reconcile the two parties. Among the more notable are Mitchell, and recently Yeo.<sup>132</sup> Little attention has been paid to the possible Jewish influence on the two parties. We will need to look at this aspect of Jewish influence and see if there are parallels to the positions of these parties in 1 Cor 8-10.

### 1.3.5 Social/economic interpretation

#### *G. Theissen*

In his various essays collected in *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, Theissen's theory is that there is internal stratification among the Corinthians that divides the Corinthians into the lower and the upper classes, of whom the lower-class members formed the majority of the church.<sup>133</sup> This is based in part on Paul's

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<sup>131</sup> Gooch 1993:75-78.

<sup>132</sup> Mitchell 1991; Yeo 1995. Yeo's work is basically an effort to draw from Paul's strategy to inform a cross-cultural Chinese hermeneutic. His work assumes too much what the term 'Chinese' entails, which considerably weakens his argument.

<sup>133</sup> Theissen 1982:69.



statement in 1 Cor 1.26 which Theissen argues shows the ‘wise, powerful, nobly born’ are of sociological significance.<sup>134</sup> The divisions in the church are the result of different social strata that bring with them various interests, customs and assumptions. Thus the ‘socially strong’ and the ‘socially weak’ differ on issues such as the Lord’s Supper, idol meat, civil litigation among members and such like.

With the above ideas set out, Theissen then identifies the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’ of 1 Cor 8-10 with the ‘socially strong’ and the ‘socially weak’ of 1 Cor 1.26. The ‘strong’ were exposed to a variety of meats by virtue of their high social status, thus they had no scruples over idol meat. These members of the ‘strong’ were in fact former Gentile God-fearers sympathetic to Judaism while the ‘weak’ were the former Gentiles or Jews who had been accustomed to idols and thus would eat idol meat with a guilt conscience.<sup>135</sup>

This has been well received among scholars and is now termed as the ‘new consensus’. However, this way of interpreting the Corinthian situation in general and 1 Cor 8-10 in particular has not gone unchallenged. Recently, Meggitt has ably put this theory under scrutiny and considerably challenged it.

### *J. Meggitt*

Meggitt has challenged the ‘new consensus’ in his argument that there are no social divisions of the ‘elite’ and ‘non-elite’.<sup>136</sup> Instead, the Pauline communities ‘shared fully in the bleak material existence that was the lot of the non-élite inhabitants

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<sup>134</sup> Theissen 1982:71f.

<sup>135</sup> Theissen 1982:102-4, 138. Theissen’s basic thesis has won a number of followers, notably Meeks (1983:68-70), Clark (1993), Martin (1995), and Horrell (1996). All of these scholars make use of Theissen’s thesis to draw different theses of their own. Meeks seeks to illuminate the situation of the ‘first urban Christians’, Clark looks at the idea of ‘secular’ and ‘Christian’ leaderships and compares the two, Martin looks at the conflict between Paul and the ‘strong’ as arising from their different body ideologies, and Horrell seeks to show that Paul is using the Pauline ‘symbolic order’ with its centre as the cross of Christ to invert the values and status of the dominant social order.

<sup>136</sup> Meggitt 1998:100-53.

of the Empire'.<sup>137</sup> His argument against Theissen's analysis cannot be examined here in full, except in relation to 1 Cor 8-10. With regard to the parties in 1 Cor 8-10, Meggitt argues against Theissen's identification of the 'strong' and the 'weak' of 1 Cor 8-10 with the 'socially strong' and the 'socially weak'. His reasons are that (1) there is no evidence of the party of the 'strong' in 1 Cor 8-10; and (2) it is problematic to see the use of the word ἄσθενής in 1 Cor 1 as determinative of its meaning seven chapters later.<sup>138</sup> He does not rule out the possibility that the 'weak' of 1 Cor 1.27 may be identical to the 'weak' of 1 Cor 8-10, although the association is less certain. However, if we allow the existence of the 'weak', we would need to consider who the others are who do not belong to the 'weak'. This has been set out above (see 1.2.1). Meggitt provides no alternative scenario.

Theissen's social explanation of the differences between the two groups will not work, as Meggitt shows, but Theissen is right to indicate that there could be Jewish influence on both groups. We need to indicate how this could be, or to use Theissen's words, i.e. what sorts of 'accommodated' and 'non-accommodated' Judaism are present?

### 1.3.6 Paul's position as Jewish or influenced by the Decree

#### *J. C. Hurd*

Hurd posits that there is not a 'weak' party in the Corinthian church.<sup>139</sup> Paul is addressing the whole church and in 1 Cor 8-10 he lays down two prohibitions: (1) do not offend the weaker Christians; and (2) do not practise idolatry. The 'weak' are

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<sup>137</sup> Meggitt 1998:153.

<sup>138</sup> Meggitt 1998:107-8.

<sup>139</sup> Hurd 1983:147.

created hypothetically for Paul's own argument.<sup>140</sup> This has been dealt with in 1.2.1 and we will not repeat the weakness of Hurd's thesis here.

Hurd sees the issue of 1 Cor 8-10 as arising from changes in Paul's own position. The prohibition of idol meat was not part of Paul's original teaching, as the Decree was not yet formulated.<sup>141</sup> Paul sent the regulations of the Decree to the Corinthians in his previous letter, which generated strong reactions from the Corinthians who charged that Paul was not being consistent. According to Hurd, Paul had accepted the Decree in order to win the recognition of the Jerusalem apostles. But Paul remained silent about the Decree in 1 Cor 8-10, Hurd theorises, because the mention of the Decree would undermine his hold over the Corinthian church.

Hurd's suggestion that Paul's position has been influenced by the Decree does not explain why Paul argued so strongly and vehemently against idolatry. Besides, the rigour in his argument concerning his authority in 1 Cor 9 does not suggest that he is trying to win the recognition of the Jerusalem apostles. In fact, he appears quite independent in asserting his apostolic authority. The entire argument of 1 Cor 8-10 gives the impression that Paul has the conviction of scripture, rather than the influence of the Decree. Paul's position could well be informed by his previous training in the Jewish scripture, albeit with new interpretations in the light of Christological insights.<sup>142</sup> Hurd seems to think that the Corinthians are ethnically Gentile. However, he does not address the possibility of Jewish influence on the 'strong', seen in their slogan of the 'one God' and use of the term εἰδωλον in 1 Cor 8.4. It must be affirmed, though, that he is right that there is Jewish influence on Paul. We need to look at how the other two parties may have Jewish influence.

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<sup>140</sup> Hurd 1983:148.

<sup>141</sup> Hurd 1983:261.

<sup>142</sup> See Gooch 1993:141.



*J. Weiss*

Weiss posits that 1 Cor 8 and 10.23-11.1 belong to a later letter, while 1 Cor 10.1-22 constitute part of Paul's previous letter mentioned in 1 Cor 5.9-13. In the previous letter, Paul took a vehement stance against idolatry, which was shared by the 'weak', as a result of his Jewish superstition.<sup>143</sup> For Weiss, there are two groups whom Paul seeks to address. In 1 Cor 8 and 10.23-11.1, Weiss argues that Paul has abandoned his fear of demons and now advocated that eating itself is morally indifferent. Thus Paul is taking the stance of the 'strong' in this letter. Where he appears to oppose the 'strong', it is for the sake of the 'weak', not because he thinks idolatry is dangerous.<sup>144</sup>

Weiss's partition of 1 Cor 8-10 has been challenged variously and no longer appears convincing.<sup>145</sup> However, his suggestion that Paul had, in his previous letter, commanded against idol meat because of his Jewish scruples might help to illuminate 1 Cor 8-10. If Paul had shared the position of the 'weak' before, it would mean the 'weak' had had Jewish influence. This idea might illuminate our understanding of the 'weak': in what way were the 'weak' Jewish in their scruples? And if 1 Cor 8 and 10.23-11.1 represent Paul's liberation from Jewish superstition, what does that say about the 'strong', given their belief in the 'one God' and the non-existence of idols? We need to see in what way all parties here might be Jewish.

*P. J. Tomson*

Tomson's thesis rests on his assumption that Paul is operating within a halakhic framework and tradition, and therefore teaches a 'rational, halakhic definition' of what

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<sup>143</sup> Weiss 1910:264.

<sup>144</sup> Weiss 1910:212, 264.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Hurd 1983:131-42; Gooch 1993:138; and Cheung 1999:85.

constitutes idolatry and what does not.<sup>146</sup> Thus, unlike scholars who argued that Paul was inconsistent, Tomson argues from ancient Jewish idolatry laws and early Christian attitudes that it is unlikely Paul would condone eating idol meat.<sup>147</sup> Throughout, Tomson seeks to see Paul and explicate 1 Cor 8-10 in the context of Paul's Jewish Pharisaic background. The 'strong' have γνῶσις which allows them to eat idol meat. This γνῶσις, according to Tomson, is lacking in the 'weak' who are pagans.

Tomson is right to posit that Jewish theology lies behind Paul's teaching in 1 Cor 8-10, with different implications/practical conclusions drawn. However, his thesis is too heavily dependent on the Tannaitic halakha and therefore has not fully explored Paul's Christian convictions and how they impinge on his position. Further, the use of later rabbinic halakha to explain Paul runs the risk of anachronism, a point that has been noted by Cheung.<sup>148</sup> Is this geographically and chronologically appropriate?

While there are clear Jewish influences on Paul and, I shall argue below, on the parties involved, would it be possible for us to explore the possible Jewish parallels to the positions of the two parties, the 'weak' and the 'strong' in 1 Cor 8-10, by looking at the Diaspora? There are at least two advantages for doing this. First, the Corinthian church is a Diaspora community itself. Are there parallels to their behaviour regarding idol meat? Second, we have evidence of Jews living in many parts of the Mediterranean. Their survival depends to a large extent on how they interacted with their Gentile surroundings. But this also suggests that it might be possible for us to find Jewish parallels to the behaviour of the two parties.

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<sup>146</sup> Tomson 1990:217.

<sup>147</sup> Tomson 1990:151-86.

<sup>148</sup> Cheung 1999:307.

### *A. Cheung*

Cheung's basic thesis is that idol food is dangerous if, and only if, it is identified as such. This thesis is based on his argument that Paul's primary authority for his prohibition against idol food is the Jewish scripture, although Cheung also recognises the possibility of the background of other Jewish works.<sup>149</sup> He further finds support for his thesis in the interpretations of Paul by early Christian authors.<sup>150</sup> Throughout his work, Cheung is concerned to show that Paul is Jewish in his attitude towards idol food, thus categorically arguing against Barrett and others.<sup>151</sup>

Cheung is certainly right to look at the Jewish scripture for the background of Paul's attitude. But this research agenda of his reflects an assumption of Judaism – Jews always reject idolatry – and a similar assumption about the 'weak' as Gentiles.<sup>152</sup> This assumption is unnecessary and, as I shall show below (chapter four), there is evidence that Jews in the Diaspora did not always abstain from idolatry. What 1 Cor 8-10 show is that all the parties seem to have had Jewish influence to varying degrees. And we need to investigate this important question of the Jewish influence in 1 Cor 8-10.

#### **1.4 Summary and conclusion**

We have looked at the textual evidence for two groups in 1 Cor 8-10 and concluded that there are indeed two parties of the 'strong' and the 'weak', contrary to Hurd and Gooch. We have also looked at the question of the identities of these two groups and shown that while it is possible to identify the opinions and practice of these groups, it is not possible to determine their ethnicity – the groups could all be Jewish.

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<sup>149</sup> Cheung 1999:31-81.

<sup>150</sup> Cheung 1999:177-277.

<sup>151</sup> Cheung 1999:76-81.

<sup>152</sup> Cheung 1999:22, n20.



If this tentative hypothesis were to be proven plausible, which will be discussed in the following chapters, then it suggests that Judaism is not so simple as most scholars made it out to be. One of my tasks in this chapter was to survey the scholarly interpretations of 1 Cor 8-10, with particular focus on their view of the 'strong' and the 'weak'. We have looked at these in a thematic fashion and found that all parties in 1 Cor 8-10 have been identified as 'Jewish' in different ways and to varying degrees. And scholars who proposed a non-Jewish interpretation have not denied the presence of any Jewish influence, but merely looked at the Graeco-Roman background of dining. What is lacking is the attention that should have been paid to the explicitly Jewish slogans of the 'strong'.

There are various ways of looking at this phenomenon. All the parties, namely, Paul, the 'weak' and the 'strong', may be Jewish but not all hold to the same opinion about the 'one God' and the idols. For example, Paul says in 1 Cor 8.7 that not all share the same view of the 'strong'. Even if all parties hold a similar opinion on the 'one God', not all of them may believe the same about the idols or the pagan Gods. Even if they share similar beliefs about the idols as being non-existent, they need not adopt the same practice. Thus, for example, the 'strong' have no scruples about attending pagan temples and eating idol meat. But the 'weak' have difficulty with such a practice. As will be discussed below (chapter three), the position of the 'weak' seems to reflect Jewish opinion about idols, which gives them the scruples regarding eating idol meat. But the 'strong' adopt a completely opposite behaviour – they freely eat idol meat because of the belief that idols are non-existent. Similarly, Paul seems to believe in the non-existence of idols, but he continues to believe in the reality of demons. And he will not allow his behaviour to give room to any possible partnership with these demons.

There is a wide spectrum of views/practices among the Jews themselves. And this will imply that Judaism is to some extent multifaceted and we therefore cannot oversimplify Judaism by adopting a viewpoint that makes Judaism conform to one strand of view/practice.

The purpose and rationale of my thesis is to examine the issue of idolatry and authority in 1 Cor 8-10 by looking at the Jewish Diaspora communities and establishing parallels to the behaviour of the parties in these chapters. And in the process, I hope to show that the parties are all 'Jewish' in varying ways but differ in their practices. Thus, in the next chapter, we will look first at the examples of idolatry in the LXX (chapter two), using the model or definitions found in M. Halbertal and A. Margalit's *Idolatry*.<sup>153</sup> From here, we will move to examine the reactions of representative Diaspora Jewish authors against idolatry (chapter three). This will illuminate the position of the parties in 1 Cor 8-10 in which idols are said to be οὐδὲν ἐν κόσμῳ (cf. 8.4). While chapter three will draw out the reactions to idolatry, chapter four will be a discussion of Jews' accommodation to idolatry. I will look at the Jewish inscriptions and papyri, in addition to other Jewish authors, to survey these examples of idolatrous behaviour. This will set up parallels to the practice/behaviour of the 'strong' in eating idol meat as seen in 1 Cor 8-10.

One of the main aims of my thesis is to look at the question of authority, which is closely linked to idolatry – who decides what is idolatrous behaviour and what is not? To do this, I will examine the question of leadership and discipline in the Jewish Diaspora, and see how the Jews in the Diaspora organised themselves and what they did with those who violated their rules/regulations (chapter five). I will show that the law constituted the 'final court' of appeal for the Diaspora Jews. This will enable me

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<sup>153</sup> Halbertal-Margalit 1992.

to set up a contrast to the Diaspora churches such as that of Corinth, where the law no longer functions the way it does in a Jewish community. After discussing the leadership and discipline of the Diaspora Jewish communities, I will move to contrast the positions of the 'strong' and Paul regarding idolatry: the 'strong' argue for the neutrality of food based on their theology, and adopt a non-traditional practice; but Paul sees eating idol meat in an idol temple as equivalent to entry into a partnership with the 'demons' (chapter six). Paul's position will be presented as one that is Jewish but modified with a Christian perspective that underpins his argument throughout. The final chapter (seven) will focus on 1 Cor 9 which, I will argue, fulfils Paul's double purpose of defending/re-affirming his apostolic authority and setting himself as an example to the 'strong', using precisely the authority that he has just re-affirmed. Because the law no longer functions as a 'final court of appeal' for a Diaspora church like the Corinthian church, the basis for authority and for what is distinctively Christian action will have to be found elsewhere. And it is here in 1 Cor 9 that Paul provides this basis. I will conclude the thesis with answers to our questions raised in this first chapter, offer a fresh approach to Paul's ethics, and draw implications for historical re-construction of ancient Judaism and early Christianity as they relate to idolatry.



## CHAPTER TWO

### IDOLATRY: DEFINITIONS AND PATTERNS

#### 2.1 Introduction

In chapter one, we have seen that while scholars have variously argued for different interpretations of 1 Cor 8.1-11.1, there remains a need to explain how all three parties in the passage may be Jewish and how these positions may be illuminated by comparison with Diaspora Judaism.

The common assumption regarding what is Jewish almost always assumes some definition of idolatry – the worship of idols and/or eating idol food. However, none of the scholars surveyed in chapter one has defined idolatry in a comprehensive way.<sup>1</sup> This means the issue of idolatry becomes a subjective one – different people will define idolatry differently and thus practise according to what they think is or is not idolatry.<sup>2</sup> For example, does eating idol-meat constitute idolatry? Or does idolatry take place only when such eating involves actual idols? Thus, is a monotheist, who only views eating idol-meat but not visits to pagan temples as idolatry, committing idolatry when he or she conducts business transactions at a pagan temple? Similarly, a person may not think that eating idol-meat constitutes idolatry, only if one worships an idol. But to others who do not think so, that person is idolatrous.<sup>3</sup> Even within the Jewish tradition, idolatry does not seem to be a clearly defined category (see below). This shows, as in chapter one, that there is no single definition of idolatry. And in

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<sup>1</sup> To my mind, the one scholar who has pointed in the right direction is Derek Newton. His point that the passage of 1 Cor 8.1-11.1 is complex with ambiguity, boundary definition difficulties and conceptual differences in opinion shows the need for a proper definition of idolatry (see Newton 1998:21-23).

<sup>2</sup> Newton 1998:22 points out that ‘the whole church in Corinth represented its multiple views to Paul’, and rightly says, ‘We cannot assume that the Corinthians held the same concepts and boundaries as Paul with regard to such concepts as idolatry, worship and Christianity’ (1998:23).

<sup>3</sup> Batnitzky 2000:3 rightly shows, from a modern philosophical perspective, how ‘idolatry’ as one religious category can be so diversely defined.

order to understand the issues concerning idolatry, a multifaceted set of definitions will need to be established. Such definitions are important as they will enable us to identify what we are looking for in the texts we examine, and also to understand why some Jews accommodated to idolatry while others found it objectionable (see further chapter four below).

Although Halbertal and Margalit's work, *Idolatry* (1992), spans across a much wider Jewish terrain and historical period, it draws from the biblical motifs and employs them philosophically to analyse the question of idolatry. And because their work looks at idolatry from a multifaceted perspective, it serves as a useful critical tool for understanding the Jewish texts on idolatry. Thus, I will employ their analysis and apply it to the discussion of idolatry in the base Jewish text, i.e. the Septuagint. Because the LXX serves as the basic religious text for the Diaspora Jews, a discussion of idolatry in the LXX will enable us to trace the patterns of thought on idolatry which are operative within the LXX. The discussion will also enable us to understand how different Jews might interpret the LXX differently, when we look at the other Jewish texts later.<sup>4</sup>

In the subsequent discussion of other Jewish texts, inscriptional and papyrological sources, we will continue to examine the issue of idolatry using the critical analysis as set out in Halbertal and Margalit's work. Thus, the task here must begin with an overview of Halbertal and Margalit's critical analysis.

## 2.2 An analysis of Idolatry: Halbertal and Margalit (1992)

In their book *Idolatry*, Halbertal and Margalit address the central question – what is idolatry and why is it viewed as an unspeakable sin? What they are interested in are the various models of this concept in the monotheistic religions, especially in

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<sup>4</sup> One example is Josephus' use of Num 25 incident (see chapter 3.4.2 below).

Judaism.<sup>5</sup> They look at the different concepts of idolatry by looking at the different models. This is done by looking also at the different concepts of God, for these concepts create different concepts of idolatry when reversed.

(1) The sin of idolatry is first of all seen in the framework of anthropomorphic concepts of God through the biblical metaphor of marriage relationships. This is because the marriage relationships are exclusive and therefore provide a useful explanation for the sin of idolatry. The marriage metaphors are used to describe the relationship between Israel and Yahweh.<sup>6</sup> For example, the marriage metaphor in Hosea provides a description of the relationship between Israel and her God as one in which Israel as the wife has been 'unfaithful' to her husband, God (cf. Hos 1.2; 2.9-11; 14-15).<sup>7</sup> What is involved is a 'jealous' God whose wife has 'betrayed' him. Such 'betrayal' is viewed as such because of God's 'jealousy', which has two sides to it: (1) Israel's 'betrayal' or 'unfaithfulness' constitutes a threat to his power; and (2) Israel's idolatry means humiliation for God. 'Unfaithfulness' defines idolatry when *another God or an alien cult other than Yahweh is worshipped*. Since 'betrayal' is closely linked to 'unfaithfulness', idolatry may also be seen as a form of 'rebellion' through 'betrayal'. In this case, the breach of the covenant would be viewed as idolatry.

(2) Another aspect of idolatry concerns the ways God is represented. Not only is the worship of other Gods forbidden, but *the representation of God by means of a statue or picture is also banned*. There are basically three type of representations:<sup>8</sup> (1) similarity-based representation, which refers to the representation of one thing by another because it is similar to it; (2) causal-metonymic representation, which refers

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<sup>5</sup> Halbertal-Margalit 1992:1.

<sup>6</sup> Halbertal-Margalit 1992:9-36.

<sup>7</sup> Halbertal-Margalit 1992:11-23.

<sup>8</sup> Halbertal-Margalit 1992:38-66.



not to a relation of similarity but a relationship of possession; for example a handkerchief of someone represents him/her not because it resembles him/her but because it belongs to him/her;<sup>9</sup> and (3) convention-based representation, which refers to the convention that permits something to be so called. For example, a cup is called a cup without (1) and (2) but because there is a convention that allows the word 'cup' to represent the physical object from which we drink. The issue of representation arises with regard to the definition of idolatry through *misrepresenting* God by means of an object, or by treating the Gods/demons as if they were the true God, thus confusing God with them. The second commandment explicitly prohibits representing God at all with an image (cf. Exod 20.3-4). Since God cannot be represented, any physical representation of God will be viewed as an act of idolatry.<sup>10</sup>

Conventional representation in the sense of linguistic representation is permitted in the biblical tradition. However, there is a fine line between linguistic representation and similarity-based representation of God, i.e. between speaking of God as a mighty king and drawing a picture of him as such. Although there are various arguments in favour of linguistic representation, Maimonides developed a strong objection that linguistic representations can be even more dangerous because they state propositions and make judgements. Thus, the distinction between these two types of representation should be abolished.

There is another view, that is, that the 'Torah speaks in the language of the people'.<sup>11</sup> This view rejects the types of representation mentioned above. It sees the Torah as speaking in the language of the people, i.e. the people understand best the

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<sup>9</sup> Metonymic representation appears to be permitted in the biblical tradition as can be seen in the OT such as the Temple and all that is in it, such as the Holy of Holies, the Ark of the Covenant, etc.

<sup>10</sup> Halbertal-Margalit 1992:45-49. Such representations are less likely to lead to any false conception of God. However, false conception of God can take place when one equates, for example, the Ark of the Covenant as powerful as if it were God himself. Thus, the issue is with *misrepresentation* of God.

<sup>11</sup> Halbertal-Margalit 1992:54-62.

language in which they have been brought up and taught. However, this view of language raises the question of the limitations of language in describing God. Further, there is always the danger that the use of language will distort, rather than accurately describe, the true God, since human language is limited and humanity on their own do not know anything positive about God. This further raises the question of the appropriateness of a particular representation, be it linguistic, anthropomorphic, or otherwise.

There are two aspects to the problem of anthropomorphism: (1) does it provide an erroneous picture of God? And (2) does it provide a disrespectful and inappropriate picture of God? This leads to the cognitive level or aspect of idolatry.

Idolatry is here defined in terms of *cognitive error*. In this error, one internalises idolatrous beliefs so that even though one may worship in a monotheistic setting, one is still an idolater.<sup>12</sup> In other words, the concept of idolatry is being transferred from the performance of alien ritual worship to *harbouring alien beliefs*. This is explained as ‘mental internalisation’, which ‘refers to a description of the deity that uses mental expressions in a literal sense’.<sup>13</sup>

Another aspect of cognitive error is found in *false worship and false belief*. False worship may be defined in terms of ‘wrong’ kinds of action, i.e. the action that renders to the true God what is meant for pagan Gods or alien cults. False belief is closely linked to false worship – it precedes false worship. This leads to imagination, which Halbertal and Margalit define in terms of what provides us with objects for the error of false belief. But false belief and imagination further give rise to a lack of abstraction.

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<sup>12</sup> Halbertal-Margalit 1992:109.

<sup>13</sup> Halbertal-Margalit 1992:110.

The lack of abstraction, it is argued, forces people to conceive of God in observable terms. And observable terms provide the potential for error. In view of the above, i.e. false belief, imagination and lack of abstraction, *the question of intention* becomes an important factor in defining idolatry. For whom one intends the worship indicates whether it is idolatry; what kind of worship one intends for the true God also plays a part. In other words, if a worshipper intends the right kind of worship to the wrong God (or alien cult), it is considered idolatry. Similarly, if one intends the wrong kind of worship to the true God, it is equally considered to be idolatry.<sup>14</sup> This leads us to the question of what or who constitutes the 'right' or 'wrong' God.

Halbertal and Margalit argue that no description of God is adequate and that the 'right' God can only be identified through his proper name. The identification of the 'right' God is made impossible if we take Maimonides' view that any description of God will be false. However, if we take G. E. Moore's causal condition as the criterion, then tradition will guarantee the conception of the 'right God' by the 'shared form of worship, and by the worshiper's intent to worship the God of his fathers'.<sup>15</sup>

The identification of the 'right' God leads to the question of idolatrous practice. The practice of idolatry may be simply the worship of any object other than God. But at times, it involves certain ways of worshipping God, i.e. the method of worshipping God. In defining wrong worship, Halbertal and Margalit point out that the perspective of a practical definition of idolatry, based on the method of worship, means that there is a shift from the cognitive error to the practice of worship that 'regards every deviation from the accepted method of worship as a form of idolatry, even if it is God himself who is being worshipped'.<sup>16</sup> This perspective means that a form of worship

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<sup>14</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of 'intention', see Halbertal-Margalit 1992:202-9.

<sup>15</sup> Halbertal-Margalit 1992:162.

<sup>16</sup> Halbertal-Margalit 1992:181.



can still be idolatrous even if no idol or false god is involved. This means it is necessary to answer the question, *what is worship?* Do those who forbid the worship of other Gods deny their existence, or do they admit their existence but forbid their worship?

The issue for the monotheists is that there can be only the worship of one God. What constitutes 'correct' worship may be gleaned from the OT incident of the golden calf. The story shows that the basic difference between idol worshippers and the worshippers of God is the difference in the method of worship. And it appears that while Israel in the wilderness did not worship an alien cult, the Israelites have misrepresented Yahweh with the image of a calf. Thus, one's intention of worshipping God may be acceptable but one's method may not.

The final issue dealt with by Halbertal and Margalit is that of idolatry and political authority.<sup>17</sup> They argue that religious language is filled with metaphors of political sovereignty describing God and his people. This is even more so in the biblical tradition where the covenant between God and Israel is perceived as that between a king and his vassals.

In contrast to the marital metaphor, in a political metaphor God is the king to whom his people must yield total loyalty. What is God's relationship to the system of human dominion? Is political loyalty to God so exclusive that any other political loyalty is considered a betrayal and thus idolatry? This limits the potential for establishing human political institutions. Israel under Samuel no longer could continue living under the burden of a holy political sovereignty so that they demanded a king. In fact, the failure of the prophets in their politics is precisely because of the uncompromising requirement of the exclusive heavenly sovereignty of God. The

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<sup>17</sup> Halbertal-Margalit 1992:214-35.

exclusivity of this political leadership of God was waived by God when Israel demanded a king (cf. 1 Sam 8.6). But such a waiver was ‘conditional on both the king and the people understanding that they are still subject to God and that the king is nothing but an agent:...’.<sup>18</sup> Thus, 1 Sam 8.7-8 shows that even though there may be a king in Israel, he is only to be an agent, and that any rejection of a political leadership is in fact a rejection of God. And this rejection is compared to Israel’s rejection of God and worship of other Gods in the wilderness (v 8). Thus the *failure to recognise the sovereignty of God*, i.e. failure to be loyal to God, constitutes another definition of idolatry.

### 2.2.1 Summary

The above analysis enables us to see idolatry being defined in two broad categories, namely, *the worship of other Gods or alien cult*, and *misrepresenting, or dishonouring God (Yahweh)*. These two can take place simultaneously or independently.

#### *Worship of other Gods or alien cult*

There are two further aspects of this first category. (1) The first aspect is that of ‘unfaithfulness’ in which we may understand idolatry through the metaphor of the marriage relationship, which describes Israel or the people of God as the wife while God is the husband. Idolatry is thus understood to be ‘unfaithfulness’ when Israel turns away from God to other Gods just as an unfaithful wife turns away from her husband to other men. It is therefore a form of rebellion against the true God. And owing to the fact that the true God always remains true, such ‘unfaithfulness’ would mean that it is also a form of ‘betrayal’ of the true God by those who turn against him. An example is Israel’s worship of the Baal.

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<sup>18</sup> Halbertal-Margalit 1992:219.

(2) The second aspect within the first category is that of disregarding ancestral customs and tradition. In the case of Israel, the breach of the covenant with God will be seen as a form of idolatry. Israelite religion is an ancestral tradition in the sense that it begins as a family belief which gradually grows to become institutionalised, climaxing in the written code of the *Torah*. The belief is then passed down from one generation to another serving as a norm for each successive generation's individual as well as communal life and practice. The central motif of this tradition is embedded in the covenant, which is expressed in and through the Law given by Moses. Because the tradition is accepted as being given by the one true God, any act of worship that contradicts the ancestral tradition is deemed idolatrous.

### *Misrepresenting/dishonouring God (Yahweh)*

The second broad category is that of *misrepresenting*, or *dishonouring* the true God (Yahweh). Under this category, idolatry may be defined in two ways. First, visually, that is, by representing God with an object. Thus, any effort in trying to represent God physically or visually by any form will be deemed idolatrous. An example of misrepresenting God visually is the golden calf event in Exod 32.

The second definition is on the cognitive level. While idolatry has often been thought of as building and worshipping an idol, it in fact can happen without necessarily having an idol. The understanding of idolatry as cognitive error identifies three areas in which idolatry takes place. (1) One area refers to the 'wrong' kind of worship, which can be further defined in two ways. (a) The first is by intention. When a person worships the true God but with a wrong intention, that is, mentally the person has in mind some other Gods, idolatry has taken place.<sup>19</sup> (b) The second is by action.

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<sup>19</sup> Halbertal & Margalit 1992:109 explain that a person may worship in a synagogue alongside his fellow monotheistic Jews and behave in a manner totally indistinguishable from a monotheist. However, his concept of divinity may be so 'distorted by errors and corporealizing' that his intentions in worship can only be described as worshipping an alien God.



A person may worship God with all the right conceptions of divinity but with an act that is inappropriate to the worship of God. For example, one may worship God with the acts of worship normally prescribed by the nations for their own cults or Gods - such a worship constitutes the 'wrong' kind of worship.

Under the definition of 'wrong' kinds of worship, either wrong intention or wrong action will constitute idolatry. In other words, the right action with the wrong intention or the right intention with the wrong action would render the worship idolatrous. Both action and intention must be right in order that idolatry as 'wrong' kind of worship may not take place. This is a two-pronged approach in which monotheism is safeguarded and idolatry defined. An example of right belief or conceptions about the true God but with the 'wrong' actions may be seen in the act of eating idol-meat in the presence of the Gods in 1 Cor 8-10.<sup>20</sup>

(2) Another area of cognitive error is that of confusing God with nature or mixing God with other Gods/demons (δαίμόνια). When Israel views an object, be it a tree, or a stone, or the sun, and such like, and attributes power to it even though no actual worship of the object takes place,<sup>21</sup> idolatry is deemed to have taken place. In this case, it is different from representing God with an object such as the golden calf, or the 'wrong' kind of worship in terms of action or intention.

(3) The third area of cognitive error may be seen in Israel's failure to recognise the sovereignty and/or the uniqueness of God. For example, when Israel demands a king, it is seen as her failure to recognise God's rule over her and thus her failure to recognise God's sovereignty.

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<sup>20</sup> The 'strong' may hold the right view of God as one, but their action of eating idol meat in the pagan temple renders them idolatrous.

<sup>21</sup> Most of the time, however, the people would tend to bow down and worship an object which they perceive as having power.

The above analysis of Halbertal and Margalit yields at least two achievements. (1) It has identified different definitions of idolatry which are interwoven in the Jewish tradition but are intellectually separable and of varying degrees of importance to different Jews.<sup>22</sup> Thus, in our analysis of the LXX and other Jewish texts, including 1 Corinthians, the Halbertal-Margalit analysis will be useful in identifying what are the different determining patterns of thought on idolatry for different Jews. Such patterns of thought are most likely the reasons for which different Jews acted the way they did regarding idolatry. (2) By indicating the complexities and subtleties in the definition of idolatry, the analysis reveals the possible spaces Jews might carve out for themselves which they might not consider idolatrous, but which are considered idolatrous by others. For example, a Jew may attend a pagan temple but claim to be worshipping the one God because he or she denies the existence of idols.<sup>23</sup> But others may still accuse him/her of employing the wrong method of worship, or having the wrong intentions (see chapter four below). In other words, although the definitions yielded by Halbertal and Margalit's analysis are complementary, they do not form one single package.

The above definitions of idolatry will serve as a critical tool for analysing the various Jewish texts, including 1 Cor 8-10, in our subsequent chapters. We will begin with the LXX.

### 2.3 Idolatry in the LXX

That the LXX constitutes the base Diaspora Jewish text is undeniably clear. This is because the LXX is a translation of the Hebrew scripture that was clearly meant

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<sup>22</sup> This will enable us to see the different emphases placed upon different definitions in different Jewish texts, and thus help us see on what grounds Jews identified an act as idolatrous.

<sup>23</sup> See for example, Halbertal 1998:157-72, where he shows from the Mishnah *Abodah Zarah* how Jews carved out the space for themselves in which they justified their action or behaviour. See chapter 4.6 below.



for the Greek speaking Jews in the Diaspora. The LXX was for the Diaspora Jews an important part of their identity and a guide to their life as a people. It provided the language, history and authority to which Diaspora Jews of different kinds appealed. For example, Moses, the Law, and the different Jewish stories have been cited by different Jewish authors to argue for a particular policy, or advocate a particular value, or champion a particular cause.<sup>24</sup>

A survey of idolatry in the LXX would therefore serve as a foundation for the subsequent analysis of other Jewish texts. A survey such as this will also enable us to trace the different definitions and patterns of thought on idolatry in different periods of Israel's history that are operating in the LXX. Since the LXX plays a seminal role in Diaspora Judaism, the survey of idolatry would provide an important path towards the understanding of Diaspora Judaism on idolatry.

However, our discussion will only focus on texts which explicitly concern idolatry. Two reasons may be adduced for this. First, the bulk of the material is simply too diverse for an exhaustive study to be done. It is, in any case, not my purpose to do an exhaustive study. Second, the above definitions require that the passages cited be analysed straightforwardly. Using the above definitions means that the classification of the texts cited has to be arbitrary, and thus the process has to be very selective, i.e. those closer to a particular definition will be placed under that definition, even though it they may also appear to fit another definition. We will see that some of the texts chosen under a particular category refer to one period of Israel's history more than others. For example, under the category of **worship of other Gods (alien cults)**, examples from the exilic period are cited more often. This could serve as a hint that Israel in exile turned to other Gods more regularly or readily, perhaps

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<sup>24</sup> E.g. Philo, Josephus, Artapanus, 1, 2, 3, and 4 Maccabees, to name a few.



because the people were in an alien land where interaction with alien cults was more frequent.<sup>25</sup> But texts on idolatry during the pre-exilic period tend to come under the second category: **misrepresenting God**, which again suggests that Israel before exile had frequently dishonoured Yahweh.

### 2.3.1 The first two commandments

That the first and second commandments are frequently cited in the many Jewish texts that critique idolatry shows these commandments to be foundational to the concept of 'monotheism'. However, do the first two commandments recognise the existence of other Gods, but prohibit only Israelites from worshipping these Gods but not the Gentiles (monolatry)? Or do these commandments stipulate that only Yahweh is to be worshipped, and that all other Gods are denied (monotheism)? It appears that there is evidence suggesting both possibilities. It is necessary to cite the two commandments here:<sup>26</sup>

#### The first commandment:

Ἐγώ εἰμι κύριος ὁ θεός σου, ὅστις ἐξήγαγον σε ἐκ γῆς Αἰγυπτου  
ἐξ οἴκου δουλείας. οὐκ ἔσονται σοι θεοὶ ἕτεροι πλὴν ἐμοῦ.

'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery. You shall have no other Gods except me' (Exod 20.2).

#### The second commandment:

οὐ ποιήσεις σεαυτῷ εἰδωλον οὐδὲ παντὸς ὁμοίωμα, ὅσα ἐν τῷ  
οὐρανῷ ἄνω καὶ ὅσα ἐν τῇ γῇ κάτω καὶ ὅσα ἐν τοῖς ὕδασιν

<sup>25</sup> Similarly, during the wilderness sojourn, Israel had engaged in idolatry, again perhaps due to their constant encounter with alien cults. One example is the Num 25 incident (see 2.2.2 below).

<sup>26</sup> When the first commandment ends and the second begins is open to debate. However, Philo and Josephus represent the first two in the present arrangement (see Philo, *Decal* 12; and Josephus, *Ant* 3.91-92). Cf. Weinfeld 1990:6-7 who reconstructs the ten commandments based on Philo and Josephus. For a thorough treatment of the various versions of the Decalogue, see Greenberg 1990:83-119.

ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς. οὐ προσκυνήσεις αὐτοῖς οὐδὲ μὴ λατρεύσης αὐτοῖς. ἐγὼ γάρ εἰμι κύριος ὁ θεός σου,...

‘You shall not make for yourself an idol nor likeness of anything in heaven above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them. For I am the Lord your God...’ (Exod 20.4).

The first commandment, which sets the tone for the rest,<sup>27</sup> lays the foundational principle for the relationship between Yahweh and Israel: I am the Lord your God.

And this is set within the historical context of deliverance from Egypt and the covenant into which Yahweh entered with Israel.<sup>28</sup> Yahweh is therefore the only God of Israel.

The second may be a logical deduction from the first: Israel is not to make any idols; nor is Israel allowed to worship or serve them. The question is whether these two commandments are meant only for Israel, or whether they extend beyond Israel to include Gentiles. In other words, are the first two commandments meant to advocate monotheism, or henotheism (or monolatry)?<sup>29</sup>

The first commandment seems to suggest that there are other Gods, but Israel is precisely barred from going after them because their Lord is Yahweh God. In this case, the commandment is applicable only to Jews and not to Gentiles. However, we see in the second commandment a prohibition against idol-making, which presumably includes the physical representation of Yahweh, with the reiteration that Yahweh is

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<sup>27</sup> The question of who God is in relation to Israel is of utmost importance to the significance of the rest of the commandments. Albeck 1990:265 rightly concludes that the first commandment itself suggests that God is known through the commandments themselves, and that this commandment is actually a command to believe in God. Thus, Houtman 2000:19 says that this commandment is the ‘most fundamental’ commandment for the entire Old Testament.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Urbach 1990:172-73.

<sup>29</sup> Henotheism is here taken to mean belief in one God who is not necessarily the *only* God. Monolatry, on the other hand, means the worship of one God, without excluding belief in others. Cf. Gnuse 1997:62-228 where he argues for a developmental monotheism in Israel.



God. In the second commandment, the word 'idol' (εἰδωλον) is used, thus suggesting that the ban covers the Gentile idols.

Houtman correctly points out that the first two commandments do not prohibit the Gentiles from worshipping their Gods. For Yahweh has entered into a relationship with Israel, not with the Gentiles. Thus, the concern here is with the right worship of Yahweh and thus the Decalogue requires 'monolatry' of Israel.<sup>30</sup> This means the temptation to worship other Gods was real, which is the reason why Yahweh God is concerned that Israelites do not worship other Gods.<sup>31</sup> It also suggests that the first two commandments could be used by Jews to critique the Gentile Gods, that is, if Yahweh alone is the true God, then all Gentile Gods must be false. However, if Gnuse's thesis is tenable that monotheism as a religious concept developed over a period of time,<sup>32</sup> then it is entirely possible that not all Israelites had the same understanding about monotheism and how Yahweh was to be worshipped.<sup>33</sup> For example, the golden calf incident shows that the Israelites thought the calf was their God who led them out of Egypt (Exod 32.4). Similarly, not all monotheists necessarily have the same understanding of the 'one God'. For example, the 'strong' in Corinth believe in the 'one God', to the exclusion of all idols. But for Paul, there are still Gods in heaven and on earth and eating idol meat constitutes partnership with demons (cf. 1 Cor 10.22; see chapter six below). Thus, in the following, besides using

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<sup>30</sup> Houtman 2000:20.

<sup>31</sup> Thus, Childs 1974:403 writes: '...in the first commandment the prohibition describes the relation of Yahweh to Israel by categorically eliminating other Gods as far as Israel is concerned'. This statement reiterates his earlier statement that 'Yahweh's exclusiveness in the sense that Yahweh alone has existence is not contained in the first commandment'.

<sup>32</sup> See Gnuse 1997:129-76 who argues for a development of monotheism, which is arrived at only during the Babylonian exile. Thus, during the pre-exilic Mosaic period there was no developed monotheism and Israel's monotheism began with much the same pluralistic cultic beliefs as the Canaanites.

<sup>33</sup> Thus, inscriptional evidence shows that Yahweh and Asherah were in some way related. See Meshel 1979:24-35, cited in Gnuse 1997:70, n19.



Halbertal and Margalit's definitions, we will also see how the first two commandments are brought to bear on the issue of idolatry.

### 2.3.2 Worship of other Gods (alien cults)

#### The metaphor of 'unfaithfulness'

Num 25.1-9 provides us with an account of the Israelites' worship of the Baal of Peor. The incident took place at Shittim which, according to Davies, was an ancient pre-Israelite sanctuary where 'worship was marked by strongly Canaanite features'.<sup>34</sup> It was also the last stop-over before the Israelites crossed over the Jordan (Num 33.49). The story about Israel's idolatry is progressive. First, the Israelites entered into sexual relations with the Moabite women (LXX: ἐβεβηλώθη ὁ λαὸς ἐκπορνεῦσαι εἰς τὰς θυγατέρας Μωάβ; the Hebrew לְקַדְּשׁוּ means 'profaned themselves'; v 1). The women then invited the people to join them in sacrificing to their idols (LXX: τὰς θυσίας τῶν εἰδώλων). It should be noted that the LXX translates the Hebrew לִילְהֹתָם, which means 'their Gods' are 'idols', thus showing the negative attitude of the author to other Gods. And the description of the people's worship of these Gods is that they ate (ἔφαγεν) and bowed down to the women's idols (προσεκύνησαν τοῖς εἰδώλοις αὐτῶν). The God to whom the Israelites rendered their worship is the Baal of Peor (v 3). LXX translates כָּשַׁף 'yoked himself' as ἐτελέσθη which carries the meaning of 'fulfilling' or 'performing' the requirements for the sacrifice of the Baal of Peor. By turning to the worship of another 'God' or alien cult, the Israelites may be said to commit the sin of idolatry or 'unfaithfulness'. Although the passage does not describe the Israelites as 'rebellious', the Hebrew word כָּמַר, which carries the

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<sup>34</sup> Davies 1995:285.

meaning of 'bind', 'join', 'attach oneself to',<sup>35</sup> suggests that the people have abandoned Yahweh since they have 'attached' themselves to Baal. Thus, Israel's idolatrous act may be considered one of 'rebellion' against their God.

Jer 3.1-23 records Israel's 'unfaithfulness' during the pre-exilic period in terms of a marriage relationship. In vv 1-2, a broken marriage relationship is described in which a man divorces his wife because she has become another man's wife. Israel is then said to be worse than such a woman. For Israel has played the harlot with many lovers. Carroll argues that the language about the pollution of the land indicates that Israel's act of whoring is a reference to baalistic cults.<sup>36</sup>

In v 6, Israel is said to have played the whore on every high hill and under every green tree, which are explained in Jer 17.2 as places where altars and sacred poles are set up for religious rituals made to the Gods. The same theme of an adulterous affair is again referred to in vv 8-9 as a description of Israel and Judah. The theme is again repeated in vv 11-14 and 19-20 where in v 13, the idolatrous act is a 'promiscuous traffic' with foreign Gods; and in v 20 Israel's act is viewed as a treachery towards Yahweh. Thus, the passage revolves around the motifs of 'unfaithfulness' and 'treachery' on the part of Israel towards God. The sexual language used is an attempt by the author to express the seriousness of the broken relationship between Israel and God, thus showing the exclusivity of the relationship which does not and indeed cannot allow a third party's entry. The theme of 'whoring' is seen throughout Ezek 16, where Israel is accused of using what God has given her to make images for worship (16.15-18).<sup>37</sup> In 16.24-25, Israel is said to have built a

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<sup>35</sup> BDB 855.

<sup>36</sup> Carroll 1986:142. The theme of whoring is repeated in v 6.

<sup>37</sup> Brownlee 1986:230 suggests that the elements of oil and incense in Ezek 16.18 are a clear reference to the anointing of Israel's idols. The author of Ezekiel tells us that the food supplied by God was given in sacrifice to the idols as a 'pleasing aroma' (ὀσμὴν εὐωδίας). Cf. Stuart 1987:44 who comments on



‘room’ or ‘house’ of or for the harlot, where **בֵּית** is translated in the LXX as οἶκημα πορνικόν.<sup>38</sup> Ezek 20.23 points out that Israel’s rebellion in idolatry is the reason for her eventual exile to the nations. Thus we are given the impression that Israel’s fate as a whole is dependent on her religious ‘unfaithfulness’ to God (cf. Ezek 36.19).<sup>39</sup> Such a metaphor may have its foundation in the first two commandments.

In a similar vein, Ezekiel provides us with much material on Israel’s idolatry during the pre-exilic times. For example, in Ezek 2.3-7, the prophet Ezekiel is said to have a vision in which he is commanded to address the people of Israel with the message of God. In his address, the people of Israel are described as ‘provoking God’ (τοὺς παραπικραίνοντας).<sup>40</sup> And the phrase ‘a house of rebellion’ (οἶκος παραπικραίνων; **בֵּית מִרְיָ**) is used three times in vv 5, 6, and 7. This description of the house of Israel serves as an introduction to the things to be said about Israel. The rebellion is set out in several passages.

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Hos 2.8 that Israel uses what God has given her to spend on the worship of an alien cult, i.e. Baal. Hos 2.13 further accuses Israel of forgetting the Lord and of burning incense to the Baal, a reference to the festivals (Stuart 1987:51); and they were an occasion for Baal worship. Stuart 1987:51 argues that the feast, the new moon, and the Sabbath were originally legitimate festival holidays but had been turned into ‘the days of Baal’ (ταῖς ἡμέραις τῶν Βααλῖμ).

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Hos 2.1-13, where Israel is likened to an adulterous mother and an unfaithful wife (LXX: 2.4, ἐξαρώ τὴν πορνείαν αὐτῆς ἐκ προώσου μου καὶ τὴν μοιχείαν αὐτῆς ἐκ μέσου μαστῶν αὐτῆς). This charge is repeated in v 5; and throughout, Israel is accused of not acknowledging God as her provider by the metaphor of an unfaithful wife’s failure to acknowledge her husband’s provisions. Thompson 1977:475-81 explains that the ‘lovers’ of Israel shows her failure to love Yahweh alone and thus Israel violates the covenant into which God has entered with her (cf. Ezek 16.59).

<sup>39</sup> Ezek 36.17-18 specifically refers to Israel’s uncleanness in terms of her idols. Cf. 37.23 where Israel is said to be no longer defiling herself with her idols after God has restored her (LXX: ἵνα μὴ μιαινῶνται ἔτι ἐν τοῖς εἰδώλοις αὐτῶν). Similarly, Ezek 43.7-9.

<sup>40</sup> See Liddell-Scott 1940:1320 where the word also carries the meaning of ‘rebellion’; Cf. Ezek 12.2-9, 25, where the word παραπικραίνω is used several times, in vv 2, 3, 9, and 25, denoting that the house of Israel is one of rebellion. The text in Hebrew sets this out quite clearly:

The rebellious house: (v 2) **בֵּית-הַמִּרְיָ**  
 (v 3) **בֵּית מִרְיָ**  
 (v 9) **בֵּית הַמִּרְיָ**  
 (v 25) **בֵּית הַמִּרְיָ**



For example, in Ezek 5.5-12 Israel is said to have committed abominations, which are described with the word βδέλυγμα (vv 9, 11) which in the OT refers to ‘everything connected with idolatry’.<sup>41</sup> And Israel defiles the sanctuary with all the abominations (τὰ βδελύγματα, v 11; cf. Ezek 7.20).

Israel’s idolatry invites God’s destruction of her high places (Ezek 6.3-13). Even those who will escape destruction are those who have sought after their idols (Ezek 6.9). And Israel as a whole has offered a pleasing aroma (ὀσμὴν εὐωδίας) to ‘all their idols’ (πᾶσι τοῖς εἰδώλοις αὐτῶν) (Ezek 6.13) everywhere.<sup>42</sup>

In a strange vision, Ezekiel is personally shown the idolatry of Israel through a dramatic experience of being lifted to a secret location where there is a chamber in which all kinds of carvings are found – reptiles, animals, and all the ‘idols’ of Israel. This is where Ezekiel purportedly witnesses the seventy elders commit idolatry (Ezek 8.11).<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, their women are said to weep for Tammuz (Ezek 8.14) in the house of God (οἴκου κυρίου). Tammuz was apparently a cult identified with Baal Hadad.<sup>44</sup> Brownlee has observed that the weeping of the women could be linked to the Canaanite festival in which weeping was carried out to call back the God of rain and storm at a time of dry vegetation.<sup>45</sup> This could well be connected to v 12 where the

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<sup>41</sup> BAGD 137f.

<sup>42</sup> The phrase ‘under every leafy oak’, יַתְחַת כָּל-אֵלֶּה עֹבְדָהּ, is omitted in the LXX. This, however, does not alter the basic meaning of what the text is trying to say, i.e. Israel worships in every possible place.

<sup>43</sup> It is not certain whether the secret location is a reference to the temple in Jerusalem. The description does not seem to fit it. It does not make any difference to the point we are making, that even the seventy elders are seen to be idolatrous in their practice.

<sup>44</sup> Brownlee 1986:134.

<sup>45</sup> Brownlee 1986:136. Gray 1962:516 notes: ‘The Sumerian deity of spring vegetation; known from the Gilgamesh Epic as the love of Ishtar, Goddess of love, who had betrayed him. The anniversary of her betrayal was the occasion of an annual wailing for the God in the fourth month, which was named for him’.

elders are said to have moaned the abandonment of God. The leaders have thus turned to alien cults.<sup>46</sup>

During the exilic period, when Israel lived in Gentile lands, idolatry appears to continue. An example is seen in Isa 46.1-13, which is set in the exile in Babylon where idols are transported (vv. 1-2). Israel is called to listen to her God who bore and carried her, and who would save her (vv 3-4). Such a description of God as the one who ‘bore, carried and will save’ Israel is probably a reference to the period of Abraham’s promise, i.e. before Israel was ‘born’ as a nation; to the period of the exodus during which Israel became a people (‘carried and being born’); and the eventual salvation of Israel from the nations (‘will save’). But Israel has forgotten Yahweh God and turned to the idols of the Babylonians (vv 5-7).

Jeremiah records an incident during the exilic period in which the people of Israel in exile worshipped an alien cult of the ‘queen of heaven’ (Jer 44.1-19; cf. Jer 7.18). The story reports that the women, with their husbands’ full knowledge and co-operation (v 19), intentionally turned away from the word of God and worshipped and made offerings to the queen of heaven and poured drink offerings to her (vv 16-17).<sup>47</sup> The ‘queen of heaven’ is also mentioned in Jer 7.18. It is an expression used of the Babylonian-Assyrian Ishtar, Goddess of the planet Venus. Thus, the people of Israel in exile continue in their ‘unfaithfulness’ by worshipping an alien cult.

Another example of the exilic period worth mentioning is the story of Daniel’s friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Although it is not an example of Jewish

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<sup>46</sup> Many other examples can be found. E.g. Ezek 20.1-31; 23.1-39 (political alliance with the nations that extend to the religious area); 44.6-14.

<sup>47</sup> The expression used in the LXX is τῇ βασιλίσσει τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, but in 7.18 the expression is τῇ στρατιᾷ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. The former refers specifically to ‘queen of heaven’ while the latter refers to ‘host of heaven’. The difference is subtle in that the ‘host of heaven’ may refer to the power of the heavens while the ‘queen of heaven’ is the one possessing the power. However, the Hebrew does not make any distinction. In both passages, the same expression מַלְאכֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם is used, which could be due to the fact that both texts refer to the same Babylonian-Assyrian Goddess Ishtar.



accommodation to idolatry, it serves as an example of the kind of critique of, and the reward for, abstaining from idolatry that can be seen in the LXX. The event is set in the third year of Jehoiakim king of Judah (606 BCE), when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took the people of Judah into exile. Nebuchadnezzar had ordered a golden image to be set up and all people were ordered to worship it.

Dan 3.1-18 gives the detailed account of the building of the golden image, which appears to be an alien cult associated with Nebuchadnezzar's Gods (vv 7, 12, 14, 18). In v 12, the golden image is referred to as τῷ εἰδώλῳ σου ('to your idol') and τῇ εἰκόνι σου ('to your image'). The clause εἰσὶ ἄνδρες Ἰουδαῖοι is a direct reference to the identity of Daniel's friends, who were given a choice between serving and worshipping their own God, which means death, and serving and worshipping Nebuchadnezzar's golden image, which means life. They chose the former, as they would not serve the king's idol nor worship Nebuchadnezzar's golden image (v 18). For them, a clear distinction is made between *our God* (v 17) and *your Gods* and *your golden image*. What is also interesting is the consequence the three men faced: they were cast into a furnace heated to extreme temperature (3.19) but were not burnt at all (3.27). This then led the king to a eulogy of the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (3.28), and a further act of promoting the three (3.30). And this was preceded by a recognition that they were servants of the Most High God (3.26). The author of the story gives these details to highlight the divine protection for those who would stand their ground on serving only the true God of the Jews, and the reward for their heroism.

In a description resembling the exilic promise of restoration for Israel, Hosea announces God's future restoration of Israel in the marriage metaphor, '...you will call me "my husband", and no longer call me "Baal"' (2.16, LXX: 2.18). Although Stuart



notes that both words *אֵשׁ* and *בַּעַל* could have similar meaning, he reckons that the point of the oracle is based on the fact that *בַּעַל* is the name of a specific God.<sup>48</sup> The translators of LXX (2.18) bring out the meaning more precisely by indicating ‘Baal’ to be a proper name. Thus, Hosea shows that Israel had at one time turned from Yahweh to worship Baal.<sup>49</sup>

The book of Amos views idolatry from a different angle from Hosea. Amos announces various reasons for Yahweh’s punishment against Israel (cf. Amos 2.7, 10-12; 5.7, 10-15). Among the reasons are cited the altars at Bethel (cf. 1 Kgs 12.28-30). This is a cult that is considered alien. And in 5.25-26, Amos points out that Israel in the wilderness did not have to bring sacrifices to God. They remained the people of Yahweh. However, Israel as God’s people engaged in alien cult worship. Two specific names of the cult are mentioned: Sakkuth and Kaiwan (v 26, NRSV). The LXX translates the two Gods as *Μολοχ* and *Ραιφα*. *Μολοχ* is the ‘Canaanite-Phoenician God of sky and sun’; while *Ραιφα* is the ‘constellation of the God Romphia’.<sup>50</sup>

The above shows the importance in the LXX of the metaphor of ‘unfaithfulness’ and the pervasiveness of the definition of idolatry as the worship of other Gods/alien cults. Such a pattern of thought could be used as a self-critique. But it could also be used by Jews to critique each other. Another aspect of this definition can be seen in the breach of the ancestral tradition.

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<sup>48</sup> Stuart 1987:57.

<sup>49</sup> Other examples in Hosea may be cited: Hos 4.12-19 (Israel consulting a piece of wood); Hos 8.2-6 (Israel making idols); Hos 9.10 (worshipping an alien cult, a reference to Num 25); Hos 10.1-6 (Israel increasing its number of altars); and Hos 11.1-2; 13.1-16 (Baal worship [cf. Stuart 1987:178]).

<sup>50</sup> On *Μολοχ*, see *BAGD*, 526; and on *Ραιφα* see *BAGD*, 118. See further Amos 8 for the other sins of Israel recorded in Amos. Besides the prophecies of Hosea and Amos, we have the record of the prophecy of Zephaniah against Israel’s worship of the Baal, under the leadership of the priests who are lumped together with the priests of Baal as a condemned lot (Zeph 1.2-6).

### **Idolatry as contrary to Jewish ancestral tradition (covenant)**

Examples of idolatry as contrary to Jewish ancestral tradition are not many and most of them are brief statements. In the following we will look mostly at short verses which reveal explicitly those idolatrous acts of Israel as contrary to her ancestral tradition.

The first may be seen in Deut 32.16-17, which describes Israel's idolatry as going after 'strange Gods', sacrificing to demons and deities they had never known. Verse 17 then says that these are deities 'whom your ancestors did not know' (οὐς οὐκ ᾔδεισαν οἱ πατέρες αὐτῶν). In other words, Israel had engaged in alien cult worship that was contrary to what her ancestors would have done.

After the passing of Joshua, the Israelites are said to have abandoned the God of their fathers (Judg 2.12). Israel has thus abandoned their ancestral tradition and committed the act of idolatry. Jeremiah describes Israel's idolatry in terms of Israel's failure to follow their ancestral tradition (Jer 11.10). This is explained in terms of Israel's breach of the covenant.

In Jer 16.11, Israel's failure to keep the law (νόμος) is cited as one of the reasons for her punishment. As the *Torah* is understood to have been given by Israel's God to her ancestors for guidance and instruction in the ways of God, the failure to follow or keep the *Torah* constitutes an act that is contrary to Jewish ancestral tradition. This failure is expressed in Israel's making offerings to 'other Gods' and the Baal (Jer 19.4-5), and these acts of worshipping other Gods are described as what Israel's ancestors and their kings do not know (cf. Deut 32.17 above). Israel has thus forsaken the covenant of God (Jer 22.9) and Jeremiah has shown that this has led to



Israel's idolatry (cf. Jer 44.1-29).<sup>51</sup> In the prophecy of Ezekiel, Israel is explicitly said to have rejected (ἀπώσαντο) God's ordinances and 'not followed' (οὐκ ἐπορεύθησαν) his statutes (Ezek 5.6), an accusation that Israel has not walked according to God's covenant (cf. Ezek 11.12). What this means is that, while there is a body of laws, statutes and ordinances passed down from Israel's ancestors, the people live in a way that is contrary to this body of ancestral tradition.<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, a few passages in the Minor Prophets also refer to idolatrous acts as contrary to the covenant or ancestral tradition. In Hos 8.1 the people are accused of breaking the covenant of God (παρέβησαν τὴν διαθήκην), which is here taken to be the Mosaic covenant (cf. 6.7), and transgressing his law (cf. 7.13). Davies rightly points out that the imposition of the legal obligations of the covenant on Israel is presupposed.<sup>53</sup> Thus, Israel's ancestral tradition is embodied in the law.<sup>54</sup>

What our analysis shows thus far is that a prominent analysis and critique of idolatry in the LXX covers the twin themes of worship of other/alien God and breaking ancestral tradition. Such nexus of ideas reflects the basic concern of the first commandment, which prohibits the worship of other Gods, on the basis of the 'covenant' relationship to God.

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. Hos 4.12-19, where Israel's idolatry is both attributed to and equated with the transgression of the people against the covenant (Hos 6.7), their betrayal (Hos 7.13) and abandonment (Hos 4.2) of God.

<sup>52</sup> See further Ezek 20.4-39. Ezek 20.19 equates obedience to the law of God with acknowledgement of him as Lord; conversely, disobedience to God's law is abandonment of his lordship. Cf. Ezek 20.24 where Israel's idolatry is summarised as the failure to walk according to the requirements (τὰ δικαιώματα) and keep the commandments (τὰ προστάγματα), etc.

<sup>53</sup> Davies 1992:171-72.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Amos 2.4 where a pronouncement of judgement is made on Judah precisely because of her rejection of the law of the Lord (ἀπώσασθαι τὸν νόμον κυρίου) and her failure to guard his statutes (τὰ προστάγματα αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἐφυλάξαντο). See further examples in Mal 2.10 and 3.7 where the covenant is breached. Stuart 1987:178 comments: 'Israel "chose new gods" (cf. Josh 24.15; Judg 5.8), thereby breaking the most basic rule of the covenant, "You will have no other gods besides me" (Exod 20.3)'.



### 2.3.3 Idolatry as misrepresenting/dishonouring God (Yahweh)

#### Visual (anthropomorphic) representation of God

The first passage that speaks explicitly about idolatry as dishonouring God by misrepresenting him visually may be found in Exod 32.1-15 (cf. Deut 9.15-21), where Aaron and the Israelites built a golden calf and worshipped it. The text makes it clear that the Israelites understand the golden calf to be their God who led them out of Egypt. In other words, they have not turned away from their God but merely sought to worship God by means of the calf. They are not worshipping an alien cult of the nations. What is idolatrous with the golden calf event is the fact that the people have misrepresented God with a physical thing. This is contrary to the fact that Yahweh is not to be represented physically. They have thus dishonoured God. This is also a breach of the second commandment, which forbids representing Yahweh with an object and worshipping it.

A second passage that deals with Israel's idolatry in terms of dishonouring and misrepresenting God can be found in 1 Kgs 12.25-33. In this passage, Jeroboam is reported to have made two calves. The purpose of Jeroboam is basically political (v 27). However, v 28 also makes it clear that the two calves are meant to represent the God who brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt. The understanding of Jeroboam and that of the people appears to be that the location of worship is not exclusive to Jerusalem, and the method of representing God is not fixed either. Both places, Dan and Bethel, have long been consecrated as shrines for Yahweh (cf. Judg 18.27-31 and Gen 28.16-22; 35.1-4). It is therefore quite natural to place these calves in these two consecrated locations. Further, their concept of God being their deliverer seems to remain unchanged, as v 28 shows, 'behold your Gods, Israel, who brought

you out of the land of Egypt'. Thus the understanding concerning the calves is that they are not 'other Gods' or 'alien cults', but representations of Israel's God.

Many subsequent kings, including many who do right in the eyes of Yahweh, do not remove these calves. The common idea of Jeroboam's sin as expressed in the LXX, ἀμαρτιῶν Ἱεροβοάμ υἱοῦ Ναβάτ ὃς ἐξήμαρτε Ἰσραήλ (1 Kgs 14.16), can be seen in 1 Kgs 14.21-24 (Rehoboam), 15.1-8 (Abijam), 22.51-53 (Ahaziah). The LXX interprets the 'failure' to remove these calves with this expression, ἐποίησε τὸ πονηρὸν ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς Κυρίου ('he did evil in the eyes of the Lord'; cf. 1 Kgs 14.22; 15.34; 16.7, 19, 25, 30; 1 Kgs 14.9).<sup>55</sup> Although Jeroboam is said to have made an acclamation similar to that of Exodus (Exod 32.1, 4), the editor of the LXX turned the original singular form of the verb (brought) to plural so as to reflect that אֱלֹהִים is not read as 'God' but 'Gods'.<sup>56</sup> The editor thus exploits the fact that there were two calves to make it look like alien worship. The LXX similarly translates אֱלֹהִים as θεοί (Gods). However, even though the intention of Jeroboam, his people, and that of the subsequent kings, was never to turn away from God, the fact that they misrepresented God with two calves renders their act idolatrous. For it was an explicit act that violated the second commandment.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> The repeated Hebrew expression ... וַיַּעַשׂ קִרְעַת בְּעֵינָי יְהוָה ... is well captured in the LXX translation.

<sup>56</sup> De Vries 1985:162-63 observes that the present consensus on the calves is that they were not idols but ornaments or pedestals and that 'Jeroboam undoubtedly intended the occasion to be good, happy and holy'. His observation is that the reporter's change of the word 'brought' to a plural form is a reflection of the reporter's 'censorious attitude' and so the reporter could conclude that Jeroboam's act was an error. Although he is referring to the Hebrew text, the LXX text seems to translate this more clearly.

<sup>57</sup> A similar example of Israel's misrepresenting God is found in Hos 8.2-6, which is an allusion to 1 Kgs 12.26-30 and possibly to Exod 32. In the Hosea passage, Hosea says that God rejects the 'bull' (8.4). This is a possible later imposition of a theological interpretation of the 'bull of Samaria'. Thus, in 8.6, the same critique of idols is levelled against the bull (cf. Hab 2.18-19).



## Cognitive error

### a. 'Wrong' kind of worship

Judg 17.1-13 gives an account of a man named Micah who gave his mother a large amount of silver, part of which she turned into an idol of cast metal (v 4).

According to v 6, it was a period of Israel's history when there was no king and everybody did what was right in his/her own eyes. In other words, there was no standard of what constituted proper belief, or worship.

However, the passage also reveals some possible tradition which was assumed to be either the right or more desired thing to do. For example, v 5 says that Micah not only had a shrine (LXX: οἶκος θεοῦ; Hebrew: בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים; both mean 'house of God'), but also made an ephod (a priestly garment) and teraphim (תְּרָפִים). Presumably, the shrine is meant for the teraphim and the ephod is meant for the priest.<sup>58</sup> What he still lacks is a priest to preside over the rituals. Verses 7-10 tell us that Micah knows about the priesthood and is aware that the Levites are set apart for the service of God. So when a young Levite came to look for a place to live in, Micah immediately invited him to be his (Micah's) priest. The words which Micah says in v 13 are significant, 'Now I know that the Lord will be good to me (LXX: ἀγαθυνεῖ μου Κύριος)'. And his reason for believing that God will be good to him is attributed to the fact that he now has a Levite as his priest (LXX: ἐγένετό μοι ὁ Λευίτης εἰς ἱερέα).

What the story shows is that Micah tried his very best to keep some kind of religious tradition at home, despite everyone doing what was right in his/her eyes.

And further, the hope of Micah's mother for the Lord's blessing on Micah was raised

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<sup>58</sup> Harrison 1982:117-18 suggests several possible uses of the ephod: (1) a component of the high priest's vestments (e.g. 1 Sam 2.28; 14.3; 22.18); (2) images rather than garments (e.g. Judg 8.27 refers to a gold idol or image); (3) clothing for the images. Harrison points out that the third possibility is most probably unlikely as Micah probably wore the ephod, although it could be worn by Micah's son whom he made as a priest (Judg 17.5). Since Micah found a young Levite to act as his priest, it would be more possible that the ephod was meant for the young Levite.



as a result of her moulding a cast metal idol for her son.

The above passage indicates to us that idolatry as wrong kind of worship takes place here in terms of action, but not intention. In other words, Micah's intention is religious and he meant to serve the Lord. He even made sure he had a Levite to act as the priest. His act of worship, however, is wrong in that he has rendered worship to what is not God, i.e. a teraphim, when God cannot be represented in any form. It is not unfaithfulness since the teraphim is not an alien cult,<sup>59</sup> nor is there any hint that Micah betrayed or rebelled against his Lord. As mentioned earlier in the discussion of definitions, idolatry as the wrong kind of worship can be deemed to have taken place as long as one of the two elements - wrong action or wrong intention - is present.

2 Kgs 16.1-20 is a very interesting account of the wrong kind of worship. The story is set in the political context of Ahaz's dependence on Assyria. In v 7 Ahaz gives, in a very brief way, a diplomatic message to the king of Assyria, asking for help. The king of Assyria responded positively and came up to Damascus and seized it (v 9). Verses 10-18 make a shift from the political situation to a religious one.

King Ahaz is reported to have gone up to Damascus, presumably at the invitation of the Assyrian king, where he saw the altar (v 10). Almost immediately, the king sent to Uriah a model of the altar, patterned exactly after the one in Damascus in all its details. Verses 12-16 give a detailed account of the offerings which Ahaz made at the altar and the instructions he gave to Uriah concerning the morning and evening offerings, including grain offerings and drink offerings of the people. Verses 17-18a further provide a brief account of Ahaz's 'renovation' or 're-arrangement' of the interior of the temple. The fact that Ahaz built an altar in exactly the same pattern

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<sup>59</sup> Albertz 1994:37-38 observes that the 'teraphim' are part of the Israelites' regular household cult; they are not to be confused with the Gods. For him, the 'household cult' of Micah was lowly deities, not the Gods, and the teraphim were meant to represent these lowly deities.

as the one in Damascus might suggest the Ahaz was following the traditional approach in his offerings and that he was careful in all these undertakings.<sup>60</sup> In other words, Ahaz's action was right.

The problem with what Ahaz is doing comes in v 18b - he carried out all the religious acts for the sake of the Assyrian king (ἀπὸ προσώπου βασιλέως Ἀσσυρίων). NIV is probably more accurate in translating it as 'in deference to the king of Assyria'. He has rendered the 'right action' but with the 'wrong intention'. His intention is not meant for the worship of the God of Israel, but for the sake of the king of Assyria. Thus, Ahaz's wrong intention renders his act idolatrous.

Ezek 14.3-7 is a passage that speaks about the thoughts and intentions of the elders of Israel in acquiring idols, presumably to worship them. The various words used in LXX to refer to these elders' intention are τὰ διανοήματα (thoughts [vv 3, 4]; *BAGD*, 187), ἐνθύμημα (thought, [v 5]; Liddell-Scott 1940:567), and ἐπιτήδευμα (pursuit, way of living [v 6]; *BAGD*, 302), none of which mean 'idol'. However, these different words have been used by the translators of LXX to translate the Hebrew word עֲלִילִים (idol), which is used throughout the passage in the Hebrew text. Brownlee observes that the 'verb עלל in its intransitive form is the language of thinking, either by way of remembering (Isa 65:17; Jer 3:16) or by way of planning and forethought (Jer 7.31; 19:5; 32:35; Ezek 38:10)'.<sup>61</sup> From the above observations of the LXX and the Hebrew words used, it becomes clear that for the LXX translators

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<sup>60</sup> Hobbs 1985:217 comments: 'From this account the motivation of Ahaz was clearly not apostasy, since the organization of the sacrifice that follows is consistent with the other legislation on sacrifice in the OT'.

<sup>61</sup> Brownlee 1986:201.



the intention of the elders was to be unfaithful and thus amounts to, or is equivalent to, idolatry.<sup>62</sup>

The above passages show that idolatry could be construed on the basis of the ‘wrong’ kinds of worship both in terms of the wrong action and the wrong intention.

**b. Mixing God with nature/other Gods (δαίμόνια) or attributing power to what is powerless/idols**

The first and most explicit text that speaks about Israel mixing God with δαίμόνια is Deut 32.16-17. This is set within the larger context of Moses’ Song in which Moses recounts the history of Israel in the wilderness (Deut 32.1-43). Here, Israel is accused of sacrificing to δαίμόνια.<sup>63</sup> It may be seen as an interpretation of the wilderness experience of Israel which gives a negative judgment on the ‘golden calf’. Verse 16 describes the calf incident variously, using such words like ἄλλοτρίοις, βδελύγμασιν, and in v 17, the word δαίμόνια is used for the first time to refer to the calf as demons. The Greek δαίμόνιον also means ‘demon’, ‘(evil) spirit’, which occupies a position between the human and the divine.<sup>64</sup> This is a clear critique of Israel’s idolatry by interpreting it as the worship of the non-Gods or ‘demons’. In other words, Israel is here mixing or confusing Yahweh with what is not God.

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<sup>62</sup> Similarly, the thought of worshipping wood and stone (ξύλοι καὶ λίθοι) in Ezek 20.32 is in itself idolatry in that such an intention constitutes the wrong kind of worship.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Ps 106.37-38, where the term δαίμόνια appears to be used interchangeably with other ‘Gods’. Even in the Song of Moses itself, the δαίμόνια seem to be an alternative designation for the Gods of the nations.

<sup>64</sup> BAGD 169. For a treatment of the term in the LXX, see chapter 6.4.1 below. The Hebrew expression יִזְבְּחוּ לַדִּמּוֹנִים means ‘they sacrificed to demons’, of which דִּמּוֹן, which means ‘demon’, is a loan word from Assyrian 𐎠𐎶, meaning ‘a protecting spirit’. BDB 993.



The powerlessness of idols is well illustrated in Isa 41.21-29, in which the idols are challenged to show proofs of their abilities.<sup>65</sup> In v 23, the Gods are addressed and challenged to do something that would shock Yahweh. They cannot do anything and therefore are accused of being non-Gods. Similarly, in v 25, Yahweh calls out to Cyrus to do his will. This is followed by a question in v 26 which asks who knows beforehand about Cyrus' rising. The question appears rhetorical: the questioner knows his audience's awareness of the answer to his question (v 27). And therefore, the audience too ought to know that the Gods are nothing (v 24) and their works are a delusion (v 29).<sup>66</sup> By attributing power to the powerless idols, Israel is guilty of the sin of idolatry in terms of cognitive error.

The critique of idolatry is intensified in Isa 44.9-20 where its larger context is the announcement of God's good news to Israel (Isa 40.1-44.23). Isa 44.9-20 is part of a larger text (Isa 43.22-44.28) which speaks of God's help to his people. The passage, which describes the idols, is sandwiched between two passages that speak of God as the Lord. A chiastic structure is seen here and it serves to highlight the contrast between the idols and the true God of Israel, revealing on the one hand the absurdity of the idols and on the other the reality of Yahweh.

Although Isa 44.9-20 concerns idol making, Isa 44.22 clearly indicates that the fashioning of the idols was in fact the sin of Israel at one time: 'I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you' (NRSV). Israel is asked to 'return' to God, presumably from her idols,

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<sup>65</sup> The Isaiah text shows a more intellectual critique of idolatry. This appears to be a base text upon which similar critiques of idolatry are carried out by Wisdom of Solomon and Philo (see chapters 3.2 and 3.3 below). By an intellectual critique of idolatry, the Isaiah text defines what is the 'alien realm' (Halbertal-Margalit 1992:8) and so clarifies the 'cognitive error' of 'misrepresenting' God.

<sup>66</sup> LXX πόθεν meaning 'whence?' understands וְיָשׁוּׁ to be an 'interrogative particle'. Thus, translators of LXX turn the statement into a question, challenging the validity of the idols, as it answers ἐκ γῆς (v 24).

because Yahweh has *redeemed* her (λυτῶσαι σε), a salvation that Israel's idols are incapable of performing. Instead, the idols are fashioned according to a detailed step-by-step procedure: trees are grown; they are then cut down once they have grown strong; every part of it is used for some practical purpose (as fuel to set up fire [v 15a]; part of it for warming oneself [v 15b]; part of it for baking bread [v 15c]; part of it for roasting meat [v 16]). Verse 15d says, 'Then he makes a God and worships it, makes it a carved image and bows down before it'. The force of the ridicule comes in v 17 which says that the 'God' is made from the 'leftover' of all the wood! This is especially strongly contrasted with the end of v 16 in which the idol-maker, after having satisfied himself with the food and the warmth from the fire, says, 'Ah, I am warm, I can feel the fire'. It gives the idea of a picture in which some block of wood that cannot be used for anything, i.e. is useless, is being turned into a God, thus giving the impression of a convenient use of a block of wood for convenience's sake.

The cognitive error is made even more explicit in v 17b where the idol-worshipper is said to attribute power to a powerless thing (i.e. a block of wood [γλυπτόν]) and confuse God with nature (i.e. calling the block of wood one's God and asking it to save [ε]ξελοῦ με, ὅτι θεός μου εἶ σύ)). Verses 18-19 make the cognitive level of the idolatry explicit: they know nothing (v 18a, οὐκ ἔγνωσαν φρονῆσαι); their eyes and their hearts are so closed that they can neither see nor understand (v 18b, ἀπημαυρώθησαν τοῦ βλέπειν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτῶν καὶ τοῦ νοῆσαι τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτῶν). Verse 20 further describes such cognitive error as arising from a 'deluded mind' (σποδὸς ἡ καρδία, 'heart of ashes'). That is why the



people worship the idols, which are detestable things (v 19b, βδέλυγμα, literally ‘an abomination’); they are a ψεῦδος (v 20, a lie, or falsehood).<sup>67</sup>

### c. Failure to recognise God’s sovereignty

Apart from Halbertal and Margalit, scholars generally do not view the failure to recognise God’s sovereignty as an idolatrous error. However, if we observe closely, when Israel fails to recognise God’s sovereignty, her failure in fact suggests that she no longer accepts the rule of God over her. This has implications on whether the first commandment will be kept: you shall have no other Gods before me (Exod 20.3). The monotheistic nature of Israel’s religious status becomes dubious. It also suggests that Israel is ready to break the exclusive relationship with Yahweh. There are several examples worthy of discussion.

In Judg 8.22-28, we are told that the Israelites ask Gideon to rule over them (ἄρξον ἡμῶν, v 22). This suggests they have failed to recognise Yahweh to be their sovereign ruler. As v 23 points out, Gideon has to correct them and tell them that he (Gideon) will not rule over them but God will (κύριος ἄρξει ὑμῶν). This is followed by Gideon asking for a share of the people’s gold earrings, with which he made an ephod (a priestly garment) which the people ‘worshipped’ (ἐξεπόρνευσεν, v 27).<sup>68</sup> Davies observes that the people, presumably since their request to be ruled by Gideon was turned down, are now turning to the ephod which could be used either to put on an idol, or to represent Yahweh, or possibly to make a connection with the

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<sup>67</sup> See further Jer 2.26-29; 8.19; 10.1-15; 18.15; Ezek 8; similarly, Zeph 1.5 speaks of the people confusing God with nature.

<sup>68</sup> The word ἐκπορνεύω (Liddell-Scott 1940:518) literally means *commit fornication*. It is used in Exod 34.15 as a metaphor for idolatry. The RSV translates ἐξεπόρνευσεν πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ as ‘all Israel played the harlot’.



Ark.<sup>69</sup> The context of the story suggests that the ephod of gold was meant to represent Yahweh. And since the people would have understood the Ark to represent God's presence, they could possibly regard the golden ephod as serving similar functions.

The exact purpose and meaning of the golden ephod are not clear in the text. However the point that the Israelites have asked Gideon to rule over them constitutes a failure to recognise God's sovereignty, a factor very closely associated with idolatry.

Another example is found in Jer 10.1-16 in which God is declared as the God of all nations (vv 7, 10, 12, 16). The passage serves to contrast the idols and the true God of Israel by describing how idols are made. Although it appears similar to the critique in Isa 44.9-20 (cf. Isa 40.19-20; 41.7), the function differs somewhat. For in Jer 10.1-16, the theme of God as God of all nations is repeated several times, indicating his sovereignty over all the nations. Thus, the passage does not mention Israel's idolatry but only serves to warn the people against following after these idols or worshipping them. While idols are totally dependent in that they have to be carried,<sup>70</sup> the true God is great and wise (Jer 10.6-9). Yahweh is described as ἀληθινὸς θεός ἐστιν (the true God), θεὸς ζώντων (the God of the living), and βασιλεὺς αἰώνος (the eternal God). And v 7 further declares that God is the 'king of the nations' (βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν), thus affirming his universal sovereignty. Israel would have failed to recognise God's sovereignty over her if she turns to idols.

What the above shows is that idolatry in the LXX is not simply viewed from the angle of the worship of other Gods, but also from various other angles such as the

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<sup>69</sup> Davies 1962:118. In view of the marriage metaphor of 'unfaithfulness', Judg 8.27 may be taken to mean that Israel performed some kind of worship to the ephod, which could, in this case, be an idol or an image (see Harrison 1982:118; cf. Exod 32.4 where Aaron asked for all the gold jewellery from the people and fashioned a calf out of the melted gold).

<sup>70</sup> Jones 1992:173 suggests that this is a possible reference to the procession of Bel-Marduk and Nebo his son, God of wisdom in Babylon.

acts and intentions involved in the worship of God, how God is viewed, and whether God's sovereignty is compromised. Through these various articulations, the LXX shows that idolatry is as much a cognitive error, as it is an error in practice.

#### 2.4 Summary and conclusion

From the discussion above, it may be observed that the concept of idolatry is a multifaceted one which involves complex reasoning – an idolatrous act may have several definitions or a definition may cover various idolatrous acts and at times they are interwoven. These multifaceted definitions have the capability of guarding monotheism at different angles, and critiquing any act that may appear to be idolatrous in order to prevent any type or form of idolatry from taking place among the Israelites. In Halbertal and Margalit's analysis, the main dimensions of idolatry have been isolated. As mentioned earlier, the multifaceted definitions set out by Halbertal and Margalit do not operate as a single package. These multifaceted dimensions of idolatry are illustrated in the foundational Diaspora text of LXX. For example, an act of worship involving an object may not be idolatrous in terms of 'unfaithfulness' because that object is not an alien cult but meant to represent Yahweh (e.g. golden calf). However, it becomes idolatrous under another definition, that is, idolatry as dishonouring God in terms of misrepresenting God visually (i.e. against the second commandment).

Even if the object is not anthropomorphic, it will come under yet another definition, that is, 'wrong' kind of worship – rendering an act of worship to an object that is not the true God.

The discussion above also reveals that a totally exclusivist monotheism is not a settled issue and can be exploited and therefore compromised. And the articulations in the LXX also reveal an interesting fact about Israel: **idolatry is an ongoing practice**



*and struggle in Israel as she interacts with her environment.* For example, the golden calf incident during the wilderness and the two calves of Jeroboam which many successive generations of kings never removed might suggest that they have viewed the calves as legitimate or even as expressions of the monotheistic God of Israel. The lack of clarity and agreement on what constituted idolatry, despite the variegated approaches in dealing with idolatry in the LXX, indicates that the definition and critique of idolatry is crucial in determining Jewish boundaries. But the location and definition of such boundaries was not always clear to different Jews.

This ambiguity could be reflected in later Jewish history, which leads us to examine both sample Diaspora texts which castigate 'idolatry' (chapter three), and examples of Jewish accommodation to what others might consider 'idolatry', or of Jews speaking of God/the Gods in terms which might arouse suspicion in others (chapter four). This ambiguity and variety might also illuminate the different positions in 1 Cor 8-10, which might all turn out to be Jewish in some sense, but in different ways and expressions.



## CHAPTER THREE

## CRITICISM OF IDOLATRY IN DIASPORA JEWISH LITERATURE

## 3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has demonstrated the complexity of idolatry and its lack of clarity. Our analysis has also revealed that even within the LXX, there is a lack of clarity and agreement on what constitutes idolatry, despite its variegated approaches in dealing with the issue. This ambiguity is also reflected in later Jewish history, represented, among others, in the Diaspora Jewish literature. Thus, an examination of the representative Diaspora Jewish literature on idolatry would help to clarify the issue. In this chapter, we will look at the criticism of idolatry in the following: *Wisdom of Solomon*, Philo, Josephus, *Joseph and Aseneth*, and *Sybilline Oracles*. There are good reasons for such a study and the choice of the literature.

First, such a study would illuminate the question of how Diaspora Jews viewed and reacted to idolatry. This will serve to highlight the different emphasis each places on the definitions set out in chapter two. Knowing how these Diaspora Jews viewed idolatry and what definitions they adopted in their critique of idolatry would enable us to see what were the base reasons for their rejection of idolatry. This will also illuminate the way idolatry was understood and defined by different parties in 1 Cor 8-10.<sup>1</sup>

The choice of the above Diaspora Jewish literature is made as the authors represent a variety of viewpoints on idolatry and emphasise its different aspects. In addition, since these texts date from a period close to that of the New Testament, what they say about idolatry may reflect the thinking on idolatry current at that time.

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<sup>1</sup> The fact that the Corinthian community was itself a Diaspora community, set within the Graeco-Roman world in which there were many Gods and many lords (cf. 1 Cor 8.5), means that a study of the criticisms of idolatry by the Diaspora Jews will shed light on our understanding of the situation in the Corinthian church where idol-meat was freely eaten by some, particularly when the 'strong', the 'weak' and Paul all show some degree of Jewish influence.

As in the previous chapter, we will examine the various emphases of the Diaspora Jewish authors and see what definitions of idolatry are particular to different authors. This will further strengthen the point made in chapter two, that the multifaceted definitions of idolatry in chapter two are liable to the following: (1) intellectual separation of these definitions; and (2) subjective choice of the definitions by either individuals or groups. Further, our discussion will yield the different grounds on which the different Diaspora Jewish authors base their rejection of idolatry.

### 3.2 *Wisdom of Solomon* 13-15

The book of Wisdom is generally assumed to have been written by an Alexandrian Jew between 100 BCE and 30 CE,<sup>2</sup> although neither his exact identity nor his biography could be established.<sup>3</sup> The entire book appears to be the writer's efforts in encouraging his fellow Jews to take pride in their ancestral monotheistic belief of the one true God.<sup>4</sup> Throughout, the author seeks to persuade his readers that their belief is superior and thus their way of life a better option, by making a sharp contrast between the nations' Gods and the true God.<sup>5</sup>

The vehemence of the language indicates that even though the author is an Egyptian Jew, he is categorically opposed to pagan culture and religions. There is a series of antitheses throughout the book: the righteous versus the wicked, knowledge versus ignorance, the just versus the unjust, immortality versus mortality, reward versus punishment, God versus idols, and the like. Barclay concludes that the predominant theme is 'social conflict and cultural antagonism between Jews and non-

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Winston 1992:121-2; Barclay 1996:181-82, and 182, n3. Cf. Reider 1957:12-14.

<sup>3</sup> See Clarke 1973:1-3.

<sup>4</sup> Winston 1979:63.

<sup>5</sup> Collins 1997:135 is right in saying that there is always an apologetic element in the attempts to extol the Jewish religion. Kolarcik 1999:289-301 argues that the themes of 'universalism' and 'justice' can be seen throughout the book, in which the author expresses these themes by showing the relationship of God to the cosmos and the defence of the faithful. Cf. Collins 1997:1-15 who rightly points out the inherent tension between natural theology and divine revelation in Wis.



Jews' and that it is 'an educated and deeply Hellenized exercise in cultural aggression'.<sup>6</sup> Such a conclusion is well attested throughout the book, not least in the chapters on idolatry (13-15), which are the focus of the following discussion.

Various structural outlines have been proposed.<sup>7</sup> Winston provides a relatively simple outline, while Grabbe's is more elaborate which may be set out as follows:

- A Nature worship (13.1-9)
- B Idolatry (13.10-15.19)
  - a Introduction (13.10)
    - b Carpenter/wood (13.11-14.2)
      - c Apostrophe (14.3-6)
        - Transition (14.7-11)
          - d Origins of idolatry (14.12-31)
            - c' Apostrophe (15.1-3)
              - Transition (15.4-6)
                - b' Potter/clay (15.7-13)
                  - a' Conclusion (15.14-19)

If we would imagine a concentric progression from below gradually extending to the top with the most despicable type of idolatry at the pinnacle of the cone, then it becomes obvious that the author's purpose is to show that the basest of all idolatrous worship is the Egyptian animal worship.

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<sup>6</sup> Barclay 1996:184. Collins 2000:200 does not find this conclusion justified, as he argues that there are Stoic and Cynic philosophical parallels to the polemic in Wis. However, the base foundation of the people in the ancient world may be traced to their religious belief. Thus, when one wanted to criticise another, the main area of criticism would seem to be that of religion. That the Gentiles have been found to be equally critical of the Egyptian animal worship does not therefore mean that the polemic in Wis cannot be viewed as 'cultural aggression'. There is no reason why one cannot borrow an idea from the Gentiles to criticise the Gentiles. Wis 13-15 certainly cannot be viewed as expressions of 'cultural convergence', as Collins sees it (2000:202). Reider 1957:9-12 looks at the entire book as a polemical work, of which the first 5 chapters are against the recalcitrant Jews while the rest of the book are against the vicious pagan idolatry.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Winston 1979:11; and Grabbe 1997:23.



The above structure establishes two basic points of the writer of *Wisdom*: (1) the true God rules, saves, and extends his mercy; and, in contrast, (2) idols and images are dead, wrong, and despicable.<sup>8</sup> It is worth looking at Wis 13-15 in greater detail. Grabbe's outline will be followed in the following discussion.

#### A Nature worship (Wis 13.1-9)

Wis 13 begins with nature worship, which the author suggests is the result of a human tendency (13.2-3).<sup>9</sup> The elements of nature are powerful (δύναμις) and influential (ἐνέργεια) (13.4). Thus humans worship these elements because of their greatness and beauty. The word θεωρέω (13.5) has the meaning of 'contemplate' or 'consider' when it is used of the mind.<sup>10</sup> However, if the elements are powerful, then their creator must be even more powerful.<sup>11</sup> The Gentile idolaters have therefore gone astray (πλανῶνται, v 6) when they worship nature, confusing nature with God and are thus in error (cf. v 2). This kind of idolatry is that of the cognitive level of dishonouring God, as defined in chapter two above. The irony is that they do not find the God behind these created things.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Reider correctly points out that the sense of v 1 seems to be that '(A)ll men must be fools who can look upon the works of God

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<sup>8</sup> Thus Schürer III.570, rightly says that essentially the contents of Wis warn against the folly of godlessness. Similarly, Grabbe 1997:57 observes that harangues make up the bulk of the third part of Wis (i.e. Wis 13-15). See also Reider 1957:10-11

<sup>9</sup> Reider 1957:160-61 is not convincing when he argues that the 'rulers of the world' in v 2 refers to all sorts of Gods, not just to sun and moon. Winston 1979:250 takes the word πρυτάνεις κόσμου to refer to the sun and moon, although the term is also applied to the Gods. In the context of Wis 13.1-9, the author seems most certain to refer to the sun and moon.

<sup>10</sup> Liddell-Scott 1940:364

<sup>11</sup> This is essentially the point of the author in 13.4b. Cf. Reider 1957:161.

<sup>12</sup> Reider 1957:161-62, 'These men are moved by the world's beauty and endeavor to seek God, but somehow they fail to attain that end'. Cf. Collins 2000:200.

and not recognise God in them'.<sup>13</sup> Such a failure in recognising the true God serves as the basis for their rejection.

## B Idolatry (Wis 13.10-15.19)

### Wis 13.10-19

The seeking of God leads to the making of 'Gods'. Those who do not seek after God in nature seek for him in other ways. Wis 13.10-16 details the making of an idol, founded probably on Isa 40, 41, 44 and 46.<sup>14</sup> The author apparently wants to show the absurdity of idols by describing the entire process of idol-making (cf. Isa 44.9-20). First he shows how the carpenter uses the wood for good purposes. But idols are made out of what is to be thrown away (ἐξ αὐτῶν ἀπόβλημα), therefore out of what is unwanted (οὐθεν εὐχρηστον) (v 13). They are therefore 'dead' (νεκροῖς, vv 10, 18), 'useless' (ἄχρηστον, v 10; οὐθεν εὐχρηστον, v 13), 'worthless' (or 'cheap', εὐτελεῖ, v 14), 'powerless' (ἀδυνατεῖ, v 16), and 'lifeless' (ἄψυχῳ, v 17).<sup>15</sup> Further, an idol is made because the carpenter is too free, or idle (ἀργία), not because of any devotion on his part.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the care (ἐπιμέλεια) with which he carves out the idol is due to two reasons. The first is his professional habit as a carpenter. The second is the carpenter's desire not to be bored again by idleness. There appears to be a complete absence of religiosity, at least to Wis. The idols made have various forms such as those of animals and of humans (εἰκόνι ἀνθρώπου).

<sup>13</sup> Reider 1957:159. Cf. Collins 1997:208-9 recognises Wis as regarding the philosophers who worship nature as culpable, but goes on to say that they deserve respect when they seek to worship the true God, even though they fail in their attempt.

<sup>14</sup> Collins 2000:200 says the polemic in Wis 13.10-19 draws its inspiration from Isa 44.9-20.

<sup>15</sup> These terms have at least two common features: (1) they are all negative; and (2) in contrast to the true God, they all have to do with the absence of life. The word ἄψυχος literally means 'lifeless', 'inanimate' (Liddell-Scott 1940:143). The author's intention is clear: to show that idols are false and therefore no Gods.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Reider 1957:164-65.



They are then accommodated in some kind of chamber, or shrine (οἶκημα), fastened on the wall, and nailed down for stability. Such an elaborate process is necessary as the idol is unable to help itself (v 16).<sup>17</sup> Thus the author shows the passive inability of the idols and thus the absurdity of idolatry. The passage shows a crescendo of polemic against idolatry.

#### Wis 14.1-7

In 14.1-7, the idolater sets sail into the sea but encounters danger, from which he is saved when he entreats his idols. Here the writer of Wis ridicules the idolater's God as but a piece of wood that is worse than a vessel. He argues that it is in fact the Father (πάτερ, v 3) who, by his providence (πρόνοια, v 3),<sup>18</sup> guides and saves (v 4).<sup>19</sup> Thus, the answer to the idolater's prayer does not come from his idol but from God. The idolater should have prayed to the true God but he did not. Thus, his prayer is idolatrous.

#### Wis 14.8-11<sup>20</sup>

In 14.8-11, the writer moves to a scathing attack on idols and their makers by pouring scorn and curses on them, and pronounces judgement on them. The idol is hand-made (τὸ χειροποίητον, v 8), which is the ungodliness (ἡ ἀσέβεια, v 9) of its maker. Yet, the maker and worshipper of idols call their idols, which are perishable, God (τὸ φθαρτὸν θεὸς ὠνομάσθη, v 8).<sup>21</sup> They are described in terms

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Ep Jer 27; Isa 46.7.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Reider 1957:167-68.

<sup>19</sup> Verse 7: 'For blessed is the wood through which righteousness comes', may well be an allusion to Noah's ark (Reider 1957:169). Thus, Winston 1979:267 translates the verse correctly as 'blessed ... through which righteousness survives'. Cf. Collins 1997:210, n70, who rightly points out that the theory of a Christian interpolation is difficult.

<sup>20</sup> Collins 1997:210 takes 14.1-11 as a unified whole that forms a mockery of the sailor. But a closer look shows that in 14.8-11 the author shifts his emphasis from the idolater to the idols.

<sup>21</sup> Could it be possible that the author is having in mind the second commandment, which bans the physical representation of Yahweh? Collins 2000:201 observes a 'clear identification' of Israel in Wis. Reider



which are contradictory to God and his nature, so that they are both equally hateful to God (μισητὰ θεῶ, v 9). The idol is pejoratively described as τὸ πραχθέν (that which was brought about) and its maker ὁ δράσας. Both will face punishment (κολασθήσεται) (v 10), which is described as a visitation. The reason for such an ἐπισκοπή is that both the maker and the idols are an abomination (βδέλυγμα, v 11),<sup>22</sup> which is the result of misrepresenting the true God, to which the author attributes the ‘stumbling’ (σκάνδαλα) and the ‘snare’ (παγίδα) of the human souls.<sup>23</sup>

### Wis 14.12-21

In a rather long passage in 14.12-21, the author explains euhemeristically the origin of idolatry. For him, idolatry begins with the mind, and is the beginning of moral decadence (ἀρχὴ πορνείας). The idols’ entry into the world is the result of human error or, more precisely, the ‘vain glory’ (κενοδοξία) of humans (v 14).

The author then illustrates his view of the origin of idolatry with how a grieving father made an image of his recently deceased child and honoured him as a God (v 15).<sup>24</sup> Over time, rules and rituals were introduced and passed down, which became a law to be kept (νόμος ἐφυλάχθη, v 16). These were subsequently enacted

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1957:2 sees Wis 10-19 as an illustration of the power of wisdom from the ancient history of Israel. It is therefore possible that the author of Wis sees here a universal application of the first and second commandments.

<sup>22</sup> Βδέλυγμα is a term frequently used in the LXX to refer to idols. Liddell-Scott 1940:312. Reider 1957:171 observes that ‘*Bdelugma* seems to be used in LXX for every opprobrious term applied to idols’ (italics author’s).

<sup>23</sup> What these two terms mean may perhaps be gleaned from 14.12, where idolatry is accused of being the beginning of fornication and corruption of life. See further 14.24-28.

<sup>24</sup> Collins 1997:210-11 argues that this illustration of the origin of idolatry finds several parallels in various works, such as that of the 4<sup>th</sup>-century convert to Christianity Firmicus Maternus, the cult of Hadrian’s Antinous, etc. Winston 1979:270 rightly points out that the case of Firmicus Maternus is based on the widespread religious phenomenon of the Graeco-Roman world. While this may further reinforce the theory that the author sees an extension of the second commandment to the Gentiles, the use of a much later 4<sup>th</sup>-century work as a parallel runs the risk of anachronism.

as commandments by the monarch, and the graven images were worshipped (v 17). Then the people who lived far from the city, out of a desire to 'flatter' their monarch, erected an image of the king (εἰκόνα τοῦ βασιλέως). With the artisan further embellishing it, a great multitude of people were attracted to it and began to view this image of a man as an object of worship (v 20).<sup>25</sup> The author calls such idolatry a hidden danger to life (τῷ βίῳ εἰς ἔνεδρον, v 21). By such a detailed description of the origin and development of idolatry, the author illustrates how the true God is dishonoured through physical representation. The criticism and condemnation of idolatry are therefore legitimised.

### Wis 14.22-31

The author of Wis shows in this section the consequences of idolatry as wholly negative and as bringing about only the abuse of the human life, body, institutions and the like. In 14.23, the idol worshippers are accused of doing more than just committing idolatry. They have gone further by instituting rituals which are totally absurd, and thus the author implies that idolatry here involves the wrong kinds of worship.

In 14.24-27, a catalogue of vices is given which the writer of Wis attributes to the worship of idols (εἰδώλων θρησκεία).<sup>26</sup> Thus the worship of nameless idols is the beginning (ἀρχή), the cause (αἰτία), and end (τέρας) of every evil (παντός κακού) (v 27).<sup>27</sup> This is to show that there is nothing good or positive about other religions or Gods other than the true God. And if the Gentile objects of worship were

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<sup>25</sup> Winston 1979:279.

<sup>26</sup> According to Reider 1957:174-75, this seems to be a description of the moral decadence of Greece and Rome. The murder, robbery and such like are also mentioned in Jer 7.9 and Hos 4.2. Cf. Philo, *Conf* 12.

<sup>27</sup> Winston 1979:280 translates ἀνωνύμων as 'unspeakable', 'not to be named'. Reider 1957:176-77 is more correct in rendering it 'nameless', which is equivalent to 'without a name' and therefore without existence. The description of the idols as 'dead', 'useless', 'worthless', 'powerless', 'lifeless', 'corpse' in 13.10-18 shows that the author in 14.27 is having similar thoughts about the idols.



in every way evil, their devotees and worshippers are not much better (vv 28). The author describes the idolaters' celebrations as madness (εὐφραίνόμενοι μεμήνασιν), their prophesying (προφητεύουσιν ψευδῇ) as lying, their living as unrighteous (ζῶσιν ἀδίκως), their swearing as false (ἐπιορκοῦσιν) and their invocation of the name of their Gods as light (ταχέως, literally 'hasty').<sup>28</sup>

These negative terms are apparently meant to convey the idea that the results of idolatry are but an evil and wicked society!<sup>29</sup> By such a vehement treatment of the idols and idol-worshippers, the author reveals his hatred for the religio-cultural practices of the Gentiles and his own surrounding Graeco-Roman world.<sup>30</sup> It also indicates to us that the author seems to see a global application of the second commandment against idol-making. Thus far, the critique of idolatry in Wis seems to lie in the author's emphasis on the true God.<sup>31</sup>

### Wis 15.1-6

The theme of the true God continues in Wis 15. Here the author makes the contrast between seeking after the true God and idol making. He shows that the true

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<sup>28</sup> Reider 1957:177 argues that v 28 '(e)numerates four results of idolatry: madness (Bacchic frenzy), false ideals, injustice, and perjury'. Thus, we may deduce from the results of idolatry one of the reasons for Wisdom's condemnation of idolatry. For if idolatry leads to such serious consequences, then it not only fails to honour God but also directly advocates disobedience to the true God, which is the reason of their punishment.

<sup>29</sup> So Reider 1957:177.

<sup>30</sup> While scholars have interpreted Wis as having different purposes, e.g. Collins 2000:202 views it as one of convergence in Greek culture; Reider 1957:9-12 sees it as a polemical work; and Barclay 1996:184, 186 argues that it is 'cultural aggression', the basic conception that Wis reveals a distaste for the idolatrous evil practices of Alexandria is still valid. Even though Collins has sought to show from various Greek authors and the terms employed by Wis that the author of Wis is attempting to find common ground with his Greek counterparts, he precisely betrays the fact that it is still the idolatrous practices of the masses that Wis is polemicising against.

<sup>31</sup> That the author is having in mind the God of Israel may be seen in his allusions to Israel as a righteous people and his constant reference to the history of Israel as the paradigmatic example for the Gentiles. See Collins 2000:200, who rightly points out the equation the author makes between Israel and the righteous. See further Wis 2.23-24, where a clear reference to the creation is made (cf. Gen 1.26; 2.17a, and 3.1-7), which again suggests that the God of Moses is in view here.



God is sought after, while the ridiculous idols are made. The former refers to a superior being, the latter to a created thing made possible by human hands.

In 15.1-6, the author begins with *Σὺ δέ* (but you...), changing the subject matter of 14.22-31, the consequences of idolatry, to the kind (*χρηστός*) and true (*ἀληθής*) God.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the reader immediately sees the contrast between idolatry and the worship of the true God.<sup>33</sup> For the true God is not only slow to anger (*μακρόθυμος*, literally ‘patient’) but also merciful (*ἐλέει*) (15.1). Thus, we see here the emphasis on the four divine attributes as mentioned in Exod 34.6. Since the context of Exod 34 is the re-writing of the laws, the reference to these divine attributes suggests the author has in mind the covenant motif. Thus, the author suggests that part of seeking God consists in not sinning (*οὐχ ἁμαρτησόμεθα*); and he adduces the knowledge of belonging to God as the reason for not sinning – those who seek after God are his (*εἰδότες ὅτι σοὶ λελογίσμεθα*, v 2). This is important for understanding the contrast. Belonging to God involves ‘faithfulness’ to his command, presumably the command to worship only the true God, which is the basic requirement of the covenant.<sup>34</sup> ‘Sin’ (*ἁμαρτία*) in the context of this section is a clear reference to idolatry, as vv 4-6 show. Verse 3 speaks of the benefits of seeking after God – the knowledge of God itself is perfect virtue (*ὀλόκληρος δικαιοσύνη*); and this knowledge is in fact the root of immortality (*τὸ κράτος ῥίζα ἀθανασίας*). In other words, the author is here establishing a theological conception that the

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<sup>32</sup> Reider 1957:178 says, ‘The writer passes now from the lifeless idols to the great living God of Israel...’.

<sup>33</sup> Winston 1979:281.

<sup>34</sup> In the context of Exod 34.17, Israel is specifically commanded not to visually or physically represent God.

knowledge of the true God leads to salvation - 'we are yours' (v 3).<sup>35</sup> But what does 'salvation' here mean? Winston rightly points out that the covenant motif in Deut 9.29, 'Yet they are your very own people', refers to Israel's status as Yahweh's children despite their sin.<sup>36</sup> Understood in a covenantal light, this is perhaps among the greatest benefits of worshipping the true God. But there is no covenant between idol-worshippers and the idols they worship, and therefore there is no salvation.

### Wis 15.7-13

As with 13.10-16 and 14.12-21, a similar theme of idol making is touched upon in this section. Here, out of the same clay the potter makes vessels (γλυπτὰ δημιουργῶν, 'fabricated image') for various uses, both clean and unclean. Then with evil labour (κακόμοχθος) he forms a 'vain' God (θεὸν μάταιον) (v 8). The term that the author uses to describe the image is κίβδηλα (v 9), which, as a metaphor, means 'fraudulent' and 'dishonest'.<sup>37</sup> This suggests that the idols made are meant not only as a counterfeit of the true God, but they are primarily meant to deceive others into believing these idols to be the true God. Thus, the idol-maker himself has a hope that is worthless (εὐτελεστέρα, v 10) because, as v 13 says, the making of idols is a sin. The reference to Gen 2.7 in v 11 further suggests that the idol-maker has erred cognitively in that he has not 'discerned' (ἡγνόησεν) his creator.<sup>38</sup> This again highlights the author's emphasis on the true God.

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<sup>35</sup> Of course, one may argue that this is the question of the immortality of the soul, as Collins 1998:186 does. But more importantly, knowledge of the true God in the context of covenant would imply a relationship with God himself, as v 3 suggests, 'we are yours'.

<sup>36</sup> Winston 1979:281.

<sup>37</sup> It also means 'adulterated things'. See Liddell-Scott 1940:956. Cf. Reider 1957:181.

<sup>38</sup> Reider 1957:181 comments: 'He wilfully ignored his Maker, cf. Isa 1.3'. The assumption of the author of Wis seems to be that the idol-maker should have known but failed to acknowledge the true God who created (πλάσσαντα, v 11) him. This shows an expectation on the part of the author that all humanity ought to know the true God and creator, which further implies a possible view of a universal application of the first and second commandments.



### Wis 15.14-19

In 15.14-19, the author begins with an attack on the enemies and oppressors<sup>39</sup> of God's people as most foolish (ἄφρονέστατοι) and as having a soul more feeble (τάλαντες) than the soul of an infant (v 14). The reason is they reckoned all the idols of the nations as Gods (v 15). The critique of idols here in v 15 resembles that of Ps 115.4ff where an intellectual critique of idolatry is made. The origin of the idols is traced once again to the handiwork of a human being; but since no human being is able to form a God like himself (v 16), the idol is therefore a dead thing (νεκρόν, v 17). But the Egyptian animal worship by far receives the author's worst condemnation (v 18),<sup>40</sup> particularly the animals they worship, which the author considers the most hateful (τὰ ἔχθιστα, v 18) and are therefore excluded from the praise and blessing of God (v 19).<sup>41</sup>

### Conclusion

The above analysis shows the author's attitude towards idolatry to be negative and vehement. He mounts a relentless attack not only on the idols, but also on the entire process of idol-making and the maker, while speaking positively about the God

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<sup>39</sup> Who are these oppressors? Reider 1957:183 thinks they are the nations that have oppressed Israel, such as the Egyptians. The author may have had the thought that idols were introduced into Israel by the Gentile nations. If this is the case, the author could well have in mind the religious influence of the Graeco-Roman world on the Jews. Thus, v 18 may be taken to be for the purpose of countering the particularly bizarre Egyptian animal worship.

<sup>40</sup> This is unlikely to be an effort of the author of Wis to seek acceptance among the cultured Greeks of Alexandria (Collins 1997:213; 2000:200-202). For the conception of Wis concerning the true God differs from that of the Greeks. And if we were to take into consideration Wis 15.14-19, it would appear that the author is extending the conception of 'faithfulness' in worshipping the true God to the Egyptians. Rather than attempting to gain acceptance among the cultured Greeks of Alexandria, the author is more likely criticising pagan idolatry and the Egyptian animal worship from a culturally superior position of belonging to the 'true' God of the Jews. Although Collins is right to say that the author sees wisdom as universal, it is the true God to whom the author of Wis seeks to direct the attention of all people. And if Wis has in mind the God of Israel, as Collins himself has shown (2000:201), and as we have seen in 15.3 the possible covenant motif, one wonders how the author is able to gain acceptance among the Greeks who were unlikely to accept the religion of the Jews.

<sup>41</sup> Reider 1957:184 points out that the clause 'they have escaped etc.' in v 19 is unclear. However, the author might have intentionally left it unclear so as to create a double insult, that is, both the animals and their devotees are excluded from God's praise and blessing.



of the Jews (15.3). Throughout, the author critiques idolatry on the cognitive level, showing two basic reasons for such critique: (1) the true God cannot be represented; (2) idols have no real existence and are therefore powerless. Those who attribute to idols what rightly belongs to the true God, i.e. power and life, are guilty of the sin of idolatry and therefore face the prospect of punishment. The author seems to have adopted the second definition of idolatry as misrepresenting/dishonouring the true God. Two aspects of the definition seem to have received greater emphasis throughout: (1) misrepresenting the true God visually, that is, with an object; and (2) confusing God with nature, that is, nature worship. By identifying these aspects of the definitions of idolatry as set out in chapter two above, we are able to recognise the reasons for which the author of Wis carries out his critique of idolatry.

### 3.3 Philo

Philo was born between 25 and 20 BCE and died around 50 CE in Alexandria.<sup>42</sup> His writings reveal that he had an excellent training in the Jewish scripture alongside an extraordinary Greek education.<sup>43</sup> That he was brought up in the ancient customs and traditions of the Jewish nation is undisputed. He worked and lived as an intellectual and philosopher whose philosophy was founded upon Moses, although he was also familiar with other Greek philosophies.<sup>44</sup> However, he preferred the tranquil life of contemplation to the complex and harsh reality of politics.<sup>45</sup> In him, we witness an epitome of a devout Jew who saw his life as deeply rooted in, and therefore

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<sup>42</sup> See Sandmel 1979:3; and Barclay 1996:159 for the dating of Philo's year of birth and also Barclay 1996:159, n74.

<sup>43</sup> Sandmel 1979:15 observes that 'There is universal agreement among scholars that the Greek culture reflected in Philo is both broad and penetrating, the result of reading and study in intensity and depth. He quotes some fifty-four classical authors directly and accurately'. See also Borgen 1997:17 and Barclay 1996:159-61 for similar comments, including those about Philo's Jewish background; cf. *Spec* 1.314.

<sup>44</sup> See n43 above.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Barclay 1996:161-2 for a brief discussion of Philo's preference for a contemplative life; see also *Spec* 3.1-6; cf. *Abr* 20-25, 85-87; *Contempl* 18-21.

committed to, the Jewish community, particularly that of Alexandria.<sup>46</sup> But he was also always concerned about the Jewish people universally.

For Philo, the Torah is the most important source of one's life. The God of the Jewish Torah is the Ruler, the Maker, the Divine, and Father of all.<sup>47</sup> Thus, Philo is categorically opposed to any effort in representing God, as it will only upset and distort the truth of God. Not surprisingly, therefore, we are able to find a philosophical and intellectual critique of idolatry and polytheism.<sup>48</sup>

We will discuss five main passages from Philo.<sup>49</sup> The first is *De Opificio Mundi* 170-72 where a foundational statement about God is made. The second is *De Decalogo* 52-81 where Philo makes a sharp attack on three levels of idolatry. The third will be *De Specialibus Legibus* 1.12-31 where Philo repeats his vehement attack on idolatry but with a slight change. This will be followed by a look at the fourth, *De Vita Contemplativa* 3-8, in which Philo seems to understand idolatry in a gradation. The fifth and final treatment will be the piecemeal sections taken from *De Legatione ad Gaium* in which Philo relates the event leading up to the violation of the temple at Jerusalem and hurls sharp and harsh criticisms at the emperor Gaius.

### 3.3.1 *De Opificio Mundi* 170-72

Philo believes a detailed treatise on the creation (*De Opificio Mundi*) is necessary prior to a treatment of the Laws. And this is what Moses has done (*Opif* 3). In this treatise, he gives an account (almost a commentary) of the creation based on

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<sup>46</sup> That he was a prominent member of the Jewish community is seen from, for example, *Legat* 182, and that he represented the Jewish community and led the Jewish deputation to Gaius points to this fact. See Borgen 1997:14-15.

<sup>47</sup> Sandmel 1984:23.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Wolfson 1948:27-32 who devotes a considerable amount of space to the discussion of polytheism. A somewhat truncated discussion can be found in Borgen 1997:208-12.

<sup>49</sup> There are very many passages in Philo which treat the question of idolatry or polytheism and it is not possible to include all of them, besides those cited here, other examples include *Decal* 156; *Spec* 1.56; *Contempl* 3-8; *Post* 165; *Mos* 2.193-96, 205; *Fug* 180; *Congr* 15; *Prob* 105; *Abr* 267; *Praem* 162.



Scripture,<sup>50</sup> and ends with a summary about the Maker of the world's origin in 170-72.<sup>51</sup>

According to Philo, there are five things or conceptions that are fairest and best of all, the first of which is the eternal existence of God (170). Philo does not only emphasise God's existence, but also his eternity. This point is made with atheists in mind,<sup>52</sup> i.e. those uncertain and double-minded about God's eternal existence.

The second conception is the unity of God (θεὸς εἷς ἐστι, 171), which is held in opposition to polytheism.<sup>53</sup> For Philo, polytheists practise mob-rule (ὀχλοκρατία), when they view all the earthly creatures and animals as Gods.

The third conception is the coming into being of the world (γενητὸς ὁ κόσμος, the world came into being), which refutes those who believe that the world has no beginning and is eternal.<sup>54</sup>

The fourth is the singularity of the world (εἷς ἐστιν ὁ κόσμος). Philo argues that the Maker makes his world as uniquely as himself. Here Philo charges those who teach a plurality of worlds with lacking knowledge.<sup>55</sup> It suggests that God is not unique himself, which is a wrong conception of God.

The fifth conception is about the Fatherly nature of God: he exercises forethought (προνοεῖ). This, according to Philo, is the law of nature (172).

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<sup>50</sup> Borgen 1997:68 observes that more than a third of *Opif* 'is devoted to arithmological excursus on the tetrad and the hebdomad' so that the treatise reveals 'an extensive use of Pythagorean-like speculations on numbers'. Cf. *Opif* 47-52, 89-128.

<sup>51</sup> Borgen 1997:79 refers to these as the 'right ideas' about God. It is most appropriate to describe this as Philo's creedal statement; see Barclay 1996:164f.

<sup>52</sup> This is a criticism of the Sceptic view which doubts the existence of God. Cf. Borgen 1997:68. Philo views polytheism as a step leading to atheism (*Praem* 162); see also Goldenberg 1998:51.

<sup>53</sup> Philo most likely has in mind the Greek and Egyptian Gods; cf. *Decal* 53; *Contempl* 3-6; see also Wolfson 1948:27f. In *Migr* 69 polytheism and atheism are equally profane.

<sup>54</sup> This is also called the Aristotelian view; cf. *Aet* 10.

<sup>55</sup> The Epicureans believe in a plurality of worlds and deny the doctrine of providence. Cf. *Post* 2 where the doctrines of the Epicureans also posit that God has a human face.



For Philo these five conceptions are foundational to the bliss and blessedness (μακαρίαν καὶ εὐδαίμονα) in one's life. Although this is not an explicit condemnation of idolaters, Philo probably would not deny that the reverse will be true, i.e. that idolaters will lead a miserable life.

### 3.3.2 *De Decalogo* 52-81

There are three main strands of critique here: the critique of nature worship; the critique of idol-makers and idol-worshippers; and the critique of Egyptian animal worship. Philo discusses his critiques in three clearly defined categories of idolatry,<sup>56</sup> in an ascending and increasing order of intensity.

#### Nature worship (52-65)

Philo begins with a foundational principle – the transcendent source of all that exists is God (52). However, there is a lack of this knowledge among humanity in whom a great delusion or deception (πλάνος τις οὐ μικρός) is found, which is idolatry,<sup>57</sup> expressed in nature worship.

In 53-58, Philo says that humanity have deified (ἐκτεθειώκασιν) the four elements of nature: earth, water, air, and fire; also the sun, the moon, planets, stars, heaven and the whole world (53). They have assigned to these elements names of Greek and Roman Gods,<sup>58</sup> and therefore concealed (παρεκαλύψαντο) the true God.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. Goldenberg 1998:52. This is similar to the critique in Wis, a pattern which will be discussed below.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Congr* 15; *Virt* 214 states that the removal of the One God is 'delusion'.

<sup>58</sup> So Borgen 1997:209-10.

<sup>59</sup> The true God is here described as the highest (ἀνώτατον) and the most august (πρεσβύτατον), the begetter (τὸν γεννητήν), the ruler of the great world-city (τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς μεγαλόπολεως), the commander-in-chief (τὸν στρατάρχην) of the invincible host, the pilot (τὸν κυβερνήτην) who regulates (οἰκονομεῖ) safety.

Philo attributes such deification of nature to the myth-makers (55),<sup>60</sup> which contradicts Moses who instructs against treating any part of the universe as the omnipotent God (58). According to our definitions of idolatry set out in chapter two above, nature worship is, at the cognitive level, a mixing of God with nature, thus reducing God to ‘not being’ (οὐκ ὄντα).<sup>61</sup> Philo terms this ‘profanity’ (οὐ θεμιτόν). This is due to the fact that the people lack capacity for instruction (οὐκ εἰδότες ἀδιδάκτω τῇ φύσει); they fail to learn (οὐ σπουδάζοντες μαθεῖν) and therefore do not know the truly Existent One (τὸν ὄντα ὄντως).

For Philo, nature worship is equivalent to honouring a king’s subordinates, which he describes as ‘unwisdom’ (οὐκ ἀγνωμονέστατος) and ‘foolhardiness’ (ῥιψοκινδυνότατος). But those are the most ‘senseless’ (ἀβουλότατοι) and ‘unjust’ (ἀδικώτατοι) who render to the created what rightly belongs to the Maker (61). In so doing they are giving equal measure to what is unequal; and have deliberately forgotten the Maker (λήθη, 62).<sup>62</sup>

Philo challenges his readers to reject (ἀπωθεῖν) such imposture (τερθρείαν) and not to worship (μὴ προσκυνεῖν) the brothers (τοὺς ἀδελφούς). The use of ‘the brothers’ is an interesting twist as Philo sees the created order and humanity as

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<sup>60</sup> The making of myths is μυθοποιία; cf. *Leg* 1.43; *Sacr* 13, 76; *Fug* 121; *Spec* 1.79; see Wolfson 1948:32-34, who rightly argues that Philo sees in the second commandment a prohibition not only against idolatrous worship but also against all deities invented by myth-makers. Cf. *Wis* 13.1-9.

<sup>61</sup> Elsewhere, i.e. *Mos* 2.193-96, the Egyptians are accused of nature worship by setting up earth against heaven and by even deifying the Nile as if it were the counterpart of heaven; see also *Fug* 180 and Wolfson 1948:30.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. *Virt* 179 which states that the best of all is God, but Him they forget.



having one Father (πατήρ πάντων εἷς), the Maker of the universe (ὁ ποιητῆς τῶν ὅλων).<sup>63</sup> Thus, nature worship is ‘brother worship’!

The readers are urged to gird themselves up to serve the uncreated (τῷ ἀγεννητῷ) and the eternal (τῷ αἰδιῷ), and to engrave in themselves the first (πρῶτον) and the most sacred (ἱερώτατον) of commandments (παραγγελμάτων), which is the acknowledgement and honour of the One God (65).<sup>64</sup>

### **Idol-makers and idol-worshippers (66-76a)**

In the preceding sections, Philo has laid the foundation for a more vehement critique of idolatry, based on the second commandment, which has been set out in chapter two above.

While the second commandment was given specifically to Israel, Philo is here applying it more universally, i.e. to pagan Egyptians, and as a critique of all forms of idolatry.<sup>65</sup> Thus, in 66, he first makes a distinction between those who worship nature and those who worship idols. Taking a similar stance as Wis (13.6-7), Philo thinks that the former have a lesser offence than the latter. The offence of those who worship idols is therefore extensively described and attacked.

First, they misrepresent God by making images and figures with wood (ξύλα), stones (λίθους), silver (ἄργυρον), and gold (χρυσόν), including ‘other works of human hands’ (τὰ ἄλλα χειροκμήτων), which are likely anthropomorphic representations of God.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Thus Borgen 1997:233 is not altogether accurate when he says the ‘brothers’ referred to the stars. Certainly it includes the stars, but other created things as well!

<sup>64</sup> This is in sharp contrast to the errors of those who deify the elements and other planetary balls; cf. Borgen 1997:233.

<sup>65</sup> See for example the treatment of the golden calf by Philo in *Mos* 2.161-73, *Spec* 3.125. Elsewhere, i.e. *Spec* 1.54, Philo warns that any betrayal of the One God leads to the utmost punishment.

<sup>66</sup> But God is not a graven image on stones, nor can an image of him be made (*Det* 125).



Such idolatrous acts sever the idolater from the rightful conception of God (67).<sup>67</sup> These idolaters are therefore like boats tossed to and fro without any security in the certainty of truth. They are blind (τυφλοί) to the truth of God and more miserable than those who are physically blind (68). Thus, Philo does not think any pity should be extended to such people, only punishment (τοῖς δὲ κόλασις ὡς μοχθηροῖς).<sup>68</sup>

In a satirical way (70-71), Philo suggests that the idolaters should have deified the sculptors and painters.<sup>69</sup> But the idolaters instead embellish and serve the products of the craftsmen while their makers grow old and pass into oblivion. He therefore not only hurls his critique on idolatry, but also on the inhumane aspect of idolatry: the maker is viewed with lesser concern by the seemingly devout idolaters.

Indeed, embellishing and beautifying idols which idolaters regard as Gods is one thing, offering prayers and sacrifices to these idols by their own makers is worse (72). Philo, again sarcastically, argues that they might as well worship their own hands; or if that were to appear egotistical, they could always worship their hammers, anvils, pencils, tongs, and other tools. By mentioning the tools necessary for the making of the idols, Philo shows that the tools are of better and greater use, without which the idols would not even have been formed! Thus, the futility and the sin of idolatry are being exposed, making those who engage in idol worship even more preposterous.

More vehement is the critique of 73-74, in which Philo describes the idolaters as demented (ἀπονοηθέντας), and suggests that idolaters should seek to be like their

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<sup>67</sup> *Abr* 268 states: 'Faith in God, then, is the one sure and infallible good, consolation of life, fulfilment of bright hopes, dearth of ills, harvest of goods, inacquaintance with misery, acquaintance with piety, heritage of happiness, all-round betterment of the soul which is firmly stayed on Him Who is the cause of all things and can do all things yet only wills the best'.

<sup>68</sup> Writing in a hyperbole, Philo argues that even 'an infant knows' (ἐγνώ νήπιος) that the craftsman is superior to what he has made. He argues that the craftsman is the father of the craft since he has made it.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. *Abr* 267 on the creation of sculptors and painters.

images which he scornfully describes as having totally useless and powerless senses. The description is clearly an echo of Ps 115.5-8 where v 8 likens the idol-makers to their idols, so are those who trust in idols like them (cf. Isa 44.9-20). Thus, Philo's critique extends to both idol-makers and their idols, and those who engage in such worship. While idolaters consider the places of their idols a shrine or temple, Philo insultingly describes it as a temple-prison (εἰρκτὴν τὸν ἱερόν), turning the idols into prisoners and their worshippers prison-guards!

Philo argues that a clear proof of the impiety of idolaters is their indignation at being asked to be like their idols (75). Such a reaction is due to a few possibilities. It could be that idolatry in itself is impious. It could also be that these idolaters know in the depths of their hearts that the idols are motionless, useless and truly foolish, hence their impious indignation. A third possibility is that the idolaters could be holding such a high regard for their idols that any suggestion to be like their idols would be tantamount to blasphemy, since for humans to become like Gods would reduce the divinity of the Gods.

But Philo does not see anything positive in idolaters. To him, there could be no sincerity or devotion in idolaters towards their idols. He therefore attacks them because what they do – idol-making and idol-worshipping – goes against the teaching of the Torah which to him is universally applicable.<sup>70</sup>

Thus Philo concludes that humans who have souls must not worship the idols which have no souls (76a). The idolaters have reversed the natural order of things; but Philo is seeking to re-order it. He argues that it is out of place (ἄτοπους) and

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<sup>70</sup> Thus Barclay 1996:174 comments: 'In this sense Jews are the one truly worshipful community in the world; they are the nation with the clearest vision of God, the people thus naturally most God-beloved'. See also *Mos* 2.189; *Plant* 55-60; *Migr* 113-14; *Abr* 98. Cf. Borgen 1984:235 who states that Philo's purpose in writing the *Life of Moses* was to tell the Gentile readers about the supreme law-giver whose laws they should accept and honour. It is therefore clear that Philo views Judaism as universally applicable.



therefore unnatural and disgusting for humans to turn to the service of what their hands have made.

### **Egyptian animal worship (76b-81)**

For Philo, the Egyptian animal worship is by far the worst form of idolatry. For the Egyptians not only venerate all kinds of animals, but also invent legendary tales about them (μυθικοὶ πλάσματα).<sup>71</sup> And he reserves his strongest criticism yet for the excess of such worship, which includes the fiercest and most savage of all animals, namely lions and crocodiles, and the venomous asp (ἄσπίδα, a small poisonous snake, possibly the Egyptian cobra, perhaps similar to the present day North African cobra).<sup>72</sup> Philo describes these animals as a deliberate and careful choice resulting from a thorough ransacking of the two elements.<sup>73</sup> By worshipping these animals, the Egyptians show they hold a wrong conception of God.<sup>74</sup> And Philo insults it further by saying that people visiting Egypt for the first time and seeing such animal worship are likely to die from laughing (80). The deification of animals shows the worshippers have stooped low and degraded themselves to a level lower than the animals, but failed to worship the true God. Philo vilifies them as beasts in human shape (ἄνθρωποειδῇ θηρίᾳ) parading themselves before the foreigner.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Although Philo grants that the Egyptians might deify their domestic animals (bulls, ταύρους; rams, κριοῦς; and goats, τράγους) since they provide the means of livelihood (77), he does not therefore endorse it! His reasoning here is probably a rhetorical ploy and no more. It is unlikely that having criticised so much the physical misrepresentation of God he should now allow the deification of animals.

<sup>72</sup> In *Post* 165, he condemns the Egyptian animal worship as utterly nonsensical.

<sup>73</sup> ἀφ' ἑκάτερου, literally, after each of the two, i.e. elements, γῆς and ὕδατος.

<sup>74</sup> In addition, there are other less savage and grotesque animals than lions and crocodiles which the Egyptians deify such as dogs, cats, wolves, birds, fish, etc. But they are no less ridiculous (καταγέλαστοι, 79). Philo elsewhere describes this form of worship as 'the folly (ἡλιθιότης) of Egypt' (*Spec* 1.79). Cf. Wolfson 1948:31

<sup>75</sup> The word περινοστέω means to go around, to visit or inspect. It could mean that as the visitor, who is probably a tourist of some sort, looks on while the idol-worshippers go around visiting and inspecting their idols, thus they seem (δοκεῖν) beasts in human shape to the visitor.



### 3.3.3 *De Specialibus Legibus* 1.12-31<sup>76</sup>

This part of the treatise treats the first two commandments. The first (12-20) follows the line of the discussion in *Decal*; the second (21-31) follows the same except that Philo further interprets idolatry symbolically, i.e. as representing the vain things, such as wealth. There is, however, a difference from the treatment found in *Decal*. In *Decal* Philo's critique involves three levels as seen above. However, in *Spec* 1.12-31, only the first two are treated while Egyptian animal worship is left out. Meanwhile, Philo adds two other aspects of idolatry: that of idolatry of wealth (23-27), and the idolatry of personages (28-31).

#### Nature worship (12-20)

In this passage, Philo goes into another lengthy discussion of nature worship; but he no longer calls it an error (διαμαρτία, *Decal* 66), nor does he describe nature worshippers as the most senseless (ἄβουλότατος) and unjust (ἄδιώτατος, *Decal* 61). Instead, he calls their action 'a going astray' (πλάνον, 15f).

But unlike *Decal* the Gods here are recognised by their devotees as absolutely powerful (αὐτοκράτορας, 13), who were the cause of all events. But according to Philo, Moses taught that the universe was created as the greatest of cities (πόλις ἡ μεγίστη), and the heavenly bodies are like magistrates and subjects (ἄρχοντας καὶ ὑπηκόους).

Thus, according to Moses, argues Philo, the magistrates are not absolutely or unconditionally powerful, but are lieutenants (ὑπάρχους) of the one Father (ἐνὸς πατρός).<sup>77</sup> They operate perfectly as they have been modelled after the principles of

<sup>76</sup> Borgen 1984:239 rightly points out that Book 1 provides the interpretation of the first and second commandments, and prohibits idolatry and gives details on the knowledge and the worship of God.

<sup>77</sup> They are at most 'his agents and subordinates', so Barclay 1996:431; cf. *Conf* 168-73.

the Maker's governance (μιμουμένους τὴν ἐπιστασίαν). Thus nature worshippers have confused God with nature, mistaking the created things for the cause of all events in the universe.<sup>78</sup> This is precisely what the first commandment warns against: not recognising the true and eternal God as Ruler of all,<sup>79</sup> whom Philo describes as not only the God of Gods (οὐ μόνον θεὸς θεῶν), who holds authority and sovereignty over all the Gods, but also the Maker of all (πάντων δημιουργός).<sup>80</sup> The point which Philo makes here is a very finely defined one: if anyone renders the worship of the Eternal Creator to a created thing, that person stands 'damaged in the understanding', 'deranged' (φρεωβλαβής) and is guilty of the highest degree of impiety (ἄσεβεία τῇ μεγίστη). This is quite a blanket charge since nothing other than the one true eternal Maker is to be worshipped, and so all forms of worship to anything other than the true God are impious.

### **Idol-making and idol-worshipping (21-31)**

Philo goes on to a critique of idol-making. The treatment here differs from elsewhere in that after mentioning the acts of idol-making and idol-worshipping, and citing the second commandment (21-22), Philo moves to another category of idolatry, namely, the love of wealth (23-27). The next category is the deification of personages (28-31). That all these three categories may be classified under idol-making and idol-worshipping seems clear since each is the making of something into a God for worship

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<sup>78</sup> The instruction of Moses in Deut 4.19 is repeated here (15) and it teaches that any act which deifies the heavenly Gods is considered going astray (πλάινον). For it directly contradicts the teaching of Moses, and is consequently defined as idolatry at the cognitive level.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. 16-18, where Philo argues that the astral bodies must not be supposed to have absolute power as if they were Gods. The reason is simple: God alone is absolutely powerful. The heavenly bodies may have the rank of subordinate rulers (τὴν ὑπάρχων τάξιν, 19), but they are not God. They rule or operate according to the laws of nature as given by God the Maker. Thus, Philo is careful not to contradict his own statement in *Opif* 171 where he describes the world as unique as the Maker.

<sup>80</sup> Goldenberg 1998:52-54 states that Philo does not see any value in other Gods for he only finds the Jewish religion, its scripture and its laws to be the most supreme, hence his rejection of all pagan religious worship.



and honour. Thus, the following will be treated under the same heading of idol-making and worshipping.

*a. Physical representation of God (21-22)*

Philo's harsh critique is first of all levelled against visual or physical representation of God (cf. *Mos* 2.205). He cites the second commandment (Exod 20.23) which states explicitly that there is to be no physical representation of God with gold or silver (22). However, idolaters part with their silver and gold, and sculptors carry out the job of making idols as if they were 'competent to fashion Gods'. It is a misrepresentation of God and thus a violation of the second commandment and a degradation of the true God.

*b. Love of wealth (23-27)*

The love of wealth is capable of leading people to a point equivalent to religious devotion to a divine image (ἄγαλμα θεῖον). Thus, in 23, Philo sees the non-literal aspect of the prohibition issued by the second commandment as valuable for promoting morality. The morality of humanity in relation to wealth, Philo argues, is dependent upon one's religious morality.<sup>81</sup> For those who love money, silver and gold, wealth would appear to be their source of blessing and happiness. But this also suggests a departure from the true God who alone must be worshipped.

In 24, he accuses the poor and the needy of doing the same, although they have no wealth, by paying homage to their neighbours' wealth. The picture of the poor begging for generous gifts from the wealthy is described by Philo as resembling people

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<sup>81</sup> Borgen 1997:213 observes that the foundation of the ethical aspect of life and virtues is the worship of the God who is. Thus, there is a close relationship between idolatrous worship and immoral behaviour. Cf. *Virt* 181-82.

going to grand temples to bestow worship on their Gods. Philo criticises such behaviour for being so extreme as though wealth were Gods (θεῶν αἰτησόμενοι).<sup>82</sup>

By seeing a non-literal prohibition on wealth in the second commandment and in Lev 19.4, Philo is actually making an application of the biblical prohibition on idolatry to wealth, thus turning an obsession with wealth into idolatry. The crux of the idolatry of wealth seems to be the ‘desire for money’ (φιλαργυρία, 24) and the ‘divine honours’ (τιμὰς ἰσοθέους, 25) assigned to wealth.

However, the ‘idols’ of wealth are elusive and therefore unreliable (24). Conceptually, the way the poor and the needy seek after wealth makes wealth appear like a God, when they ought to have sought after the true God of the Jews. This could suggest ‘misrepresentation’ of the true God who cannot be ‘represented’. Thus it is deemed idolatry, a definition of idolatry set out in chapter two above.

### *c. Invention of personages (28-31)*

In 28, Philo charges that the myth-makers build their false imaginations against the truth (cf. *Congr* 15) when they invent new Gods.<sup>83</sup> Although the translation of Colson of the new Gods as ‘personages’ is instructive, the meaning of ‘personages’ in this context still requires some explanation.<sup>84</sup> Do the ‘personages’ refer to important figures such as heroes of the past who are being venerated? Or are they mere characters imagined and invented from pure fantasy? Philo throws light on this point in *Spec* 2.164, where he refers to the plurality of the Gods and describes them as the

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<sup>82</sup> Although this appears more like a violation of the first commandment, Philo views this as a conceptual error in that these people, by their very behaviour have made wealth represent God when they seek after it as if it was God.

<sup>83</sup> There is no mention of the word ‘personages’ in LCL, except the word πάντες. However, the description of θεοὺς καινοῦς suggests that the πάντες refers to some form of Gods and, with the description of the inventors as οἱ μυθογράφοι we may follow Cohn’s suggestion of adding μῦθοι before πάντες.

<sup>84</sup> LCL, Philo, vol 7, 114, n2.



‘vain invention of the tribe of poets...’ (τὸ ποιητικὸν γένος ἐμύθευσε...). On the basis of this statement, it appears that Philo has in mind the ‘invented’ myths, rather than the venerated past heroes or emperors.

‘(T)o promote their seductiveness’ (πρὸς τὸ εὐπαράγωγον), the myth-makers incorporate melody, music with all the metre and rhythm so as to deceive the audience.<sup>85</sup> Philo attacks not just the sculpture and the painting associated with it, but also the whole purpose of the myth-makers whom he accuses of deceiving and of making the soul unsteady and unsettled (ἀβέβαιον καὶ ἀνίδρυτον). Thus, he exposes the deception of the myth-makers. This is contrasted with Moses who repeatedly teaches the lesson that God is one and that he is the Framer and Maker of all things (θεὸς εἷς ἐστι καὶ κτίστης καὶ ποιητὴς τῶν ὅλων, 30), who is the Lord of created things (ὁ κύριος τῶν γεγονότων).

A further contrast of this one God is the truth that ‘stability and fixity and lordship are by nature vested in Him alone’ (τὸ βέβαιον καὶ πάγιον καὶ τὸ κῦρος ὡς ἀληθῶς περὶ αὐτὸν μόνον πέφυκε). Philo concludes that those who cling to the God who IS live!<sup>86</sup> By inference, those who do not cling to the true God but deify others will die! The above discussions reveal a Philo who is at odds with the pagan religion and all attempts to represent the true God.

The above critique of Philo suggests that he sees idolatry as having different grades, which seems to parallel his ‘graded’ critique in *Contempl* 3-8.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> But God is not a graven image and he needs no music, rhythm and such like to attract his worshippers; cf. *Det* 125.

<sup>86</sup> Deut 4.4, Colson’s observation of the meaning of the original is that those who took God’s side remain alive. Cf. *Fug* 56 and *Spec* 1.345.

<sup>87</sup> Similarly, there seems to be a parallel between Philo’s critique of idolatry (in *Decal* 52-81 and *Spec* 1.12-31) and that found in *Wis* 13-15.

### 3.3.4 *De Vita Contemplativa* 3-8

Although *Contempl* is considered not to ‘rank high’ among Philo’s works by Colson,<sup>88</sup> the section which concerns us is important as it reflects Philo’s view that there is a gradation of idolatry. For Philo, the different grades seem to connote different degrees of seriousness. The first is termed the ‘elements’ (τὰ στοιχεῖα) which comprise earth, water, air, and fire (3) (cf. *Spec* 1.12-20; *Decal* 52-65). He then provides the reasons for people’s veneration of these elements. While these elements in themselves appear to be powerful, Philo describes them as ‘lifeless’ (ἄψυχος). This is a strong word of critique as it shows the unreasonableness of the people who revere the elements. And they are ‘laid’ there by God (i.e. the Artificer) (*Contempl* 4). The veneration of the elements is further expressed in the veneration of the celestial stars: sun, moon, and other planets. For Philo, these, like the elements, are the result of the Architect who is perfect in knowledge, a clear reference to God (*Contempl* 5). The second level of idolatry moves a little lower, that of the demigods (*Contempl* 6) (cf. *Spec* 1.28-31).<sup>89</sup> For Philo, the claim that one is a God is ridiculous as he challenges: how could the same person be both mortal and immortal? The argument is further bolstered by his reference to human birth, youthful passions and sexual liaison with women, which suggest that Philo views immortality to be incompatible with mortality because of the latter’s human limitations. The third level of idolatry concerns the worship of actual idols of wood and stone (*Contempl* 7), which Philo ridicules as previously shapeless but were hewn by quarry-workers and wood-cutters (cf. *Spec* 1.21-27; *Decal* 66-76a). The fourth level is that of the Egyptian animal worship, which is ‘hardly decent even to mention’ (*Contempl* 8) (cf. *Decal* 76b-81).

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<sup>88</sup> Cited in LCL Philo, vol 9, 104. See Schürer III.756ff.

<sup>89</sup> See the discussion on *De Legatione ad Gaium* in which Gaius is compared to a demigod. Cf. Wis 14.15-21.



The gradation of the idolatry in *Contempl* and the parallel critique of idolatry found in Wis might suggest that either depended on the other for their critique, or possibly that both drew on the same source.<sup>90</sup> It is possible that both Philo and the writer of Wis depended on the same biblical record such as Jer 10.1-16 and Isa 44.9-20. However, the range of critiques of idolatry in the LXX, Philo, and Wis might also suggest that there is no fixed tradition in terms of the source. It would be helpful to tabulate the four passages (*Decal* 52-81, *Spec* 1.12-31, *Contempl* 3-8, and Wis 13-15) on idolatry and compare them. Such a tabulation enables us to see the similarities and differences between Philo and the writer of Wis, as well as the different critiques of idolatry by Philo.

| <i>De Decalogo</i><br>(52-81)  | <i>De Specialibus</i><br><i>Legibus</i> (1.12-31)   | <i>De Vita</i><br><i>Contemplativa</i> (3-8) | <i>Wisdom of</i><br><i>Solomon</i><br>(13.1-15.19)                          |
|--|---|--|---|
| (1) nature worship<br>(52-65):<br>- deification of the<br>natural elements<br>as 'error' | (1) nature worship<br>(12-20):<br>- 'going astray'  | (1) worship of the<br>elements (3-5)         | (1) nature worship<br>(13.1-9)  |
| (2) idol makers<br>and worshippers<br>(66-76a):<br>- misrepresenting<br>God              | (2) idol making<br>and worshipping<br>(21-31):<br>- physical<br>misrepresentation<br>of God (21-22)<br>- wealth (23-27) | (2) demigods (6)                             | (2) idol making and<br>worshipping<br>(13.10-19; 14.1-7,<br>12-21; 15.7-17) |
| (3) -----  | (3) personages (28-<br>31):<br>- myths  | (3) idol making and<br>worshipping (7)       | (3) origin of<br>idolatry (14.12-21):<br>- veneration of<br>humans/demigods |
| (4) Egyptian<br>animal worship<br>(76b-81):<br>- 'folly of Egypt'                        | (4) -----   | (4) Egyptian animal<br>worship (8)           | (4) Egyptian<br>animal worship<br>(15.18-19)                                |

<sup>90</sup> Winston 1979:248 puts it the other way, that is, that although both Philo and Wis may derive from a common Jewish-Hellenistic apologetic tradition, it is likely that one could be dependent upon the other.

The above table shows that idol making and worshipping is a common theme which invites condemnation. But of greater condemnation is the Egyptian animal worship, since in each critique of the different idolatrous acts, the intensity of condemnation grows towards Egyptian animal worship. Thus, in the three texts in which animal worship is mentioned, it is placed at the lowest of all categories. However, from the gradation of idolatry, it seems clear that there is a variety of critique of idolatry within a common shape, and thus it may be possible that there is no fixed tradition behind the critique.

### 3.3.5 *De Legatione ad Gaium*

In *Legat*, Philo reacts to a situation in which the Jewish community was being threatened, particularly the sanctity of the temple in Jerusalem during the reign of emperor Gaius. Even though the event is extremely complex, the main target for Philo's severe criticism is Gaius's attempt to install his statue in the temple.

The tragic tale started with the emperor Gaius who, after a series of extreme murderous acts to ensure the security of his throne and to remove all those whom he disfavoured (22-65), wanted to be thought of as a God (75-80). He took on the insignia of the images of the Gods (81) and attacked the honours paid to these Gods (93-97). However, Philo meticulously sets out the symbolic meanings of all the ornaments of the Gods (98-113) and questions Gaius's qualification to be likened to any of them (114). However, because of the people's praises Gaius thought he was really God (162) and so bestowed upon himself the divinity by setting up a statue of himself under the name of Zeus (181) and demanded that all should acknowledge his divinity (117-18).

While all others obeyed the emperor (116), the Jews refused on the basis of their laws and their knowledge of the one God (115). Thus, they became the prime



suspects of opposition and a target of the Alexandrians' hatred. This led to the pogrom of 38 CE during which images of Gaius were forcefully introduced into the synagogues (120-36).

When his efforts to be made God were delayed (203, 276-329), Gaius decided to order a colossal statue of himself to be built in Rome. Then calculatingly and carefully he moved to install statues of himself in cities in Alexandria before finally proceeding to the temple in Jerusalem (337-38).

Philo attributes the desecration of the synagogues and the temple to Gaius's great inconsistency of conduct (346) and attacks his act in no uncertain terms (347-48). First, Gaius is accused of annexing ether and heaven (αἰθέρα καὶ οὐρανόν), a result of his dissatisfaction with all his possessions. Second, Gaius is accused of treating God as worthy of nothing (τὸν θεὸν οὐδενὸς ἄξιον). Third, by installing his own statue in the temple hallowed for God (θεῷ καθιερωθέντα), Gaius is taking away what properly belongs to God, i.e. his sovereignty!<sup>91</sup> These, Philo charges, are the origin of a great flood of evil. While idolatry discussed earlier is fundamentally erroneous, it is worse still to think and make oneself God.

Thus, Gaius failed to stay within the bounds of human nature (75), but overstepped them in his eagerness to be thought of as a God.<sup>92</sup> But his belief that he was the shepherd of his people is but 'a mythical fiction' (μυθικὸν πλάσμα, 77) and the 'most godless assumption of godship' (τὴν ἄθεωτάτην ἐκθέωσιν). It is the most grievous impiety, infidelity and ingratitude to the Benefactor of the whole world (118).

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<sup>91</sup> Cf. *Spec* 1.67 where Philo asserts that there is to be only 'one temple for the One God', the defilement of which recorded in *Legat* means that no trace of the reverence and honour due to God is left (*Legat* 347).

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Borgen 1997:22, citing Smallwood 1976:174-80, 236-45.

Gaius's act is equally idolatrous at the cognitive level in that he not only failed to recognise that God was sovereign over the temple, but also transferred that sovereignty to himself!<sup>93</sup>

### Conclusion

The above discussion yields the unambiguously negative attitude of Philo towards idolatry. It also reveals the grounds on which he bases his critique of idolatry. From our analysis above, Philo's basis for rejecting idolatry at all levels is first of all his conception of the true God – the God of the Jews is the Eternal existent God (*Opif* 170) who is one (*Opif* 171), the Framer and Maker of all things, Father and Ruler. And the logical result is his insistence on a universal application of the commandments of the Jewish Scripture, which he extends even to the Gentiles.<sup>94</sup> Thus, any act or conception that contradicts the conception of divinity defined by Philo, regardless of the ethnicity of the persons involved, will be deemed idolatrous and deserving the most vehement critique and condemnation.

We may trace his critique to the definitions of idolatry set out in chapter two above. Philo seems to adopt the second broad category of the definition of idolatry, that is, misrepresenting the true God with an object. And at the cognitive level, three particular aspects of the definition of idolatry stand out: (1) the intention of seeking after what is no God to the extent that one replaces the true God, e.g. with wealth; (2) the mixing of God with nature (such as nature worship); and (3) the failure to recognise God's sovereignty, e.g. when Gaius imposed on himself the status of the divine.

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<sup>93</sup> A most blasphemous act which is punishable by death; cf. *Spec* 1.54; *Mos* 2.206.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Borgen 1997:209 who comments on *Decal* 52-57 that the 'two first commandments of the Decalogue serve as basis' for the criticism of idolatry.



### 3.4 Josephus<sup>95</sup>

Josephus is reckoned to be the ‘single most important source for the history of the Jewish people in the first century CE’,<sup>96</sup> and since he lived in the turbulent years between 37/38 CE and sometime after 90 CE, a period that coincides with the NT times, he makes a relevant example of a Diaspora Jew whose attitude towards idolatry and the reasons for his rejection of it deserve our attention. How does Josephus view idolatry? And what grounds does he offer for rejecting idols and idolatry? In the following, we will see that Josephus upholds strongly the notion of the one God as the scripture proclaims it, which also serves as his basis for rejecting idolatrous ideas and behaviour. Josephus’ view of idolatry and his reasons for its rejection are important as he had been accused of treason when he insisted on keeping the spoils which the Galilean revolutionaries took from plundering a royal caravan and on returning them to the owner at a later time (*Vita* 126ff); when he later allowed a royal delegate who was imprisoned to flee (*Vita* 388-89); and when he not only failed to take his own life under a suicide pact with his soldiers but went on to live in Rome with a royal pension (*Bell* 387-88).<sup>97</sup> Although such aspects of Josephus’ life could be construed as evidence of ‘apostasy’, or even ‘unfaithfulness’ to God, from which Josephus is now repenting, Mason has ably demonstrated the implausibility of such a theory.<sup>98</sup> Further, Josephus’ critique of idolatry and his reasons for the critique show otherwise.

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<sup>95</sup> Literature on Josephus is voluminous. See Schürer I.43-63 for an introduction to his works. Attridge 1984:185-232 provides a good summary of Josephus and his works. Barclay 1996:346-68 provides a thorough discussion of Josephus’ social context and the works of Josephus.

<sup>96</sup> Attridge 1984:185.

<sup>97</sup> See Feldman 1984:779-87 for a survey of scholarly opinions on Josephus’ life. Bilde 1988:36-52 argues that Josephus sees himself not as a traitor but a prophet of God who is saved by the grace of God and acts as God’s messenger to Vespasian. And it is ‘possible to read this narrative in the context of important themes in the rest of his writings’, if the emphasis is placed on God’s grace and Josephus’ characteristics as God’s servant. But this seems too simplistic a theme on which Bilde seeks to hang all of Josephus’ works.

<sup>98</sup> See Mason 1998:66-68.

We may mention two basic as well as overarching purposes (at least in *Ant* and *C Ap*): that of warning the Jews against ‘unfaithfulness’ to the Jewish ancestral tradition; and that of promoting the Jewish nation by retelling its story,<sup>99</sup> thus correcting wrong or false notions about the Jewish faith and the Jewish race and therefore defending Judaism.<sup>100</sup> This twin purpose will guide our following discussion.<sup>101</sup>

### 3.4.1 Josephus’ summary of the law (*Ant* 4.200-1, 207; *C Ap* 2.190-93)

In his summary of the law Josephus places particular emphasis on the oneness of God which is seen in there being ‘one holy city’ (ἱερὰ πόλις ἔστω μία), ‘one temple’ (νεὼς εἷς ἐν ταυτῇ ἔστω), and ‘one altar’ (βωμὸς εἷς) (*Ant* 4.200).<sup>102</sup> Josephus further reiterates the oneness of God in 4.201 where the building of altars and temples at other venues is forbidden, thus maintaining God’s uniqueness and holiness:<sup>103</sup> θεὸς γὰρ εἷς καὶ τὸ Ἑβραίων γένος ἓν.

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<sup>99</sup> See Barclay 1996:356-57. Cf. Mason 1998:80-88 who argues that *Antiquities/Life* aim at providing interested Gentiles ‘an alternative political constitution and as an alternative philosophical system’ (p.80). However, the Num 25 incident which is not discussed at all by Mason poses a difficulty to his thesis: how could the Jewish law serve as an alternative constitution if the Jews themselves were not fully convinced but were easily lured by Gentile women? Further, the resolution of the problem does not seem to have come from ‘reason’, but ‘violence’! It is thus safer to posit that Josephus seeks to promote the Jewish law but at the same time warns against the surrounding temptations to Jews and the challenges to the Jewish ancestral tradition.

<sup>100</sup> Thus, in his *C Ap* he seems not only to refute his opponents but primarily to demonstrate the purity and superiority of the Jewish law and the faithfulness of the Jewish people to this law; cf. Barclay 1996:366-68; see Mason 1996:187-224, who argues that *C Ap* aims primarily to ‘encourage potential converts to Judaism’ (p.222). To this, we may add, ‘in addition to a thorough defence against the enemies’ charges’.

<sup>101</sup> Attridge 1984:185 notes: ‘Each of these works relied in one way or another on earlier sources which Josephus recast to serve several apologetic purposes. Any use of his writings must take account of these various tendencies...’. Cf. Barclay 1996:346.

<sup>102</sup> This is a reference to Exod 20.25. See Durham 1987:319-20 for a discussion of the verse.

<sup>103</sup> This may be Josephus’ apologetic against any ridicule of the Jewish peculiar form of worship (all the detailed aspects of the sacrifice mark them out), the Jewish peculiar object of worship (which is invisible to the eye), and the Jewish peculiar insistence on just one temple; cf. *C Ap* 2.79.



Although Josephus claims that he does not criticise other Gods out of respect for the word 'God' (*C Ap* 2.237), unless he is left with no choice (*C Ap* 2.238),<sup>104</sup> this is probably a rhetorical ploy. And the oneness of God is often the basis for his critique of other Gods.

In *C Ap* 2.237, Josephus explains that it is out of respect for the word 'God' that they (i.e. the Jews) are forbidden to ridicule other peoples' Gods. The reason why Josephus goes on later to a criticism of Greek religion is that the accusers of the Jews provoked him into it (*C Ap* 2.238).<sup>105</sup>

In another treatment of the law (*C Ap* 2.190-93; cf. *Ant* 3.91), Josephus points out that the theme of God is stated simply in the laws: he is the creator, the 'beginning, the middle, and the end of all things' (*C Ap* 2.190). What this means effectively is that the God of the Hebrews encompasses and embraces all things. Thus, nothing is fit to make an image of God (*C Ap* 2.191). He is inconceivable, unrepresented, invisible, and unimaginable (*C Ap* 2.191). Thus, it is impious to represent God, while the reverse, that is, the worship of God is most saintly, and equivalent to the 'practice of virtue' (ἀσκοῦντας ἀρετήν) (*C Ap* 2.192).

The one temple and one God receive further emphasis in *C Ap* 2.193, εἷς ναὸς ἐνὸς θεοῦ. Josephus thus shows that the one God and one temple are the

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<sup>104</sup> Bilde 1988:116 observes that Josephus is not able to restrain himself in criticising the ridiculous Greek religion. He is of the opinion that the traditional Jewish accusation against other Gods is a set feature, i.e. a *topos*, in Jewish apologetic literature, and is also a feature here in Josephus.

<sup>105</sup> The ban on deriding the Gods is found in Philo too (cf. *Mos* 2.26, 205, *Spec* 1.7, 53). There he explains with several points which Goldenberg (1997:385; 1998:68-69) summarises as follows: (1) The name 'God' should never be taken lightly, even where it is wrongly applied (*Mos* 2.203-5); (2) Praise is always better than attack (*QE* 2.5); (3) Religious polemic leads to social violence and should therefore be avoided (also *QE*); and (4) Mockery of idols can provoke blasphemy against the true God, while respect towards idols can elicit praise of the true God (*Spec* 1.53). However, the ridicule and vehement attack on idolatry and other Gods by both of these Jews show they only pay lip service to this point.

central themes of the Jewish law.<sup>106</sup> They serve as the perspective from which Josephus carries out his apologetics.

### 3.4.2 Josephus' account of the Midianite women (*Ant* 4.126-30, 137ff)

Josephus' account of Israelites' sexual and religious liaison with the Midianite women is an expansion of Num 25. It reflects an important purpose,<sup>107</sup> and sheds light on Josephus' attitude towards the Gentile Gods.

In *Ant* 4.126ff, Balaam is recorded to provide advice to king Balak of Midian on how he may overcome the Israelites.<sup>108</sup> The method appears relatively simple. The king should send attractive Midianite women to befriend Israelite men (*Ant* 4.129), charming and luring them with their beauty until they are 'overmastered by their passion' (*Ant* 4.130).<sup>109</sup> The women should then withdraw from the Israelites, laying down the condition that the Israelites should 'renounce the laws of their fathers' and their God and 'worship the Gods of the Midianites and Moabites' (*Ant* 4.130), if the Israelite youths wished to continue their liaison with the women.

This advice of Balaam is not found in the Bible. In Num 25.1-2, no such strategy is in view. Josephus apparently offers an explanation of the Israelites' behaviour so as to shift the blame onto the Midianite women. The king followed Balaam's advice and the Midianite women succeeded in their plan (131-36). The

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<sup>106</sup> Thus, Bilde 1988:182 demonstrates that the fall of Jerusalem and of the temple became the essential theme in *Bell.* Similarly, in *Ant* and *C Ap*, the themes seem to be the Jewish religion and the Jewish people.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. *Ant* 1.17 where Josephus says that he will set out the details of what is written in the Scriptures, neither adding to nor omitting any of it. But, as Feldman 1984:788 correctly remarks, 'Anyone who takes the trouble,..., to read even a small portion of Josephus' narrative will immediately see how false Josephus has been to his pledge'. Indeed, Josephus' account of the Midianite women represents one such example.

<sup>108</sup> Feldman 2000:376 points out that in Philo (*Virt* 7.34-35) the advice comes from the Midianites rather than from Balaam. Who was the originator of the advice is not as important as the point of the story. Thus, although van Unnik 1974:245-46 rightly observes that Josephus expands much more on the seduction of the Israelite youths by the women, but deals only briefly with the Phinehas story, the latter in no way is less important as Josephus holds him up as a paragon of a law-abiding Jew. See further discussion below.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Philo (*Mos* 1.54.296-99; *Virt* 7.34-40) for a similar expansion of the seduction story.



address of the Midianite women is worth examining, as well as the Israelites' behaviour.

The Israelites are said to have customs and a way of life which are alien to all (ἄλλοτριώτατα). And this is seen in their food and drink. What is noteworthy is that Josephus attributes to the Midianite women the description of the Israelites' food as peculiar (ἰδιοτρόπους) and their drink as 'not common' (μὴ κοινά) (*Ant* 4.137),<sup>110</sup> thus suggesting that the Jewish way of life is generally perceived to be distinct and unique by the Gentiles.

The Midianite women's condition for the Israelites and the latter's unconditional declaration to worship the women's God (cf. *Ant* 4.137) may suggest that Josephus wants to press home the point that the surrounding pagan world poses a threat to the Jewish faith, custom and way of life. It is thus a possible warning to the Jews of his time.<sup>111</sup>

This is seen in Josephus making the women the main blameworthy party for the Israelites' failure to keep their faith and customs. The host people (i.e. the Midianites) are turned into 'alien' people and we get the impression that these 'aliens' and their customs and Gods are bad because they lead young men (i.e. Israelite youths) astray. In this way, what goes against the notion of the one God and the Jewish race is being criticised. But the Israelite youths are equally wrong, and in a more fundamental way because they have transgressed the laws of their fathers (παρέβησαν τὰ πάτρια, *Ant* 4.139). The word παραβαίνω in this context means 'to pass beside', 'to go beyond', 'to overstep' and 'to transgress', thus suggesting that the Israelites have passed by the side of their ancestors, or they have gone beyond and overstepped

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<sup>110</sup> Such a description of the Israelites' lifestyle and custom has to come from non-Israelites as Josephus would not like it to come from the people of God.

<sup>111</sup> van Unnik 1974:261.

their ancestors. They now believe that there are Gods (*Ant* 4.139). It is a gradual process: from mental acceptance of the plurality of Gods to crossing cultural and religious barriers of worshipping other Gods to partaking of strange meats (*Ant* 4.139).<sup>112</sup>

Thus the Israelites are accused of contradicting their law (ὁ νόμος αὐτῶν ἐκέλευε ποιοῦντες διετέουν, *Ant.* 4.139). The combination of τούναυτίον and διετέλουν forms a sharp critique of the Israelites' behaviour: they incessantly opposed that which their law commanded. This is described as 'lawlessness' or 'transgression of the law' (παρανομίαν) and a 'sedition' (στάσιν), which leads to the ultimate danger of complete destruction of the Israelites' institutions (*Ant* 4.140).<sup>113</sup> In other words, it is 'unfaithfulness' to the Jewish ancestral tradition, which is what our first definition of idolatry means.

Although Moses's response appears mild (*Ant* 4.141-44),<sup>114</sup> Josephus reveals his perception of the Israelites when he says Moses advised them to mend their ways, not to violate the laws but resist their passion (*Ant* 4.143).<sup>115</sup> And their liaison is

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<sup>112</sup> ξενικοῖς means 'foreign', 'alien'. Does it mean those meats were idol-meats? It is possible that the meats were non-sacrificial meats brought to the party by the Midianite women. However, since the phrase follows immediately the description of the Israelites making sacrifices to the Gods, it is more likely that they were meats taken from the sacrificial table.

<sup>113</sup> van Unnik 1974:251 observes the parallel in King Solomon (1 Kgs 11) and the striking similarity in terminology between the two events. Thus, he rightly comments that '(Great) stress is laid upon the fact that this is a transgression of the Mosaic Law, the specific Law of the Jews that had strongly warned against such practices'. Feldman 2000:380 argues that Zimri's open challenge to not only Moses but Judaism's refusal to 'open itself to other religious views' explains why Josephus regards his (Zimri's) rebellion as much worse than that of Korah which he refers to in *Ant* 4.12.

<sup>114</sup> Feldman 2000:381 observes the difference between Josephus' description here and that found in Num 25. In Num God instructs Moses to execute the chiefs of the people. But here in *Ant* Josephus' Moses 'takes away the initiative from God' and shows much patience and restraint.

<sup>115</sup> Feldman 2000:381 is of the opinion that Moses' speech 'in effect equates moderation with obedience to authority', a concept of obedience (πειθοῖ, *Ant* 6.160) which Josephus seems to try and convey, as also seen in his enumeration of 'his own canon of the cardinal virtues'. This could explain why Moses appears mild, patient and restrained: a reflection of a God who is patient and restrained, unless the people persist in breaking the law.



described as a ‘drunken riot’ (παροινεῖν, *Ant* 4.144).<sup>116</sup>

What is interesting is that unlike Num 25, Moses does not order the execution of the Israelite youths. But Josephus changes the story by making Phinehas take the law into his own hand and kill Zambrias and his wife (*Ant* 4.152-53).<sup>117</sup> Thus Phinehas’ act in killing Zambrias appears to be self-motivated. This helps to indicate that idolaters deserve the worst form of punishment, which requires no legitimation by Moses. For the crime itself and the motivation of Phinehas are sufficient for the act.<sup>118</sup> Josephus’ emphasis on the temptation and the dire consequences of succumbing to it is obvious (*Ant* 4.140).<sup>119</sup>

By making such a connection between Num 25 and the temptations of the Graeco-Roman world, Josephus points to the ‘tempters’ and their ‘temptations’ as leading to idolatry. Thus, Greek religion and Egyptian type of worship will receive a sharp critique later (cf. *C Ap* 2.239-49). But, at the same time, Phinehas is held up as a model of a law-abiding and law-upholding Jew after whom Jews, indeed the rest of the Israelites, ought to pattern their lives (cf. *Ant* 4.154).

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<sup>116</sup> Cf. van Unnik 1974:253 where he shows that such a method of resolving internal strife is often found in the works of Greek historians.

<sup>117</sup> Feldman 2000:384 makes the unlikely suggestion that Josephus was strongly opposed to zealotry that he omits the reward of a covenant of peace as recorded in Num 25.10-13, even though he also concedes that Josephus does praise Phinehas in general. A careful reading of *Ant* 4.152-54 shows that although Josephus devotes much less space to Phinehas, the description of him is positive throughout.

<sup>118</sup> In *Ant* 4.152, Josephus states that the action is to prevent ‘the lawlessness from going further if those who started it were not punished’, and in 4.154, he further describes those others who followed Phinehas as claiming for virtue and striving for honour (φιλοκαλεῖν, ‘to love the beautiful’, Feldman 2000:384). Thackeray’s suggestion that Josephus owes this idea to Thucydides who coined the phrase: οἱ ἀρετῆς τι μεταποιούμενοι, is not convincing as Josephus further describes the action of the rest of the men as brave and that many of the transgressors died as a result.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. van Unnik 1974:252.

### 3.4.3 *Contra Apionem* (2.66-67, 80-81, 239-54, 73-77)<sup>120</sup>

In *Contra Apionem*, Josephus sets out to refute Apion's various charges against the Jews. One of these charges revolves around the Alexandrian citizenship of the Jews. And in *C Ap* 2.66, Apion is said to have challenged the Jews' Alexandrian citizenship by asking why the Jews do not worship the same Gods as the Alexandrians.

Josephus replies with two basic points. The first is the critique of the Egyptian animal worship. He criticises the Egyptian Gods as but animals hostile to humanity. And the Egyptians themselves have no settled opinion about their own religion (*C Ap* 2.66). There is therefore no reason for the Jews to worship the Egyptian Gods.

The second point is the ethnic origin of the Jews. Josephus reasons that the Jews are one 'single and united' race who are loyal to their religious laws (cf. *Ant* 4.201).

Later, in defence of the sanctity of the temple against the allegation that the Jews worship a golden head of an ass (*C Ap* 2.80),<sup>121</sup> Josephus counters that it is at the very least not worse than the animals which the Egyptians worship as Gods (*C Ap* 2.81). His counter-argument seems to aim at silencing the critics of the Jews, since the golden head of an ass is apparently one of the most despicable things to the Egyptians.<sup>122</sup> Thus, Josephus turns the critique of the golden ass into a critique of

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<sup>120</sup> As our main objective is to examine Josephus' critique of idolatry and his grounds for doing so, the methods and rhetorical skill of Josephus are therefore not our concern here. For a study of the polemic and apologetic methods of Josephus in *C Ap*, see Kasher 1996:143-86; cf. Bilde 1988:112-21 where he also proposes the disposition of *C Ap* (117). See particularly the recent essay of Barclay 1998:194-221 where he carefully analyses Josephus' argument against Apion.

<sup>121</sup> Different versions have been put forward. One version says it is a golden ass head (*C Ap* 2.112-14, a version reported by Mnaseas of Patara, quoted by Apion and here preserved by Josephus); another says it is a statue of Moses seated on an ass, holding a book in his hands (Posidonius XXXIV/XXXV.1.3); yet one other version says it is an entire ass, not just the head (Tacitus, *Histories*, V.4.2, 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, cf. Plutarch, *Quaest conviv.* IV.5.3), see Bar-Kochva 1996:310ff for the origins and development of the slander; cf. Feldman 1993:499-501 who provides a truncated account of the theory.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Feldman 1993:145 who mistakenly points out that Apion's charge appeared inconsistent since the Egyptians themselves worshipped animals as Gods, as such he is inconsistent that he should object when others did likewise. For the Egyptians never worshipped an ass. Josephus is perhaps merely being rhetorical here.



Egyptian animal worship, and with a counter claim that the Jews have the 'purest type of religion' (*C Ap* 2.82),<sup>123</sup> as evidenced by the fact that Antiochus Epiphanes and others did not find an ass's head when they invaded the temple (*C Ap* 2.83f).<sup>124</sup>

Josephus further criticises the Egyptians for ascribing to crocodiles and asps honour and virtue (*C Ap* 2.86).<sup>125</sup> For example, the Egyptians regard the bite of a snake or the attack of a crocodile as a reflection of one's worth before God. This, Josephus argues, shows the Egyptians lack sense and their animal worship to be unreasonable, while their Gods' blessing, instead of bringing good, brings pain.

Josephus exploits further the idea of pain brought about by snake bites by suggesting that the adoption of Egyptian customs would lead to the annihilation of all humanity as all the wild beasts would have overrun the earth since they believe the animals are Gods, Gods who fail to create or protect, but only bring disaster (*C Ap* 2.139). By such a critique, Josephus denigrates the Egyptian customs and criticises the Egyptian animal worship for being potentially destructive.

As part of his argument against his accusers, Josephus downplays the significance of the Greek religions by arguing that the advocates of the Greek religions have been censured by their admired sages (*C Ap* 2.239). For they go about representing the Gods according to their own choice: ἀριθμῶ μὲν ὁπόσους ἂν αὐτοὶ θελήσωσιν ἀποφαινόμενοι (*C Ap* 2.240).<sup>126</sup> The term ἀποφαίνω is

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<sup>123</sup> Cf. *C Ap* 2.83-85 when Josephus cites several historians as well as conquerors who agreed with this particular aspect of the Jewish religion.

<sup>124</sup> It was in fact Antiochus, according to Apion, who found an ass's head in the temple when the former invaded it. Josephus' argument seems to depend on the various emperors who occupied the temple (*C Ap* 2.82-83) but found no ass's head. Antiochus' finding in fact revealed that there was not an ass's head. Apion's source, according to Josephus, is dubious (*C Ap* 2.82).

<sup>125</sup> See similar critique above in Wis 15.18-19; and Philo, *Decal* 76-80.

<sup>126</sup> Although the Greeks do not worship animals like the Egyptians, the Gods they worship represent various human aspirations by the functions they perform. Ferguson 1993:143 provides a table of the various Greek Gods' names, their functions and their Roman names (or counterparts). Cf. Price 1999:1-46.

interesting as it carries the meaning of representing and displaying. Josephus thus makes the proponents of Greek religion out to turn their Gods into a display! He uses terms such as ἐξ ἀλλήλων...γινομένους and παντοίους to describe the Greek Gods as giving birth to or being the cause of one another and so give the impression of disorderliness and confusion.<sup>127</sup>

Further, he compares the Greek Gods to animals (ὥσπερ τῶν ζώων τὰ γένη, *C Ap* 2.240), even though the Greeks do not worship animals. But because Josephus claims that the Greeks assigned to their Gods different localities and habits like the different species of animals, he lumps them together with the Egyptian animal worship and so levels a sharp critique against the Greek religions!

The critique of the Greek religions intensifies with a critique of Zeus, whom Josephus accuses of being a 'tyrant and despot' (τύραννον...δεσπότην, *C Ap* 2.241).<sup>128</sup> Zeus and his family are in animosity against each other. Even the Greek intellectuals censure and ridicule the Gods (*C Ap* 2.242) because they are limited in power. Further, they are ever quarrelling and fighting against each other, inflicting wounds on each other and sometimes being harmed by humans! Such description of the Gods shows that the qualities and nature of the Gods are very much the human projection of their own world. Thus it constitutes a powerful critique of the Greek religions as being little different from the human world.

In *C Ap* 2.244, Josephus shifts his criticism to a moral one: the sexual behaviour of the Gods. First of all, the 'noblest' (ὁ γενναϊότατος) and 'chief' (πρῶτος) of all the Greek Gods appears like a sex maniac who goes around seducing

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<sup>127</sup> See, however, Grant 1986:54-71 who gives a systematic exposition of most of the Gods, their functions and deeds. Cf. MacMullen 1981:1-18.

<sup>128</sup> A 'tyrant' and 'despot' are terms used for a dictator, one who oppresses, exploits, controls, even kills his subjects. Kindness and benevolence are never associated with a 'tyrant' and a 'despot', nor is freedom.



and impregnating women only to leave them dead (*C Ap* 2.245). Thus, Josephus makes the chief Greek God out to be morally weak. Further, the ‘chief’ is incapable of providing salvation, but is emotionally unstable, as he is unable to restrain his tears. Sarcastically, Josephus refers to these as ‘fine doings’ (καλά, *C Ap* 2.246).

In a similar vein, he scornfully hurls insults at the legendary tale about adultery in heaven with the Gods standing by as envious spectators (*C Ap* 2.246). The eldest of these Gods, who is the king among them (ὁ βασιλεύς), could not control his passion for his consort (τὴν γυναῖκα) that he had to quickly retreat into his own chamber! By highlighting the moral (or ‘immoral’) activity of the Greek Gods, Josephus shows them to be morally base.<sup>129</sup>

As mentioned, Josephus claims that the Greek intellectuals similarly disapprove of their own religion (cf. *C Ap* 2.242). For the Greek religion is considered ‘irregular’ (ἀνωμαλίας) and ‘erroneous’ (πλημμελείας), the meanings of which suggest inconsistency, ‘mistake’, and ‘error’, thus indicating the falsehood of the Greek religion. Josephus offers four reasons. First is the ignorance of the true nature of God on the part of the Greek law-makers. Second is the failure of these law-makers to formulate correct knowledge (*C Ap* 2.250). Third is the frivolous attitude the law-makers adopt towards religion by allowing poets to introduce Gods according to their own choice, on the basis of their passions, and letting orators decide the names of various foreign Gods on the register (*C Ap* 2.251). People have tremendous freedom to introduce new Gods, based on all the human passions (πάντα πάσχοντας), and according to convenience (τὸν ἐπιτήδειον). Fourth is the great licence granted to

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<sup>129</sup> In addition to these sexually immoral Gods, Josephus highlights the fact that other Gods are enslaved to humanity. For example, the Gods are hired as ‘builders’ (οἰκοδομοῦντες), ‘shepherds’ (ποιμαίνοντες), with some imprisoned like criminals (*C Ap* 2.247; cf. Homer, *Iliad* 21.442–45, 448f). This is further strengthened by the criticism that worshippers of these deities seek after their own benefits and advantages (cf. *C Ap* 2.249).

idol-makers to design and make their own Gods (*C Ap* 2.252).<sup>130</sup> Josephus' conclusion on these Gods is even more critical: some have grown old who once flourished, while new ones are continually introduced as objects of worship (*C Ap* 2.254).<sup>131</sup> The human will (βουλή) seems to play the central role in determining the status and fate of the Gods, who have no will of their own.

What about the Jews? What is the difference between the Jewish religion and the pagan ones? One of the questions raised by Apion in his charge against the Jews is the latter's refusal to erect statues of the emperors. This is the charge against which Josephus argues in *C Ap* 2.73-77. Josephus' explanation is two-pronged. On the one hand, he argues, the Romans do not require their subjects to violate their national laws and would be content to receive honours which the subjects' national laws so far allow (*C Ap* 2.73-74).

On the other hand, Moses does not forbid honours paid to the Roman authority but only prohibits the physical representation of God in images and the making of images of animals. And he offers two reasons for the ban: (1) it is profitable neither to God nor to humanity; (2) God is not a creature (*C Ap* 2.75-76). Thus, the Jewish religion differs from the Greeks'. Further, the Greeks' homage to their emperors is but an extension of their normal religious practice, which is insincere. In contrast, the Jews pay homage to the emperors because Moses never forbids it (*C Ap* 2.77). Accordingly, the Jews offer perpetual sacrifices on behalf of the emperor and worthy people, but not to them. In addition, their honour to the emperors is secondary to that

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<sup>130</sup> This resembles the critique of Isa 44.9-17 save the difference in Josephus' brevity. Cf. Philo's *Decal* 52-80, *Contempl* 3-8, *Wis* 13-15.

<sup>131</sup> The same applies to their temples: some have become desolate, probably having gone out of fashion, while new temples are built, 'according to individual caprice' (κατὰ τὴν τῶν ἀνθρώπων βούλησιν ἑκάστος). The criticism here is levelled against the Gods, their temples, and their worshippers who are fickle and fashionable.



which they render to God. Thus, a line is carefully drawn between honouring the emperor and worshipping God.

Josephus' defence against the charge that the Jews do not erect statues of the emperors thus revolves around the superiority and prominence of the Jewish law. He shows that even the Roman authorities recognise their laws. Such a defence is twofold: (1) it is a declaration of the faithfulness of the Jews in keeping their ancestral laws and tradition; and (2) it is a rejection of the Greeks' insincerity and a ridicule of the commonness of their worship.

### Conclusion

The above discussion shows a twin purpose in Josephus' critique of idolatry: (1) that of warning the Jews against 'unfaithfulness' to the Jewish ancestral tradition; and (2) that of promoting the Jewish nation and thus of persuading non-Jews about the purity and goodness of Judaism.<sup>132</sup> It is therefore not surprising that Josephus holds strongly to the Jewish notion of monotheism.<sup>133</sup> And his emphasis on the 'one God', 'one temple', and 'one holy city' enables us to see why he critiques the Greek religion and the Egyptian animal worship. Thus, for Josephus, the surrounding Graeco-Roman world poses a threat to the Jewish identity and way of life. This is seen in his use of the Num 25 incident, in which he seems to adopt a particular stance towards idolatry, which can be explained by the definitions of idolatry set out in chapter two.

The particular aspect of the definition of idolatry which Josephus seems to emphasise is that which defines idolatry as an act contrary to the Jewish ancestral tradition. In his use of the Num 25 story, Josephus repeatedly refers to the Israelite

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<sup>132</sup> For example, throughout his defence against the charges of Apion and other opponents, Josephus demonstrates an attitude towards the pagan customs and religions that is basically negative. And while he would prefer not to digress to the investigation of other peoples' Gods and religious traditions (*C Ap* 2.237), he would put up an aggressive defence in order to maintain the superiority and purity of the Jewish faith and the Jewish people as a race.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Hurtado 1998:9-14.

youths as having ‘transgressed’ the law and violated the ancestral customs. In other words, idolatry is to Josephus an act of ‘unfaithfulness’, which is the first category of definition set out by Halbertal and Margalit. The flip side of this definition is the worship of ‘alien’ Gods. In the case of Num 25, the people are said to have turned to the Gods of the Midianites, which are ‘alien’.

While the discussion of Phinehas is not as extensive as that of the Israelites’ idolatry, Josephus appears to approve of Phinehas’ act. Three points may be said about Phinehas’ act: (1) death will be the rightful destiny for those who apostatise; (2) the annihilation of the law-breakers (or the ‘unfaithful’) is a legitimate act; and (3) Phinehas’ act is a model for all law-abiding Jews. But why does Josephus view Phinehas in this way? The answer lies in his view of the law. Throughout, Josephus seems to view the law as the regulator of the covenant relationship between the true God and the Jews.<sup>134</sup> This leads us to the next area of emphasis: the law and the true God.

Throughout his critique of idolatry and the Greek religions, Josephus shows that he holds a universal conception of God as the ruler of the universe (*C Ap* 2.185). Thus, for Josephus, the God of the Jews is the only true God whose laws are those of the universe (*Ant* 1.20),<sup>135</sup> thus all other religions are false, hence the critique. From the above, we see Josephus emphasise the universal application of the Jewish law by extending it even to the Gentiles and their religions.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> See Spilsbury 1998:172-91, who shows that the relationship between God and Israel is a covenantal one but best understood through the patron-client model of relationships: God provides Israelites numerous benefactions, of which the law is the greatest. Israel’s response should be wholehearted gratitude to God and obedience and loyalty to the law.

<sup>135</sup> Thus, Mason 1998:85 ably argues, ‘...Moses treated the constitution of the universe before framing his law, just so that his laws alone would be seen to be based upon universal truths, the laws of nature’. Cf. *C Ap* 2.167, 190, where God’s sole rulership is embodied in the first commandment, which thus serves as his basis for critically attacking and rejecting idolatry.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. Mason 1998:87-90 who argues that Josephus is offering the Jewish law as an alternative philosophical system to his Gentile audience.



### 3.5 *Joseph and Aseneth*<sup>137</sup>

According to Gen 41.45, Pharaoh gave Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, to Joseph as his wife. The biblical account is silent about how the couple met and how Joseph, a Hebrew, would end up marrying the daughter of a pagan priest. In *Joseph and Aseneth*, however, we have a detailed account of the couple's encounter in which Joseph is described as a powerful man of God while Aseneth is described in less positive terms, not least her religious belief and practices.<sup>138</sup> The story reveals that the couple were eventually married, a result of Aseneth's stunning confrontation by Joseph concerning the former's idolatrous sin and of divine intervention leading to Aseneth's conversion.

While the text may be a demonstration of the use of the Hellenistic form by the author to carry out an attack on Hellenistic religions,<sup>139</sup> the particular aspect of attack on idolatry calls for a more careful and closer scrutiny. This is due to the fact that idolatry seems to be the barrier between Joseph and Aseneth, and indeed the deciding factor that caused Joseph to keep his distance from Aseneth, triggered Aseneth's repentance, and eventually brought the two together.

Although it has been suggested that *Joseph and Aseneth* is the work of a Christian redactor,<sup>140</sup> the story underlying it is clearly Jewish.<sup>141</sup> Whatever the case,

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<sup>137</sup> The question whether the longer or the shorter recension is the priority remains unresolved. Kraemer 1998:50-58 and 1999:234-65, has tried to argue for the priority of the shorter version. Collins 2000:104 has rightly argued that her (Kraemer's) case has not been fully worked through. Burchard's reconstruction of the longer recension will be followed here.

<sup>138</sup> Schürer III.546 states that *Joseph and Aseneth* 'is a romantic love story in which the author has put a midrashic elaboration of Genesis 41.45, 50-52 and 46.20 into the form of a Hellenistic romance'. For a thorough review of scholarly work on such questions as language, date, provenance, genre, message, and audience of the story, see Chesnutt 1995:20-93. On *Joseph and Aseneth* as a 'recycling' of Aseneth, see Kraemer 1999:234-65.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Barclay 1996:204.

<sup>140</sup> Collins 2000:104, and also his nn190-91.

<sup>141</sup> See Schürer III.549; Gruen 1998:92-93; and Collins 2000:104-5 who argues that the Jewish provenance of *Joseph and Aseneth* has stronger basis; cf. also Tromp 1999:266-71.

our concern here is with idolatry, and the figure of Joseph and the issue of idolatry provide sufficient grounds for viewing this story as Jewish. The story serves as a good example of the practice of idolatry, of religious attacks by the monotheistic Joseph, and reveals the attitude of the author towards idolatry and the reasons for Joseph's attack. We will begin with a sketch of the story.

### 3.5.1 The story: a sketch<sup>142</sup>

The story begins with the dispatch of Joseph to gather grain. He comes to the territory of Heliopolis and requests accommodation at the house of Pentephres (3.1-3), who has a virgin daughter named Aseneth whose beauty is unsurpassed (1.4). However, she despises and scorns every man due to her arrogance (2.1). Upon receiving news of Joseph's impending arrival, her father Pentephres makes the proposal to Aseneth to marry her to Joseph (4.7-8), which she quickly rejects (4.9-11). She flees her parents' presence in order to avoid meeting Joseph (5.1-2). In a subtle twist of the story, the author creates the opportunity for both to meet: Joseph looking up and so seeing Aseneth (7.2), who was looking down from a large window. With some elaborate explanation, the two are willing to meet each other. However, Aseneth's greeting of a kiss is rejected by Joseph, who sees a distinction between himself, a man who worships God, and Aseneth, an 'alien' woman who is idolatrous (8.5).<sup>143</sup>

Aseneth is totally devastated despite Joseph's blessing (8.8-9). Utterly shaken and feeling desperately rejected, Aseneth discards all her idols and spends the next

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<sup>142</sup> Cf. Gruen 1998:89-92 who provides a longer summary of the story than what is given below.

<sup>143</sup> This has been described by Boccaccini 1991:254 as the 'irreconcilability of Jews and Gentiles', the only road to a possible relationship between Joseph and Aseneth is the latter's conversion. This is a very powerful way in which the author shows idolatry to be negative and how giving up an idolatrous lifestyle can lead to a relationship with a 'man' who is also described as 'son of God'.



seven days in tearful fasting, repenting of her idolatry and sin (10-13).<sup>144</sup> At the end of the fast, a heavenly being descends and instructs her on what she should do (14.1-15). This is followed by the angel's announcement of her acceptance to God and her marriage to Joseph (15.2b-6). Her conversion from Egyptian idolatry to the God of the Hebrews is confirmed by the announcement of her changed name: she will be called City of Refuge (πόλις καταφυγῆς, 15.7).<sup>145</sup> And the angel will inform Joseph of Aseneth's repentance and their eventual marriage (15.9-10).

Further, the angel miraculously gives Aseneth a portion of the honeycomb so that she may eat the 'bread of life', drink 'a cup of immortality', and be anointed with 'ointment of incorruptibility' (16.16). This is in sharp contrast to 8.5, where Aseneth is described as having eaten from the table bread of strangulation, drunk a cup of insidiousness and anointed herself with ointment of destruction.

Everything happens as announced. The two are united in a wedding personally organised and solemnised by Pharoah (19.4-11).<sup>146</sup>

### 3.5.2 Idolatry in *Joseph and Aseneth*

With the story sketched out, we will focus on the idolatry of Aseneth which is described as excessive. She even has a chamber (θάλαμος), the first among ten, big and splendid (μέγας καὶ εὐπρεπής, 2.2) which is beautifully decorated, in which she keeps all her idols.

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<sup>144</sup> The author clearly is trying to show that the idols are the root of Aseneth's misery.

<sup>145</sup> See Burchard 1985:226, note 'I' for the significance of Aseneth's change of name. The change of name signals a change in status for Aseneth. She is now the one through whom many people would repent and receive their divine protection. The author thus contrasts the different statuses of those who worship the Most High God and those who worship idols.

<sup>146</sup> The second part is deliberately left out, as it is not my concern here. For an analysis of the second part of the tale, see Barclay 1996:204-16 and Collins 2000:108-10 who hold opposing views.

On the walls of the chamber, there are countless Egyptian Gods (οἱ θεοὶ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων ὧν οὐκ ἦν ἀριθμός),<sup>147</sup> including idols of gold and silver (χρύσοι καὶ ἄργυροι). All these Aseneth worshipped (ἐσέβετο), feared (ἐφοβεῖτο) and to which she performed daily sacrifices (θυσίαις...καθ' ἡμέραν).

Further, Aseneth's linen robe has all sorts of idols that match those in the chamber, with the names of the Egyptian Gods engraved on all the bracelets and stones, and all the faces of the idols carved on them (3.6).<sup>148</sup> The author describes them as a microcosm of the first chamber, thus indicating the extent of Aseneth's idolatry.

The author's critique of Aseneth is seen in Joseph's condemnation of idolatry and of Aseneth. In the text recorded in 8.5-7, Joseph charges Aseneth with being an 'alien' or 'strange' woman whom he will not kiss. The author describes the pair in contrasting terms, using possibly the language of religious rituals or symbols: Joseph is a man who worships God, blesses God, eats blessed bread of life, drinks a blessed cup of immortality and anoints himself with blessed ointment of incorruptibility, while Aseneth is the direct opposite who, as an 'alien' woman, blesses the dead and dumb idols, eats from the table of strangulation, drinks from a cup of insidiousness, and anoints herself with ointment of destruction.<sup>149</sup> Thus, the author shows that the

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<sup>147</sup> They are most likely statues of animals worshipped by the Egyptians. Cf. Wis 15-18; Philo, *Decal* 76-79.

<sup>148</sup> The author's use of the Jewish term εἰδωλα shows that the author views other Gods pejoratively. More importantly, the conception of the one God Most High seems to be behind the author's antagonism against Aseneth's religion.

<sup>149</sup> It is not clear what these rituals or symbols are. They could be either Jewish or Christian ceremonies. However, as Goldenberg 1998:152, n87 has noted, no one has successfully identified these ceremonies. Philonenko 1968:93 (cited by Collins 2000:233, n99) takes it to be a reference to the initiation rite to Judaism. Chesnutt 1995:130 posits that these are the pious habits of the righteous like Joseph. Burchard 1965:126-33 is of the opinion that the formulaic reference to bread, wine and oil refers to the whole of the Jewish lifestyle, rather than to a ritual. He further argues (1985:212), correctly, that the point is not to justify or institutionalise any meal, but to explain why such a person as Joseph does not kiss a 'strange' woman. In view of the uncertainty of these elements, it is best not to draw any conclusion about them.



religion of Aseneth is inferior to that of Joseph, and its ‘strangeness’ leads eventually to destruction. The descriptions not only serve to define Aseneth’s religion, but also act as a wholesale condemnation of it. We see this clearly when the two are placed side-by-side in a tabular form.

| Acts    | Joseph: A worshipper of God    | Aseneth: A ‘strange’ woman |
|---------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| blesses | τὸν θεὸν τὸν ζῶντα             | εἰδωλα νεκρὰ καὶ κωφά      |
| eats    | ἄρτον εὐλογημένον ζωῆς         | ἄρτον ἀγχόνης              |
| drinks  | ποτήριον εὐλογημένον ἀθανασίας | ποτήριον ἐνέδρας           |
| anoints | χρίσματι εὐλογημένῳ ἀφθαρσίας  | χρίσματι ἀπώλειας          |

Thus the contrast between a worshipper of God and a ‘strange’ or ‘alien’ person is an abomination to the Lord God, i.e. Joseph’s God (8.7).<sup>150</sup>

The inferiority and worthlessness of Aseneth’s religious belief and practice are further highlighted in Joseph’s prayer for her in 8.9. The prayer refers the Lord God to that of Israel and claims that he is the Most High (ὁ ὑψιστος), powerful one (ὁ δυνατός), the one who gives life (ὁ ζωοποίησας) to all. What is even more important to our discussion of idolatry is that Joseph’s prayer implies that Aseneth is living in darkness, her belief is erroneous, and that she is without eternal life! We see this in the claims that God called people from darkness (ἀπὸ τοῦ σκότους) into light (εἰς τὸ φῶς), from error (ἀπὸ τῆς πλάνης) into truth (εἰς τὴν ἀλήθειαν),

*Pace* Collins 2000:232-33 who argues that ‘the formulaic language can be referred to the everyday rituals of Jewish life’. The following tabular illustration is not meant to say anything about the meal, but to demonstrate the kind of comparison Joseph is making between himself and Aseneth which condemns Aseneth as an idol-worshipper.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. Barclay 1996:208-9 who carefully sets out the subtle play of the word ἀλλότριος in the story in which an ‘alien’ Aseneth is rejected, however moral or virtuous or physically attractive she might be, because ‘[t]he only legitimate forms of kinship are with those who, through birth or marriage, share the religious orientation of the Jew’.

from death (ἀπὸ τοῦ θανάτου) into life (εἰς τὴν ζωὴν). Why does Aseneth need the blessing of this Most High God of Joseph unless she lacks what God is able to give? Thus Joseph pleads for her spiritual renewal (ἀνακαίνισον αὐτὴν τῷ πνεύματι σου) and prays that she would be made alive by becoming a worshipper of God (i.e. eating the bread of life, drinking the cup of blessing and resting in the eternal life of God). Although idolatry is not explicitly attacked, the idolatrous person, i.e. Aseneth, is made to appear totally and absolutely hopeless, helpless and worthless without the Lord God of Israel.<sup>151</sup> Thus, in a subtle manner, the author implies that the commandment to worship the true God of Israel is universal; hence the universality of the condemnation that comes with its disobedience.<sup>152</sup> The contrast between the God of Joseph and the idols of Aseneth is also worth noting: the God of Joseph is the Most High (ὁ ὕψιστος),<sup>153</sup> while Aseneth's Gods are 'alien Gods' (ἀλλότριοι);<sup>154</sup> the God of Joseph is 'living', while Aseneth's Gods are 'dead and dumb' (νεκρὰ καὶ κωφά); the God of Joseph is 'one', while Aseneth's idols are without number (οὐκ ἦν ἀριθμός).

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<sup>151</sup> But it is precisely with a drastic action such as turning from her idols to the true God is any relationship with Joseph justified (Gruen 1998:90). Collins 2000:234 views this in terms of group membership whose requirement is acknowledgement of the true God, not ethnic descent.

<sup>152</sup> In this case, Collins 2000:234 suggests that the law is reduced to 'monotheism, rejection of idolatry, chastity before marriage, and avoidance of social or sexual intimacy with "aliens" – that is, people who worship other gods'. The behaviour of Joseph as described certainly speaks of one who sees himself as separated because of his association with the Most High God, that is, he worships the true God and thus must keep himself pure and free from an 'alien' woman (8.5), as Barclay 1996:208 correctly points out.

<sup>153</sup> See chapter 4.4 below for a discussion of θεὸς ὕψιστος.

<sup>154</sup> This is an interesting term used to critique Aseneth's idols as it is a carry-over of the OT biblical language. For the author not only describes Aseneth as an 'alien woman', but the Gods too are 'alien'. The term ἀλλότριος, according to Liddell-Scott, carries the meaning of being the opposite to 'one's own', that is, belonging to another. Thus an 'alien woman' (ἀλλοτρία γυνή) could also mean 'another man's wife'. In its reference to the Gods, it has the meaning of 'foreign', 'strange', so that the 'alien Gods' of Aseneth are in fact 'foreign Gods', or Gods belonging to another. Thus, in the use of this term, the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* clearly has in mind a universal conception of the true God, which he applies universally to even the Gentiles (see n150 above). In view of our definition of idolatry, this would fit well with the first category of the definition of idolatry as turning to 'alien' Gods. See conclusion below.



The words and prayer of Joseph are so powerful as to cause Aseneth to repent of her Gods and spurn all her idols (9.2). But this also shows that Aseneth's idols and Gods are quite useless and weak as to be easily spurned and abandoned (cf. 10.1-13.14). And 10.12-13 shows that the idols can be discarded and ground to pieces; and all pagan Gods, sacrifices and the like can be destroyed, discarded and removed. One of the most significant comments of Aseneth is seen in 10.13b, when she throws all the sacrificial food away: 'By no means must my dogs eat from my dinner and from the sacrifice of the idols, but let the alien dogs eat those' (10.13b). The food that has been sacrificed to the idols is considered so defiled and tainted that it is not even appropriate to feed it to the dogs. It is fit only for 'alien' dogs (οἱ κυνὲς οἱ ἀλλότριοι, 10.13). The word ἀλλότριος, used here for 'alien' dogs, is also used in 8.5 to describe Aseneth as an 'alien' woman, presumably because of the 'alien' Gods she worshipped (cf. 11.7). Thus, the 'alien' dogs here may be a parallel to the 'alien' Gods.

The next attack on idolatry is now made by Aseneth's soliloquy in 11.3b-14. The attack on idolatry is set in the context of Aseneth's effort to harness enough courage to address the God of Joseph (cf. 11.7). In 11.7-9, we have a syllogism that also constitutes an outline:

- v 7     the Lord God hates all those who worship idols and alien Gods;
- v 8b    I (Aseneth) worshipped dead and dumb idols;
- v 8a    Therefore the Lord God has come to hate me too.

In v 7, idols and alien Gods, like in earlier passages, refer to the Egyptian animal statues. Hence, the God of Joseph hates all idol-worshippers who, together with their idols, constitute objects of divine hatred. Aseneth's confession of her idolatry in v 8 serves as another attack on Egyptian idolatry: they are 'dead and dumb idols' (εἰδωλα νεκρά καὶ κωφά). Her partaking of the food and drink offered to these

idols is condemned as defiling her mouth. Such defilement is blamed for Aseneth's lack of boldness to address Joseph's God (v 9).<sup>155</sup> The syllogism leads to the logical conclusion that the Lord God of Joseph has also come to hate Aseneth since she is an idol-worshipper.

In her second soliloquy, Aseneth begins with the acknowledgement that she is a 'wretched woman' (11.16), an orphan and desolate, a state in which the true God is absent (cf. 12.8).<sup>156</sup> And she again accepts that she has worshipped idols and that her participation in eating the sacrificial food and her blessing the idols have defiled her mouth (11.16). The connection is made between idol worship and defilement, serving as a critique of idolatry.

Once Aseneth has gathered sufficient courage, she begins to address God in confession of her sin. In 12.4-5, Aseneth confesses her sin as lawlessness and irreverence (ἡνόμησα καὶ ἡσέβησα, 12.4). And it is explained in terms of her idolatrous belief and practice. 12.5 repeats her previous statements that her mouth is defiled by the eating of sacrificial food and by the participation at the table of the Egyptian Gods. For these idols and Gods of the Egyptians are 'dead and dumb', a repeat of her previous agreement with Joseph's words (cf. 11.8; 8.5). It is of great importance that Aseneth is reported to be the one making the condemnation and carrying out the attack on her idols. 13.11 thus forms an important understanding of the critique: it is Aseneth herself who has now recognised that all the Gods which she is used to worship are 'dead and dumb' idols (13.11; cf. 21.13f). What this suggests is

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<sup>155</sup> Aseneth's soliloquy seems to echo the words of Joseph in 8.5-7. Either Joseph knows Aseneth's idolatrous practices because they are commonly carried out by the Egyptians everywhere, or Aseneth is so influenced by what Joseph has said that she is agreeing with Joseph. It could be that Aseneth, being of nobility, has more elaborate and 'refined' practices which Joseph would have been aware of since they would, in all probability, have been carried out in Pharaoh's palace. Being so much in love with Joseph, Aseneth is now prejudiced against her own religious practices.

<sup>156</sup> Burchard 1985:218, note 'o': 'Doubtless life often was like that when a person decided to become a Jew. The counterpoint is that it is expected that God will be a new and better father'; cf. 11.3.



that when one comes into the knowledge of the true God one will be enlightened and therefore see the stupidity and futility of idolatry.

### Conclusion

It is noteworthy that the biblical story of Joseph and Aseneth precedes the giving of the ten commandments, which would have made any critique of the kind of idolatry in *Joseph and Aseneth* more difficult. What we have, therefore, in *Joseph and Aseneth* is a clear reading of the first commandment, which imposes a ban on acknowledging other Gods or beings other than the God of the Jews, into an earlier event. Thus, there is the element of timelessness in the application of the commandment in the critique of idolatry.

What our discussion above, therefore, means is that the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* has turned the Lord God of Joseph into the God universal by whom all other Gods and idols may be critiqued. And the contrast between Aseneth's 'alien' Gods (21.13) and Joseph's 'true' God is repeatedly emphasised. This aspect of the author's critique seems to match the first category of the definition of idolatry: other Gods are 'alien' Gods. Any worship of 'alien' Gods is therefore considered idolatrous. By using a man of God to pour scorn on an 'alien' or 'strange' woman whose Gods are equally 'alien' or 'strange', the author shows us his reason for rejecting 'other' or 'alien' Gods: only the God Most High, the God of the Jews, is the true God. Therefore, any failure to render worship to this true God through 'alien' worship constitutes a rebellion.

### 3.6 *Sibylline Oracles*

*Sibylline Oracles* are a widely attested phenomenon in the ancient world. Although there is no satisfactory or conclusive evidence as to the etymology of the word 'sibyl', it is quite possible that the word was originally the proper name of a

prophetess.<sup>157</sup> She was always depicted as an old woman who uttered ecstatic prophecies often treated with great respect because of her age, which is assumed to be granted by the Divine together with divine wisdom.<sup>158</sup>

Although a number of Sibyls were reported by various people from the fourth century BCE,<sup>159</sup> the *Sibylline Oracles* which we shall examine below (Books 3 and 5)<sup>160</sup> are the Jewish (with occasional Christian)<sup>161</sup> concoctions and therefore different from those of the fourth century BCE.<sup>162</sup> While no conclusion has been drawn as to the various Sibyls and their oracles, Books 3 and 5 are generally recognised as having originated from Egyptian Judaism.<sup>163</sup> This is seen in the references to the seventh king of Egypt (3.193, 318, and 608), the various references to Egypt (3.155-61; 5.52-110, 179-285), and the Books' interest in such things as the temple, the expectation of a saviour figure and the eschatological adversary (e.g. 3.611, 75-92; 5.493-504, 512-553). Book 3 dates between 163 and 145 BCE,<sup>164</sup> while Book 5 dates most probably

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<sup>157</sup> It is understood that in the earliest attestations, that is, from the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, the word 'sibyl' referred to a single individual; cf. Collins 1983:317.

<sup>158</sup> See Collins 1983:317 for an interesting legend about the Sibyl. Barclay 1996:216 comments: 'The Sibyl was considered a woman of immense longevity whose age accorded her great authority, while her ancient origins gave to her 'prophecies' of historical events the impression of accurate prediction'. See further Schürer III.618.

<sup>159</sup> Collins 1983:317, n10 cites Aristotle's *Problemata* 954a and Heracleides Ponticus in Clement, *Strom* 1.108.1.

<sup>160</sup> See Collins 1984:365-73 for the introductory comments on the two books.

<sup>161</sup> For examples, 3.776 and 5.256-59. See further Collins 1974:88.

<sup>162</sup> See Grabbe 1992:563.; Barclay 1996:216-18; Collins 2000:83-87, 96-97, 143-50; Gruen 1998:268-69.

<sup>163</sup> Book 4 is accepted as an example of Jewish adaptation of an older Sibylline oracle (Collins 1984:363); which was composed in about 80 CE, which Grabbe 1992:563 thinks is an old Hellenistic oracle in its core, non-Jewish and dates from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. Books 3 and 5 are the most certain in terms of their Egyptian provenance. See Collins 1983:355-56 (Book 3), and 390-91 (Book 5) for their Egyptian provenance and their Jewish origin.

<sup>164</sup> See Collins 1983:354-55 for more details. Gruen 1998:269-71, and 269, n96 provides a good summary of it, but cautions against placing too much emphasis on time and place as it may miss the apocalyptic character of the Sibyl's message. In our case, the time and place are relevant. The time falls within the Second Temple and is therefore close to the time of our NT text in question, and the place being the Diaspora enables us to see how idolatry is viewed by Diaspora Judaism.



after 80 CE and before 130 CE given its reference to the Nero legend and the destruction of the temple.<sup>165</sup>

While *Sibylline Oracles* often predict woes and doom, they carry with them the agenda of political propaganda, mostly with a religious twist, i.e. they are related to the will of the Gods and often have to do with the question of right worship.<sup>166</sup> Our discussion of The *Egyptian Sibylline Oracles* below will be confined to the issue of worship and idolatry: how do the two books view idolatry? What grounds do they offer for rejecting idolatry? And what definitions of idolatry are at work here?

### 3.6.1 The critique of idolatry in *Sibylline Oracles*

#### Book 3

In her attack on idolatry in 3.29-39, the Sibyl tells us that the creator God (3.8) is the one God (εἷς θεός), sole ruler (μόναρχος), ineffable (ἀθέσφατος), lives in the sky (αἰθέρι ναίων) (3.11); he is self-begotten (αὐτοφυής), invisible (ἀόρατος), and sees all things (ὁρώμενος αὐτὸς ἅπαντα) (3.12).<sup>167</sup> This God is not made by sculptor's hand, nor by a cast of gold or silver, nor the human crafts (3.13-14). Such conception of God reflects a traditional Jewish position, seen particularly in Isa 40.18-26 (chapter two above) and Wis 13.10-19 (see p. 80 above).

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<sup>165</sup> See Schürer III.643-45; Collins 1974:80-87 gives a helpful treatment on the speculation of the return of Nero. Cf. Barclay 1996:225 who sees the central motif of Book 5 to be 5.398-401, where the destruction of the temple is given a vivid description.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. Collins 1983:320.

<sup>167</sup> Although Schürer III.633 views 3.1-96 as belonging to Book 2, Collins 1983:354 considers it the conclusion of a different Book (see also Collins 1984:365 but in Collins 2000:84, 3.1-92 is the conclusion of a different Book while 3.93-96 constitutes the fragments of another Book), Gruen 1998:271-72 does not seem to see any value in looking for a 'main corpus' in Book 3 and argues that '[t]he significance of the composition transcends any specific era'. Barclay 1996:218 takes a middle course that takes note of the secondary nature of 3.1-96, without arguing for a specific location of 3.1-96 or dismissing the possibility of it belonging elsewhere. It is necessary to recognise that 3.1-96 does contain references to events after 68 CE. Thus, we would reckon the fact that 3.1-96 is incorporated in Book 3 is assumed to be considered at least by the editor or compiler as relevant to the sibyl's argument, particularly with regard to idolatry.

But it is God who reveals himself (3.15). But humanity have wandered in vain (3.9), and are not mindful of the immortal creator (3.10).

The wandering is seen in the worship of animals, idols and attendance and service at the godless temples (3.32).<sup>168</sup> These idol-worshippers are further described as not fearing the existing God (3.33).<sup>169</sup> They rejoice in the evil of stones and forget the judgement of the immortal saviour (3.34-35).<sup>170</sup> They have viewed their idols as the representation of their Gods. However, the Sibyl would not accept this since to her the true God is the creator and himself cannot be fashioned (cf. 3.13-14).

In an ingenious combination of the evil of murder, impiety, double-tonguedness (deceit and gossip?), and adultery, the Sibyl lumps idol-worshippers together with all kinds of evil (3.36-38; cf. Wis 14.22-29).<sup>171</sup> They are therefore wicked (κακόν, 3.39) and are 'looters' without shame (3.40). We are not told what the idol-worshippers steal. But the Sibyl's purpose is to equate idol-worshippers with shameless thieves! There is thus nothing positive to be said about idol-worshippers. Thus, idolaters face eschatological destruction (3.46-59), which the Sibyl attributes to idolatry as a central reason.<sup>172</sup>

In 3.57-59, we are told of the present religious life of the people: cities are 'embellished' (κοσμεῖσθε) with temples (ναοῖς), stadia (σταδίοις), markets

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<sup>168</sup> The sitting at the doors of the temples could be that either the people are waiting for their turn to enter the temples and offer sacrifices, a form of queuing, or they are voluntary helpers sitting as guards or guides. In either case, they give themselves to the service of the idols, instead of serving the great true God. It could also be cultic rituals which involved the eating of idol food (cf. 2.96 where the people are instructed not to eat sacrificial food, εἰδωλοθύτων δ' ἀπέχεσθαι; and 2.59 where they are warned against worshipping idols).

<sup>169</sup> Collins 1983:362, note 'f', citing Geffcken, agrees that it should be οὐ τρέμετε instead of τηρεῖτε.

<sup>170</sup> This is an obvious repetition of earlier statements in 3.29. However, it is now taking on a greater force as the continuing verses would show.

<sup>171</sup> Wis 14.27: For the worship of idols with no name is the beginning, cause, and end of every evil.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. 3.59 where, after describing the idolatry of both Rome and Egypt, the Sibyl says, 'so that you may come to the bitter day' (ἵν' ἔλθῃτ' εἰς πικρὸν ἥμαρ). Cf. Hab 2.18-19 where a critique of idolatry is levelled against Babylon, following a prediction of its woes.



(ἀργυράϊς) and images of gold, silver and stones (χρυσοῖς ξοάνοις τε ἀργυρέοις λιθίνοις).<sup>173</sup> Such terms describe the cities in the Graeco-Roman world where everyone is free to practise one's religion and where organised pagan activities are rampant and alive.

Thus, the Sibyl powerfully portrays idols and their places of activity and worship as trouble-causing evils that bring about end-time destruction.<sup>174</sup> The readers are left with the idea that idolatry constitutes the chief reason for their eschatological destruction because it is dishonouring to God.<sup>175</sup>

She further elaborates on this reason for the desolation of the land, the fall of the altar, walls and temple, and the eventual exile of the Jewish people (3.275-79). We may summarise these points: (1) the disobedience to the holy laws of the immortal God in the heart (3.275-76);<sup>176</sup> (2) the worship of unseemly idols (3.276-77); (3) the lack of the fear of God;<sup>177</sup> and (4) the unwillingness to honour God (οὐκ ἔθελες τιμᾶν, 3.279). The attack on idolatry here moves one level deeper. It is not just the

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<sup>173</sup> The images could be found everywhere, streets, marketplaces, and obviously temples. Cf. Stambaugh and Balch 1986:88-89 who point out that Hellenistic architecture of public buildings was prominent in all Greek cities so that even Palestine was without exception. In fact, much of the temple in Jerusalem was built in Greek style. See further Koester 1982:67-73

<sup>174</sup> Cf. 3.221-33 where in a long discourse in praise of the Jews, the Sibyl sidetracks into a list of vices of which the Jews are never guilty. The views there are indicative of the Sibyl's attitude towards pagan religions. These are the pagan religions in various forms, i.e. sorcery and astrology. The Sibyl views them as erroneous.

<sup>175</sup> Similarly, the Sibyl cites idolatry as the reason for the future exile of the Jews. It is on the basis of post-exilic material that the Sibyl has made her pronouncement. In 3.282ff, we are able to see post-exilic elements which provide the hope in the Sibyl's oracles. See further below.

<sup>176</sup> The word φρήν is used to describe such a disobedience. It carries the meaning of 'the heart or the mind' as the seat of thought (Liddell-Scott 1940:871). In other words, the disobedience begins at the cognitive level and is thus the beginning of all the errors.

<sup>177</sup> The 'fear of God' is an important theme in the OT. In Prov 1.7 the fear of God is linked to the acquisition of wisdom. And in Eccl 12.13, the fear of God and the obedience to his commandments are one and the same thing. In 3.278, the Sibyl refers to God as the 'immortal begetter' of Gods and all humanity, thus suggesting that the Gods and humanity owe their existence to the true God. Humanity therefore ought to know and worship the true God, not idols.

act of idolatry, but the more fundamental attitude of the 'will' not to honour God.<sup>178</sup>

By explicating the reasons as the cause of the destruction of the land of Judaea, the temple and the eventual exile, the Sibyl exposes the seriousness of the consequences of idolatry and holds it solely responsible for the plight of the Jewish people. Thus, idolatry is clearly deserving the utmost condemnation as it causes terrible disasters.

The 'Great God' receives a further treatment in 3.545-54, where acts contrary to the 'Great God' are negatively portrayed (3.547-48, 554). The Sibyl suggests that the way to seek the face of the 'Great God' is to avoid such an error (πλάνον, 3.548). She then gives an example through a eulogy of the Jews: the Jews do not honour the works of humans (3.586-89), but fully honour the temple of the 'Great God' (3.575), eat sacred food in a holy manner (3.576-79), keep the law (3.580-84), worship the immortal God (3.591-94), and are morally holy (3.595-600).

The Sibyl thus sets up a contrast between all the Gentiles, their nations and the Jewish people who worship the true God. The former face terrible judgement (3.601-5) for their failure to piously honour God. But the latter will enjoy salvation (3.702-31). Thus far, the Sibyl reveals an attitude towards idolatry that is totally scornful while her view of the worship and honour of the immortal begetter is absolutely exclusive. Her emphasis throughout is the 'Great God' of the Jews and his 'honour', making him and the lack of honour for him the ground for rejecting all other Gods and idols.

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<sup>178</sup> There could be many reasons for the people's unwillingness to honour God. It could be the burden of the laws. It could be the lure of pagan religions. Or it could be the uncertainty of the Jews as a nation, a race and a people. The Sibyl does not seem to be bothered by the reason. For the truth of the immortal God as the begetter of all is a far better reason to worship and honour him than any other reasons not to.



## Book 5<sup>179</sup>

Here, Sibyl declares the destruction of Egypt and renews her attack on Egyptian idolatry in 5.75-85. The idolaters are accused of being wicked and their persistent idolatry ‘enduring evil’ (5.75). They ‘worship stones and brute beasts’ instead of honouring God (5.77; cf. 3.29-32).<sup>180</sup> 5.78-79 reveals many other things which are worshipped by the Egyptians without reason. These are senseless and foolish; as such it is not lawful even to mention them. Thus, the Sibyl shows idolatry to be unlawful and therefore a crime.

Following a similar tradition as Isaiah (cf. Isa 44.9-20), the Sibyl describes the idols pejoratively as being brought about by human hands (5.80). The Sibyl uses the word κόπος to characterise the making of idols, which carries the meaning of ‘toil’, thus giving the impression that idol-making is a wearisome activity.<sup>181</sup> And it is the result of human wicked notions (5.81-82). This description portrays the Egyptian Gods as of material substance (5.83), and are consequently lifeless (ἀψύχους), dumb (κωφούς) and easily destroyed (ἐν πυρὶ χωνευθέντας) (5.84).

In a lengthy praise of the Jews (5.238-85; cf. 3.573-600), the Sibyl combines a prediction of mortals’ acknowledgement of God with an announcement of the happy ends of the righteous, which she declares as the termination of the Egyptian animal worship (5.278-80).<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> It is an accepted fact that Book 5 consists of six oracles or collection of oracles. See Schürer III.644; and Collins 2000:143. In the following discussion, we will confine ourselves to idolatry.

<sup>180</sup> See our discussion of Wis 15.18-19, Philo, *Decal* 76-79 and *Contempl* 3-8 above. The Sibyl’s critique differs from those of Wis and Philo who level their critique at an intellectual level. By virtue of her name and style, that is, the *Sibylline Oracles*, the Sibyl’s critique tends to be one of speaking out oracles with little or no intellectual or philosophical discussion.

<sup>181</sup> Liddell-Scott 1940:978-79

<sup>182</sup> Although this may be a prediction of the mortals’ turning to God, the words at the end of 5.80 speak much against Egyptian animal worship: στομάτευσσι κενόις καὶ χείλεσι μωροῖς (with vain mouths and foolish lips). Both words, κενός and μωρός denote both emptiness and futility, in addition to vanity and folly.

In a similar vein, she announces the disasters that are coming to the nations, which she says are meant to make humans take note of God (5.352). From 5.353 to 5.356, the Sibyl describes the idolaters as 'hostile' (δυσμενέας, 5.353), who will receive no mercy (οὐκ ἐλέήσει). Their sacrifices are unacceptable (5.354) and their objects of worship offensive.<sup>183</sup>

The solution offered by the Sibyl is to love God, the wise eternal begetter (5.360). The contrast is clear and simple: God is wise; idols are unwise; God is eternal; idols are lifeless; God is the begetter of all; idols are made. The purpose of the Sibyl in condemning idolatry seems to be to show that the God of the Jews is the one true and eternal God so that others (i.e. the pagans) might be drawn to him.<sup>184</sup> The Sibyl's grounds for rejecting idolatry are therefore a combination of several conceptions of God, among which are wisdom, eternity, and creatorship of the imperishable God.

Thus it is not surprising that Isis receives equally vehement attack (5.484). According to Ferguson, Isis is the 'most important of the mother goddesses of the Hellenistic world to whom culture and mysteries were attributed'.<sup>185</sup> Three things are said about Isis: she will remain by the streams of the Nile alone; she will be a maenad on the sands of the Acheron (i.e. Hades); and no one would remember her. Thus, Isis will lose her followers as she belongs to the past. And instead of being worshipped, she is now a follower of Dionysus. She will be a speechless maenad (μαινάς

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<sup>183</sup> I.e. Hermes (ἄψύχοις θ' Ἑρμαῖς) and Gods of stone (τοῖς λιθίνοισι θεοῖσιν) (5.356).

<sup>184</sup> In 3.669-709 we read of the defence of the temple by God himself through a cosmic display of wrath against those who seek to destroy it. Such wrath of God eventually leads to the 'conversion' of some who would offer worship in God's temple and meditate on the law of the Most High God (3.718-19). See Barclay 1996:220-21.

<sup>185</sup> Ferguson 1993:249. Cf. Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* in which Isis is given special significance through the transformation of Lucius back into a man, and the novel of Apuleius ends on a strong religious note. See also Price 1999:140-1 for a discussion of the religious commitment.



ἄναυδος, 5.485) who is as good as dead (ἄχέροντος).<sup>186</sup> By this critique, the Sibyl suggests that Isis will be passed into oblivion (5.486).

Serapis is next in line to be attacked. A saviour God, he would now be unable to save himself as he reposes on many raw stones, an indication that he suffers from a heavy casualty (κείση πτώμα μέγιστον, 5.488), due largely to the fact that his followers are now turning their attention to the imperishable God. In other words, the Sibyl is suggesting that Serapis will lose out in the contest against the imperishable God. For his followers are aware that he is nothing (5.491). Following such a condemnation of Isis and Serapis, the Sibyl continues to predict that the Egyptians would recognise their ancestral custom to be terrible (5.494).<sup>187</sup> And many Egyptians would convert to the imperishable God (5.497). The fact that the true God of the Jews is 'imperishable' is sufficient ground for rejecting all other Gods and idolatry. And the Sibyl applies this conception of God universally,<sup>188</sup> suggesting that the nations too could turn to this imperishable God and be saved from their future disasters.<sup>189</sup>

### Conclusion

The above discussion of *Sibylline Oracles* 3 and 5 demonstrates the widespread condemnation which idolatry receives from the writer of the oracles. The Sibyl reveals her attitude towards the pagan religions as one of intolerance. But this intolerance must be viewed from the perspective that she holds the belief that there is only one

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<sup>186</sup> Ἀχέροντος means Hades; but literally it means 'river of woe, one of the rivers of the world below' (Liddell-Scott 1940:141).

<sup>187</sup> Cf. 5.495-96 provides the results of the teaching of Egyptian ancestral custom, which are ridiculed, despised and degraded: the Egyptian Gods are made from stone and earthenware, and are therefore devoid of sense.

<sup>188</sup> For example, 5.264-265 refers to the conversion of the Greeks to the true God and their conformity to the laws.

<sup>189</sup> Cf. 5.274-285 where the Sibyl predicts the failure of crops in yielding their harvest until all humans turn to the 'immortal eternal God', who is the 'ruler of all'. And the Jews are cited as the example for the nations as they piously put their faith in the 'one begetter' who alone is 'eminent'.

God, who alone is self-begotten and cannot be represented (cf. 3.11-15). The true God of the Jews is further described as 'immortal', 'eternal', 'imperishable', 'the great God', 'the begetter', and 'ruler of all'. It is against the background of such a theological foundation that she carries out her critique of idols, idol-worshippers, and the Egyptian animal worship.

Thus, there must be no representation of the true and great God, a principle based on the second commandment. Thus, idol-making is viewed by the Sibyl as an attempt to represent God, and the worship of idols and animals considered a 'going astray' or 'wandering' from the great God (e.g. 3.29, 721). Thus, on the basis of the second commandment idolatry is defined and critiqued.<sup>190</sup> From the Sibyl's critique, it appears that the second broad category of the definitions of idolatry receives greater emphasis. In other words, the Sibyl emphasises the definition of idolatry as misrepresenting God, both visually and cognitively. By applying the conceptions of God universally, that is, Yahweh the true God of the Jews is now the 'great God' of all humanity, the Sibyl rejects the worship of all idols as dishonouring the true God and all visual images of divinity as idolatrous.

### 3.7 Summary and conclusion

This chapter serves to highlight the reactions of the Diaspora Jews against idolatry. While they are not exhaustive, they represent some quarters of the Diaspora Jews in their attitude towards idolatry and reflect the different grounds on which idols and idolatry are rejected. We may summarise as follows. The Jews in the Diaspora in general view idolatry negatively and, on the basis of the Jewish scripture, pour scorn on and ridicule idols as stupid and absurd, and criticise the idol-makers as equally

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<sup>190</sup> Although the first two commandments are not explicitly stated, the frequent reference to the law or holy law of the great God must be taken to include the ten commandments; cf. 3.275-76 where humanity's disobedience is to the 'holy laws' of the immortal God.



stupid. There appear to be some common emphases among all the Jewish authors; but there are also differences in emphasis. In fact, what we have seen above reflects different emphases on the different aspects of idolatry. And our definitions of idolatry as set out in chapter two are not always taken as a package. In other words, some Jewish authors would emphasise some aspects of the definitions while others emphasise the other aspects.

What appears to be the common grounds of the above Diaspora Jews for rejecting idolatry are: (1) the true God of the Jews; (2) the Jewish law (i.e. the Jewish ancestral custom/covenant), particularly the first two commandments; (3) the Isaianic tradition that critiques idols and idol-makers.

For example, Philo and the author of Wis appear to emphasise the definition of idolatry as misrepresenting God visually and at the cognitive level. Philo argues philosophically and draws heavily on the Jewish scripture to press home his points and advocates the Torah as the basis for condemning idolatry. Philo's approach to idolatry further includes one's passions. For example, his description of Gaius' efforts in making himself a God reveals that he views those efforts as Gaius' passions for idolatry. Similarly, he refers to the passions of the poor in begging for alms (especially money) at the gates of the wealthy as idolatry. The author of Wis, on the other hand, adopts an approach that is basically a polemic targeted at an inner circle. Through their critiques, we are able to see that Philo and the author of Wis seem to view the Jewish conception of the true God as universally applicable to all humanity.

Josephus differs from Philo and the author of Wis in both his approach and emphasis. For Josephus, the approach to idolatry can be seen in his constant application of the scripture to the life in the Hellenistic world. He picks out from aspects of the Jewish scripture to argue against the idolatrous Hellenistic way of life.

He neither approaches idolatry from an purely intellectual perspective, nor aims at the inner circle of Jews. Rather, he uses scripture but at the same time embellishes the biblical account so as to make it fit his contemporary world. This is seen particularly in his use of the Num 25 incident. The behaviour of the Israelite youths is described as a 'transgression' against the ancestral customs and laws. Such an emphasis provides the ground for his rejection of the Israelite youths' behaviour as idolatrous – the second aspect of our first category of definition of idolatry. But Josephus also emphasises the second category of the definition of idolatry – misrepresenting/dishonouring God. Idol-making, Egyptian animal worship, the Greek Gods, and emperor worship all receive severe critique from Josephus.

*Joseph and Aseneth* represents yet another approach, which critiques idolatry through a comparison between the true God of the Jews and the idols of Aseneth. This comparison and contrast is further seen in the lives of both Joseph and Aseneth, the praiseworthy God of Joseph and the condemnable idols and Egyptian Gods of Aseneth. One of the key terms used for condemning idolatry is 'alien'. For the author of *Joseph and Aseneth*, the Gods and idols of Aseneth are described as 'alien', while the God of Joseph is the true God. And throughout, Joseph is described in favourable terms while Aseneth is a miserable person until her conversion. What we see here is an emphasis on the 'alienness' of idolatry, which fits the first category of the definition of idolatry set out by Halbertal and Margalit in chapter two. The 'God Most High' also receives a strong emphasis, and this conception of God serves as a ground for the author to reject idolatry.

The last Jewish author is that of the *Sibylline Oracles* in which the Sibyl pours scorn on idols and idolatry. This last author represents a less intellectual negation and critique of idolatry, compared to Philo and the author of Wis. The approach of the



Sibyl differs from all the above Jewish authors. The author of *Sibylline Oracles* adopts an approach that does not discuss idolatry, but simply makes ‘prophetic’ and ‘polemical’ utterances against idolatry. The Sibyl simply states ‘propositions’ without elaboration, and is not concerned about the intellectual aspect of her critique.

Throughout, the true God is described as the great God who cannot be represented.

And this conception of the true God is that he is ‘immortal’, ‘eternal’, ‘imperishable’, ‘the great God’, ‘the begetter’, and ‘ruler of all’. The second category of misrepresenting/dishonouring the true God receives much emphasis.

The interesting point to note is that all the Jewish authors discussed above seem to employ the first two commandments to varying degrees, some explicit and others not so explicit. To this end, the Num 25 incident is being used with a twist by Josephus who added many more details not found in the LXX. The story serves to highlight the fact that the covenant God of Israel is the reason for Jews to reject other Gods.

In a similar vein, those LXX texts on ‘idolatry’ discussed in the previous chapter, such as Ezek 2.3-7, Jer 2.1-23, Isa 46.1-13, often use the language of ‘whoring’ to describe ‘unfaithfulness’. What we see in the above Jewish authors who criticise idolatry as ‘unfaithfulness’ is that there is an absence of such language. Instead, the criticism tends to be direct and the grounds are usually made explicit. The use of the Isaianic tradition in Isa 44.9-20 is also worth mentioning at this point. This LXX text is being used as a basis for almost all the criticisms of idols, their origin, and the idol-makers. And when this is seen together with the second commandment, our Jewish authors have indeed demonstrated a clear basis for the rejection of idolatry.

While the above Diaspora Jews reflect a negative attitude towards idolatry, there are possible loopholes that are liable to exploitation. For example, both Philo’s

and *Wisdom of Solomon*'s critiques and emphasis can leave room for idolatry, as it is entirely possible for a person who does not make any objects for worship, nor confuse the true God with nature, to visit the temple of Pan.<sup>191</sup> Similarly, while Josephus appears to have covered quite a wide area of idolatry, the whole question of action and intention is left out. In other words, Jews who remain relatively free from Josephus' criticism can possibly accommodate to idolatry in terms of their intention or action. For example, they may confuse God with nature or demons at the cognitive level, without actually becoming idolatrous in the way Josephus defines or critiques idolatry. It seems that Josephus' emphasis is mostly on the direct worship of idols, so that the lack of emphasis on association with idols, such as eating idol food at the pagan temple, creates a loophole for Jews to accommodate to idolatry without appearing to be so. As for *Joseph and Aseneth*, the simple and direct account of the story allows Jews to misrepresent God visually, since it is the 'alien' Gods that the author is opposing. In the case of *The Sibylline Oracles*, the lack of emphasis on the possibility of Jews turning away from Yahweh to 'alien' Gods leaves room for Jews to accept that while there is only one true God, he can be the same God as that of other religions, for example, Zeus. Conceptually, one can think of the great God of the Jews as the same as the Gods of others, just that he has a different name.

While there are loopholes/chinks, at times, what is ambiguous can also be exploited. For example, the use of a pagan juridical formula which invokes the name of a pagan God can be ambiguous enough for some Jews to have no difficulty with its use. These will be our discussion in the next chapter.

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<sup>191</sup> See chapter 4.6.1 below.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### JEWS AND THE WORSHIP OF THE GODS

#### 4.1 Introduction

We have seen in the last chapter that Jewish authors in the Second Temple period generally reflect a negative stance towards idolatry and concluded that they view idolatry as an act of unfaithfulness to the true God and a break from their ancestral tradition. The worship of idols is seen as a disloyal and dishonouring act to the covenant God of Moses. Most of them hold the theme of the true God and the law, while some also reflect the Isaianic tradition in their critique of idolatry. These authors argue vehemently against idolatry and oftentimes ridicule both the Gentile idols/Gods and the idol-makers.

While such a view suggests a Diaspora Judaism that was clearly anti-pagan and anti-idolatry, we need to ask whether this defines Judaism on idolatry as a whole, or whether it represents only one aspect of Judaism with other sections of Judaism adopting a different stance. In chapter three we have noticed that the definitions of idolatry set out by Halbertal and Margalit are not always adopted as a package, and that there are loopholes/chinks in the different emphases of the Diaspora Jews whom we examined. In other words, there were different views about what constituted idolatry. Moreover, there is evidence, both literary and archaeological, to suggest that there remain ambiguities in the definitions of idolatry. Even within the LXX, idolatry is not always clearly defined, with the exception of the first two commandments which in themselves are limited in scope. The differences in emphasis and ambiguities mean that different Jews could behave in a manner they do not consider idolatrous but which is considered idolatrous by others.

In this chapter, we will examine some of these examples to see how they may enlighten our understanding of Second Temple Judaism and how they may serve as

parallels to the ‘strong’ in 1 Cor 8-10, who display a benign attitude towards the pagan Gods, and their willingness to attend pagan temples and participate in cultic meals. In other words, are there Jewish parallels in the Second Temple period in terms of thought, attitudes, or actions, or a combination of these, to those of the ‘strong’ in 1 Cor 8-10?

We will begin with an examination of Exod 22.27, its understanding by Philo and Josephus, and whether it might serve as a parallel to the understanding of the ‘strong’. This will be followed by a discussion of the *Letter of Aristeas* which will show that it is possible for Jews to adopt an accommodating attitude towards other Gods, at a cognitive level. We will then discuss the use of the term ‘Theos Hypsistos’ among Jews and Gentiles, which will reveal a possible conceptual overlap about God between Jews and Gentiles. This will raise the question whether at a cognitive level an accommodating attitude and conceptual overlap about God might also serve as a parallel to the ‘strong’. Next, we will examine Artapanus who represents an example of a Jew who accommodated to other religious traditions, particularly the Egyptian cultural and religious traditions. Finally, we will look at actual examples of accommodation and participation by Jews in idolatry from literary and inscriptional sources. These discussions will raise the question of how ambiguities in different definitions of idolatry might be exploited, ranging from a cognitive/conceptual level to a practical level. And such ambiguities may also raise the question as to how those Jews who accommodated to idolatry could serve as parallels to the ‘strong’ in 1 Cor 8-10.

## 4.2 LXX Exod 22.27a

### 4.2.1 What does the LXX ban in Exod 22.27a teach?

The Hebrew text of Exod 22.27a is **לֹא תִקְלָל אֱלֹהִים**, which is rendered in most English translations as ‘you shall not revile God’ (NJB, REB, RSV, NRSV), with the exception of the King James’ Version and the Vulgate which follow the LXX: ‘Thou



shalt not revile the Gods'.<sup>1</sup> However, the LXX translates it as follows: θεοὺς οὐ κακολογήσεις... The use of the plural θεοί in the LXX is intriguing and calls for a closer look.

In Exod 20.2, the singular θεός is used while the plural θεοί is used in Exod 20.3, even though the same Hebrew word אֱלֹהִים is used in both verses. Similarly, the Hebrew אֱלֹהִים is used in Exod 23.32 and is translated in the LXX as θεοί, with the context clearly pointing to the Gods of the nations. But there is no clear indication in Exod 22.27a that points to the Gods of the nations so that the rendering of אֱלֹהִים as θεοὺς in the LXX seems puzzling. Why did the translators do this?

van der Horst argues that the translators 'wilfully made the text say what it now says', that is, one should not criticise other people's Gods whom the Jews encountered daily in Alexandria.<sup>2</sup> His suggestion that the background to the LXX rendering is a genuine desire for tolerance towards other religions is highly plausible.

What is clear is that Exod 22.27a (LXX) prohibits 'cursing' (in the Hebrew) or 'criticising' (in the Greek) other people's Gods. And those who read the Greek version of the Pentateuch were mostly Hellenised Jews who did not speak or read Hebrew. Could it be possible that the LXX command was meant to advise the Jews at least not to criticise the Gods of the Gentiles? And if this is possible, could it not be possible that on this basis the 'strong' in 1 Cor 8-10 were exercising a certain restraint towards other people's Gods, at least in terms of speech? But this is preceded by another question: were the 'strong' aware of the LXX prohibition? Could what Exod 22.27a commands serve as a parallel to the non-critique of idols on the part of the 'strong'? Before proceeding to this, we will discuss Josephus' and Philo's use of the LXX ban.

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<sup>1</sup> van der Horst 1994:112.

<sup>2</sup> van der Horst 1994:112f.

#### 4.2.2 The use of the LXX ban in Exod 22.27a by Philo and Josephus

In *Spec* 1.53, Philo advises proselytes against reviling the Gods whom others acknowledge so that others would not reciprocate in kind and so profane the true God. Further in *Mos* 2.203-205, Philo explains Lev 24.15-16 (LXX) in the light of Exod 22.27a by saying that anyone who names the name of the Lord commits a sin punishable by death, whereas anyone who curses God bears only the guilt of the sin. Since the two sins appear to have disproportionate punishments, i.e. naming the Lord's name receives a more severe punishment than cursing God, the former must refer to the only God while the latter the Gods. Then, in *QE* 2.5, Philo's answer to why Exod 22.27a forbids reviling other Gods provides three reasons: (1) praise is always better than curse (or revilement); (2) criticism of each other's Gods always leads to war, whereas the Law is peaceable; and (3) restraint from reviling others' Gods may lead to a reciprocation in kind from others, i.e. they may speak well of the true and living God.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Philo's plea to God-believing Gentiles not to revile other Gods seems to be motivated by a belief in peace between different religious traditions, and a desire always to ensure that the true and living God is well spoken of. His concerns are therefore different from those in *Decal* 93.<sup>4</sup>

Josephus is another Jewish author who applies the LXX ban in Exod 22.27a as it is. In *C Ap* 2.237, he declares his preference to pay attention to the Jewish Law over the investigation of Gentile religious traditions. He explains that even Moses explicitly bans

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<sup>3</sup> Goldenberg 1997:385, on the basis of *Spec* 1.53 and *Mos* 2.205, adds one more: the name 'God' should never be taken lightly, even when it is wrongly applied; see also Golderberg 1998:68.

<sup>4</sup> In *Decal* 93, Philo states that those who take an oath should ensure that their soul is pure from lawlessness, their body from pollution, and their tongue from evil speaking. With regard to the tongue, he says that 'it would be sacrilege to employ the mouth by which one pronounces the holiest of all names, to utter any words of shame' (οὐ γὰρ ὄσιον, δι' οὗ στόματος τὸ ἱερώτατον ὄνομα προφέρεται τίς, διὰ τούτου φθέγγεσθαι τι τῶν αἰσχροῶν). In the light of his comments on the ban in Exod 22.27a, it indicates clearly that Philo disapproves of the use of the tongue for reviling other peoples' Gods. For since the tongue is meant for honouring the true God, reviling other people's Gods will only render one's honour and praise of the true God οὐχ ὄσιον!



the derision or blasphemy of others' Gods out of respect for the word 'God'. Elsewhere in *Ant* 4.207, Josephus cites the Law as prohibiting the blasphemy of the Gods others revere. In an earlier citation, *Ant* 4.202, the blasphemy of the one true God is punishable by death, whereas in *Ant* 4.207, no such punishment is suggested at all. This means for Josephus there is still a difference between blaspheming the true God and the Gods, a position similar to that of Philo. The reason for the different punishments is again due to the fact that the true God is distinguished from the Gods.

While it is not clear why LXX renders Exod 22.27a the way it does, it is sometimes explained from an apologetic angle. For example, in *QE* 2.5 Philo asks, 'Do they still accuse the divine law of breaking down the customs of others?' and goes on to say that not only does the Law lend support to those who worship different Gods, but it also 'muzzles and restrains its own disciples'. Such an idea of the Jewish Law giving support to Gentiles who worship different Gods while restraining its own followers provides an example of Jewish tolerance towards idol-worshippers. And it suggests that there were Jews who might be more inclined towards a more positive interpretation of the Scriptures when other Gods were mentioned. Philo's own view might serve as a basis for other Jews to be self-restrained. And it is not unreasonable to suggest that the rendering of אֱלֹהִים of Exod 22.27a in LXX as θεοὺς was apologetically motivated. Interestingly, even though Philo and Josephus cite the same apologetic purpose for the LXX ban, as shown above, they continue to find excuses for reviling others' Gods.<sup>5</sup> But others who read them might judge their comments on Exod 22.27a worthy of consideration and perhaps acceptance.

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<sup>5</sup> E.g. Josephus, *C Ap* 2.74; 2.237-38; Philo, *Spec* 1.12-31. Even in *QE* 2.5 itself, Philo criticises others' religious traditions by saying that they are 'deluded about their own native Gods and because of custom believe to be inerrant truth what is falsely created error,...'; cf. *Decal* 52-81.

Goldenberg has argued that the ban was not obeyed by the Jews,<sup>6</sup> as may be seen in the violent destruction of the pagan shrines during the Maccabean revolt. He further cites Goodenough's argumentation that the excuse of not being familiar with the Greek translation of the Torah is not available to Jews in Alexandria and Cyrene who behaved equally violently towards the pagan religious institutions later, when tensions between Jews and pagans broke out into open war. He concludes that the lack of references about the obedience to the LXX ban suggests that the Jews might not even be aware of the ban. However, the fact that the LXX contains so much criticism of idolatry shows that the violent actions against pagans and their Gods need not be an indication of the lack of awareness of the ban. Moreover, social circumstances might make one less inclined to observe the ban. For example, Josephus and Philo know about the ban but pay mere lip-service to it, as seen above. Thus, the LXX ban can be used or ignored - it is liable to be used in a situation of social-religious accommodation.

#### 4.2.3 Were the 'strong' aware of LXX Exod 22.27a?

There are at least four possible reasons for their awareness. First, if the 'strong' in Corinth had Jewish influence, they would have been exposed to the Jewish Scriptures which, in all probability, was the LXX,<sup>7</sup> since Jews in the Diaspora mostly knew Greek and not Hebrew.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Goldenberg 1997:387.

<sup>7</sup> The LXX version of the Hebrew Scriptures which the 'strong' know would probably be the Alexandrian version, i.e. the work of the Alexandrian Jews, since that translation is our earliest known translation of the OT; the other versions such as those of Aquila, Theodotion and Symmachus belong to a date much too late to fit in the period under our discussion. The earliest possibility would be Aquila's translation. But since he is known to have studied under R. Akiba who began teaching only in 95CE, his (Aquila's) translation would not even have come into existence during the period when the 'strong' in Corinth and Paul had their exchange over the issue of idolatry. For a good survey of the various Greek translations of the OT, see Swete 1914.

<sup>8</sup> An example is the Jews of Alexandria in Egypt. Feldman 1993:51-52 points out that less than a century after the founding of the city by Alexander, the Aramaic speaking Jews began to speak Greek, pray in Greek, sing Greek Psalms, write in Greek, produce Greek literature and think in Greek. Hence the Egyptian Jews found it necessary to have the Torah translated into Greek. According to Swete 1914:21, the Pentateuch LXX would likely date from the period of the third and second centuries BCE, on the basis that some peculiar words and forms of the LXX are found to be common with Egyptian



Second, the decision of the translators of the Hebrew Bible in rendering the Hebrew אֱלֹהִים as the plural θεοὺς would have been a familiar one, so that Greek speaking Jews were more likely to be aware of the ban. This is because, as van der Horst has noted, the translators' rendering of the Hebrew אֱלֹהִים as θεοὺς was inspired by apologetic motives, i.e. to paint Moses in a good light.<sup>9</sup> This is due, perhaps, to the negative portrayal of Moses by pagan writers such as Manetho who represented Moses as a leprous Jew who led the invasion of Egypt (*C Ap* 1.227-50).<sup>10</sup> Given the religious tension between Jews and Gentiles, such apologetic efforts would have been commonplace.

Third, the constant charges and accusations of pagans against the Jews would have made any serious-minded Jew want to search for an answer or at least some guidance about other Gods.<sup>11</sup> The LXX ban in Exod 22.27a could serve as an alternative for Jews who wished to seek harmony with their Gentile neighbours. Further, the fact that both Philo and Josephus have independently made use of Exod 22.27a (LXX)

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Greek during this period. See also Schürer III.474ff for a discussion of the development of the LXX and its subsequent history. The Roman world by the first century was thoroughly hellenised (Fee 1987:2), not to mention that Corinth was historically Greek. Further, there is no evidence for the use of Hebrew by Diaspora Jews till later, possibly in the second century CE when the Hebrew language increasingly gained influence and recognition among Hellenistic Jews.

<sup>9</sup> van der Horst 1994:113f.

<sup>10</sup> Gager 1972:117 argues that such an identification of Moses with the invaders became a permanent fixture in Alexandrian literature. This is an interesting observation as other writers such as Lysimachus (Josephus, *C Ap* 1.304-11) and Apollonius Molon (*C Ap* 2.145), together with Apion, are also represented in Josephus as denigrating Moses, although Josephus probably only summarised their positions. Although these represent only those anti-Moses elements, they could have spread to other parts of Asia Minor and such anti-Moses elements were later seen in authors such as Quintilian, Tacitus and Juvenal. For a discussion of their treatments of Moses, see Gager 1972:80-86.

<sup>11</sup> Philo (*Legat* 120) reports that the masses in Alexandria hated the Jews for sometime so that when the issue of emperor worship became a subject for further hatred, the masses simply let loose. Feldman (1993:114) observes that among other factors the more immediate was the Gentiles' accusation against the Jews of being unpatriotic as they refused to engage in the veneration of the imperial cult. Further, we are told that Apion, in arguing against Jews' citizenship in Alexandria, accuses the Jews of not worshipping the same Gods as the Alexandrians (Josephus, *C Ap* 2.66). Jews in other Hellenistic cities faced similar problems from their Gentile counterparts so much so that two Roman rulers Caesar and Augustus had to pass various decrees to protect the Jews and allow them the right to practise their religion; see for example Josephus *Ant* 14.185-267 and 16.160-79. See also Schürer III.116f, nn33 and 37.

indicates that inter-religious relationships were a hot issue and that some Jews in the Diaspora would in general be more willing to restrain themselves as much as possible, so long as they were allowed to remain loyal to their ancestral tradition.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the self-discipline of the 'strong' in terms of their speech can be seen in their not openly criticising pagan religious traditions; their statement in 1 Cor 8.4 that 'idols are nothing in the world' should be understood as part of an internal dialogue between them and Paul, which does not constitute a public criticism of Gentile Gods.

It is necessary to raise another question. If the Jewish-influenced 'strong' Corinthians were obedient to the LXX ban, why did they not also obey the second commandment which bans the worship of other Gods and idols? In other words, their obedience to the LXX command and their attendance at pagan temples do not seem to match. Could it be that their understanding of the true God actually differs from those who are opposed to idolatry? We shall now turn to consider this possibility.

#### 4.3 Identification of the true God with other Gods - *Letter of Aristeas*

The *Letter of Aristeas* represents an example of a Jewish accommodating attitude to the religious traditions of Gentiles. This is seen in Pseudo-Aristeas' attempt at identifying the God of the Jews with Zeus, which could be considered an act of dishonouring God, based on some of the definitions of idolatry set out in chapter two above, particularly that of cognitive error, that is, mixing Yahweh with other Gods. This does not mean, however, that Pseudo-Aristeas has abandoned his Jewish distinctions, as may be seen throughout the letter. But it is in the midst of the 'letter' that Pseudo-Aristeas' accommodating stance is subtly revealed, particularly sections 15-16 where his openness to pagan religions is the most explicit.

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<sup>12</sup> Goldenberg 1998:63ff observes that during the same period of Jewish opposition to other religions there was a parallel track which shows that other Jews sought various means of accommodating to the religions of their neighbours.



The *Letter of Aristeas* seems to suggest that the event described in the *Letter* took place during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-246 BCE) but the story is now recognised as a legend among scholars.<sup>13</sup> The work, though legendary, also reflects some possible historical actuality in that a translation of the Jewish Law into Greek in Alexandria in the third century BCE is known.<sup>14</sup> Thus, while the contents of the *Letter* may not be historical, the author would probably have written after the mid third century, and possibly come from Alexandria.<sup>15</sup> The date of the *Letter* remains in dispute. Collins has argued that the *Letter* may be dated in the time of Physcon, around early to mid second century BCE, based on the mention of the liberation of Jewish slaves in the beginning of the *Letter*.<sup>16</sup> Thus, Collins and others follow Bickermann who argues for a date between 145 and 127 BCE.<sup>17</sup>

Although the name Aristeas is Greek,<sup>18</sup> his Jewish identity is easily discernible in his concerns with the law (31, 144, 139-40), and the importance he attaches to Jewish

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<sup>13</sup> Collins 1983:98, n92; cf. Boccaccini 1991:164 who rightly points out that the translation of the Law is only a frame for 'a quite complex, profoundly consistent, and articulated system of thought that still asks to be explored and identified in its entirety'. Thus, even though a legend, *Letter of Aristeas* still serves as a window through which one can gain insight into Jewish thought.

<sup>14</sup> Schürer III.677.

<sup>15</sup> It is most probably dated between the early and mid second century BCE; see below. The idea that the author is probably an Egyptian who comes from Alexandria is based on his detailed knowledge of Ptolemaic court life; see Bickermann 1930:280-98; cf. Fraser 1972, 1:698-703 and Gruen 1998:211.

<sup>16</sup> Collins 1983:82-84 bases this argument on the explanation that after the death of Philometor, the Jews from the land of Onias continued to support Cleopatra II against Physcon (see Fraser 1972, 1:119-23). However, since Physcon triumphed, the Jews were in a difficult situation. It was not until 118 BCE when a decree of amnesty was issued. Collins therefore suggests that the account of the liberation of the Jewish slaves in Pseudo-Aristeas may have been meant as a subtle appeal to the king by commending the generosity of his ancestor, or designed to reassure the Jews of the general goodness of the monarchy and to suggest that the threat to Jews was due to other factors such as the greed of the soldiers or the impulse of the mob (*Let.Aris.* 14, 27).

<sup>17</sup> Bickermann 1930:280-98. Cf. Schürer III.679-84, and Gruen 1998:210, and n76.

<sup>18</sup> There are various reasons for the adoption of a Greek name. He is apparently a very acculturated Jew in Alexandria as may be seen in the display of his well-educated command of the Greek language and the plentiful literary *topoi* in the *Letter*. Thus, Gruen 1998:211 comments that Pseudo-Aristeas is an intellectual (202) who is well acquainted with the procedures at the highest levels, familiar with royal practices with regard to the issuing of decrees, understands the court protocol, is thoroughly conversant with the court arrangements required for formal banquets, knows the secretarial exactness of the records of Ptolemy's 'every word and deed'; and whose collection of all the various materials, documents and speeches indicates him to be a writer of 'unusual imagination'. The Greek name in itself reflects



separateness (181-84, 139), not to mention one of the central themes of the letter: the translation of the Law.

The purpose of the letter has not been totally clear. At the outset, Pseudo-Aristeas may appear to tell how the Jewish Law was translated into Greek. But this does not seem to be the only reason for the letter.<sup>19</sup> Some scholars have posited that the author is defending Judaism against the Gentile world as may be seen in the pro-Jewish, pro-law effort in Aristeas' description of the king's ready acceptance of every answer to his questions during the question and answer session before each day's banquet.<sup>20</sup> Others are of the opinion that Pseudo-Aristeas is addressing the letter to a Jewish audience.<sup>21</sup> Bartlett concludes that Pseudo-Aristeas' letter would be an encouragement to both Jews and Gentiles in Alexandria to be mutually respectful of each other, and a reassurance to Jewish leaders in Palestine that under a friendly Hellenistic regime their counterparts in Alexandria could still live in conformity to the Law.<sup>22</sup> Barclay argues that at a time when Jews were becoming increasingly prominent, Pseudo-Aristeas creates a narrative to describe the kind of respect Jews in élite circles could enjoy and to

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Pseudo-Aristeas' acculturation. The other reason is possibly that by working through a Greek name, the author creates for himself a narrator who is both directly involved in the story as well as a nearby observer. There is therefore a certain degree of freedom for the author to move forward and backward, depending on when and what he wants to say or comment. It allows him to be a party involved in the political conversation as well as a bystander-commentator. The use of a pseudonym may be more effective, therefore, when the author wants to say positive things about his own race, i.e. the Jews, and their Law and traditions, not least when the pseudonym is that of the pagans!

<sup>19</sup> The story, as it progresses, seems to digress into an exalted praise of the Temple, the priesthood, Jerusalem and Judaea, the high priest's vestments, and the like in an exaggerated description (e.g. the description of the water supply within the Temple, 88-89; cf. Stinespring 1962:549).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Bartlett 1985:11-16.

<sup>21</sup> Bartlett 1985:12-13 is of the opinion that Pseudo-Aristeas is defending the authority of the Greek translation of the law, together with the whole Diaspora, against the negative attitude of the Palestinian Jews who are ever ready to accuse the Diaspora Jews of what to them is a compromising tendency in matters of the law. Barclay 1996:148, n49, however, points out the implausibility of this theory as it does not make sense for Pseudo-Aristeas to disguise himself with a Greek name. Cf. Gruen 1998:212-14.

<sup>22</sup> Bartlett 1983:16; cf. Gruen 1998:220f who rightly points out that the *Letter of Aristeas* is a complex, multi-layered, piece of work which is not driven by any single purpose.



explain the reasons for the Jews' differences in matters of religion, morality and diet.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, it is possible that the *Letter of Aristeas* is a fictional story created by Pseudo-Aristeas for apologetic as well as reconciling purposes, among others.<sup>24</sup>

It may be that some of these reasons coexist side by side and they provide a larger framework for understanding Pseudo-Aristeas' acculturation and open attitude to others' religious traditions. The question before us is: how does Pseudo-Aristeas display his openness to Gentile religions when he has actually filled the 'letter' with so much exaltation of the Jews and Judaism? Yet precisely because Pseudo-Aristeas is such an acculturated Jew who at the same time remains committed to his Jewish tradition, his willingness to accommodate the religions of the Gentile world in which he lives through the creation of a literary figure is even more impressive. In the following I shall examine some of the texts in the *Letter* and show how they may reflect an accommodating stance on the part of the author.

#### 4.3.1 Religious accommodation in Pseudo-Aristeas

At the beginning, Aristeas, a creation of the author, introduces himself as one of the officials in Ptolemy's court who was also one of the members of the embassy sent to Judaea. While discussing the proposal to send an embassy to Judaea, Aristeas took the opportunity to request from the king the release of the Jews captured as slaves during the king's father's reign (12-14). Aristeas' address, contained in two simple sections (15-16), reveals much about Pseudo-Aristeas' attitude towards pagan deities. First he equates the God of the Jews with the God who directs Ptolemy Philadelphus' kingdom (15). This may be variously understood. It could mean that the God of the Jews is

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<sup>23</sup> Barclay 1996:148-49.

<sup>24</sup> Bartlett 1985:16; cf. Barclay 1996:148-49 and 149, n51. Gruen 1998:221 argues against a synthesis between Judaism and Hellenism promoted by scholars such as Tcherikover (1958:70, 82), Hengel (1974, 1:264-65) and others (see Gruen 1998:221, n137). He proposes that the *Letter of Aristeas* implies that Jews are not only fully at home in the Hellenistic culture, but they have also surmounted it. Thus, Gruen does not think that *Letter of Aristeas* is apologetic in the sense that it is directed at outsiders.

equally worshipped by the king, although on the basis of this statement alone, it is unlikely. It could also mean that the God of the Jews directs all other kingdoms without regard to these kingdoms' religious devotion. It could also mean that there is no difference between the Gods of the different religious traditions. But this may be as good as saying that there is only one God whom all worship except that different peoples and cultures express their belief in this God differently. Section 16 clarifies what Pseudo-Aristeas intends to suggest.

In section 16, Aristeas says, 'the God who is overseer and creator of all things whom they (the Jews) worship is he whom all humanity worship, but we, O king, call differently as Zeus and Dis' (τὸν γὰρ πάντων ἐπόπτην καὶ κτίστην θεὸν οὗτοι σέβονται, ὃν καὶ πάντες, ἡμεῖς δέ, βασιλεῦ, προσονομάζοντες ἑτέρως Ζῆνα καὶ Δία, 16).<sup>25</sup> This is probably the most explicit statement that reveals Pseudo-Aristeas' attitude. The implication is clear. The God of the Jews is not only being universalised in this statement, but more significantly, he is also made to appear not as unique since the Greeks are said to address him with different names.

Although putting the words in the mouth of a pagan Aristeas lessens the significance of the equation, it may perhaps be the only way in which a Jew like the author of *Letter of Aristeas* could make that equation. Otherwise, as Goldenberg rightly points out,<sup>26</sup> since Jews do 'seem generally to have drawn the line at actually calling their God by the name of a pagan deity', it would have been probably rejected by most Jews reading the letter, if not all. And the fact that the author has put himself into a pagan persona might suggest that he does not wish to be known as a Jew. Further, since

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<sup>25</sup> Shutt 1985:13 provides a mistranslation: 'These people worship God the overseer and creator of all, whom all men worship including ourselves, O King, except that we have a different name. Their name for him is Zeus and Jove'.

<sup>26</sup> Goldenberg 1998:65.



the author is a Jew, such an equation, though made through a Greek figure, must reflect the author's own accommodating attitude towards the Gentile religions! In theory, Pseudo-Aristeas' accommodation seems to be at the conceptual level, i.e. identifying the Jews' God with the Gentiles' God. But in practice, he is able to write a pseudonymous 'letter' in which to express his religious openness.

In section 19, the other court officials are represented as advising the king to release the enslaved Jews as a thank-offering to 'the Most High God' (τῷ μεγίστῳ θεῷ, 19; cf. 37). This phrase, 'the Most High God', could mean that the author views the God of these pagan officials as 'the Most High', or that 'the Most High God' of the Jews is the one whom these pagans worship. The former would imply that Pseudo-Aristeas is pluralistic; while the latter suggests that he sees the God of the Jews in the Gods of the pagans. In either case, there is an attitude less strict than that seen in Philo and Wis; and in either case the exclusivist and negative stance appears to be absent. Further, Philadelphus is made to express an intention to do a 'pious action' and to dedicate a thank-offering to the Most High God (37). The author's positive description of the king's religious actions not only reveals his positive perception of the king, but more significantly his attitude towards pagan religions.

In section 42, Eleazar the high priest is said to read king Philadelphus' letter to the whole people 'in order that they might know your pious reverence for our God' (ἵνα εἰδῶσιν ἦν ἔχεις πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἡμῶν εὐσέβειαν). This is a subtle recognition that non-Jews are just as capable of worshipping the true God and therefore capable of righteousness. As it is, Pseudo-Aristeas has made clear that the king worships Zeus (16). But here in section 42, he seems to make a distinction by making Eleazar say 'our God' (τὸν θεὸν ἡμῶν). This is in reference to what the king does for the Jews in terms of the gifts and offerings for the Temple (40). Thus, the king views his 'pious action' as

done unto his God, i.e. Zeus; while the high priest views it as reverence for 'our God'!<sup>27</sup> While it may appear that Pseudo-Aristeas is concerned to emphasise 'our God' as against 'their God', this could be reversed to say that he wants to show that the king's God is equally 'our God'! But he has to show this through the high priest, since in the person of a pagan, he cannot speak for the Jews.<sup>28</sup> Such is the careful twist of the author which exposes his accommodating attitude towards the pagan God.

The question arises, then, as to what we may make of the critique of idolatry and of the Egyptian animal cults by the high priest (134-38). To be sure, such a critique reflects Pseudo-Aristeas' negative view of idolatry and the Egyptian animal cults. But it in no way reflects his critique of Zeus. In fact, seen against the background of the equation of the Jews' God and the Greek Zeus, the critique might suggest to us what Pseudo-Aristeas thinks of Zeus. God is one; and by the name of Zeus, he remains one! In other words, he shows himself to be committed to the oneness of God: Zeus is God, but not the idol that represents him! The critique of idolatry by Eleazar therefore makes no difference to Pseudo-Aristeas' accommodation to the pagan God; it in fact strengthens his position and therefore allows him greater room to manoeuvre! This is particularly so since he can interchange between the true God and Zeus without being thought of as being unfaithful to the Jewish tradition.

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<sup>27</sup> Although one may argue that Eleazar is referring to the gifts and offerings for the Temple, without reference to the 'pious action' and 'thank-offering' of the king in releasing the captured Jews, yet it precisely shows that Eleazar has chosen only that aspect of the king's action which speaks well of his piety. And there is no reason to think that the king would have such clear separation of ideas about his God and the Jews' God since in section 16 he has not been made to disagree with the equation of Aristeas.

<sup>28</sup> Indeed, in the person of a pagan, Pseudo-Aristeas can speak positively of the Jews, their city and their Temple. But the question of the oneness of God is a sensitive one and being a Jew, he has to be extremely careful with what he says. In the end, the mutual reference to 'God' between the pagan king and the high priest, both representing positions of authority, helps to express Pseudo-Aristeas' openness on this matter, as he says, 'just as my careful labour has shown' (καθὼς περιείργασμαι, 15), i.e. the mutual recognition of the true God.



As the story unfolds, Pseudo-Aristeas' accommodation becomes even more apparent. In section 139, Eleazar is made to say that Moses, having given thought to all the details, 'fenced us round with impenetrable barrier and iron walls' (περιέφραξεν ἡμᾶς ἀδιακόποις χάραξι καὶ σιδηροῖς τείχεσιν). Thus the Mosaic Law is described as a fortress whose purpose is to ensure that Jews do not have any contact with the other nations (ὅπως μηθενὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἐθνῶν ἐπιμισγώμεθα κατὰ μὴδέν). And purity of the body and the soul (σῶμα and ψυχή) is defined against that understanding of contact. In section 140, Eleazar is further made to say how even the Egyptian priests acknowledge the Jews as 'people of God' (ἀνθρώπους θεοῦ). Such a description is reserved only for those who fear the true God (εἰ μὴ τις σέβεται τὸν κατὰ ἀλήθειαν θεόν), not to the rest of humanity. Yet, this position of Eleazar is softened by his very engagement in receiving the Gentile embassy from Egypt and sending a team of translators to Alexandria. It in fact suggests a greater than expected tolerance towards non-Jews. For if Eleazar is of the opinion that the Mosaic Law is meant to keep the Jews from pagan contamination, his willingness to send his team shows that the fear is at least minimal. And given Eleazar's careful position, his choice of the translators, we would assume, would probably go along with what he thinks are 'people of God' (cf. 121). This, we see in his description of the men in his reply to the king: 'good men and true' (καλοὺς καὶ ἀγαθοὺς, 46). And the willingness of these men of high quality to go to Philadelphus' court seems to show that they have no fear of pagan contamination.<sup>29</sup> This self-contradiction of Pseudo-Aristeas can in fact be

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<sup>29</sup> Barclay 1996:147 argues that Aristeas is not guilty of self-contradiction since Philadelphus accommodates the dietary requirements of his guests and foregoes his normal religious practices, which suggests that 'if Jews and Gentiles are to mix in friendly social intercourse, it has to be *on the Jews' terms*'. However, we are also told that accommodating guests in matters of drink and food is a practice of the court so as not to create any discomfort (182). In other words, it is possible that Philadelphus'

explained through the answers of the translators to all the king's questions, which will be looked at below.

The reception of the translators is equally telling. Upon the arrival of the translators and the Law, the king is reported to make obeisance seven times (177) thanking not just the representatives from Judaea but more importantly thanking God 'whose oracles these are' (οὗτινός ἐστι τὰ λόγια ταῦτα, 177). Although this is a description of the king's favourable attitude towards the team of translators and the law, it raises the question as to which God the king is thanking. The phrase 'whose oracles these are' suggests that Philadelphus is thanking the Jewish God. But his devotion is to Zeus, which implies that Pseudo-Aristeas is possibly allowing a conceptual interchange between the king's own God and the Jews' God. The equation of section 16 between the God of the Jews and Zeus does indicate such a possibility. Such accommodation is seen no more clearly than in the prayer of Elisha, the oldest of the translators, which asks for good things to be granted to the king, his family and all those who support him. The prayer seems to imply that the king is righteous enough to warrant favourable treatment from the Jews' God. And Elisha and those present who applauded at the prayer (186) probably viewed the king favourably in terms of his religious life, which reflects Pseudo-Aristeas' own accommodating attitude towards the pagan king's religious behaviour.

The translators' constant praise of the king's rule and his commitment to justice and truth betrays the author's possible belief that those who worship the true God can also be found among Gentiles. The first observation is that the use of the word 'God' appears as if the king understood what the translators meant when they mentioned

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accommodation of his guests' dietary requirements is more a diplomatic move accorded to all guests, whether they are Jews or not.



‘God’. Thus, the author turns ‘God’ into a common denominator between the pagan king and the Jews.

In the first series of questions which the king asked, the last one received an answer which included the author’s view of the king’s counsels: they are good and are all fulfilled by God to your profit (τελειοῦνται δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πάντα σοι καλῶς βουλευομένῳ, ...συμφερόντες, 199). There are two possibilities for interpreting this. It could mean that Pseudo-Aristeas to some degree recognises that the God of the Jews is also the God of some pagans, if the God of the Jews is meant here. Alternatively, Pseudo-Aristeas may be recognising, also to some degree, the validity of other Gods, if another God is meant here. If the former is meant, which probably it is, it shows Pseudo-Aristeas’ openness to the possibility that pagans are just as capable of receiving favour from the ‘true God’ of the Jews. If the latter, then it shows that Pseudo-Aristeas is willing to accommodate Gentile Gods.

In the answer to the question, ‘what is the most essential quality of a ruler?’ we are able to see Pseudo-Aristeas’ subtle connection between God as a lover of righteousness and the exhortation to the king to honour righteousness (209). Pseudo-Aristeas seems to view righteousness rather differently from the covenantal perspective so that even a pagan king who acts righteously would be approved by God.<sup>30</sup> And the words of Eleazar in section 42 and the translator’s answer in sections 232-33 to the question, ‘how one might be free from grief’ also reveal relatively clearly that the king’s piety (εὐσεβεῖ, 233) is linked to ‘righteousness’ (τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ, 232). This

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<sup>30</sup> If we take the Jewish law observance as the key to defining ‘righteousness’, then to accord ‘righteousness’ to a pagan is certainly going against the norm.

suggests that Pseudo-Aristeas conceives of the king as approved by God,<sup>31</sup> although the king probably worships his own God (cf. 16).

Further, in answering the king's question on what wise counsel consists in, the translator's answer, though quite commonsensical, is qualified with the statement that the practice of piety ensures the fulfilment of all the king's resolutions. Philadelphus is here credited with practising piety (τὴν εὐσέβειαν ἀσκοῦντι, 255), which is an interpretation of the king's practice by the translator. Such a recognition here of Philadelphus' practice as piety by Pseudo-Aristeas shows that Pseudo-Aristeas himself recognises piety outside Judaism. This suggests the possibility that piety is seen by Pseudo-Aristeas as universal and that who the God is to whom and for whom one practises piety may not necessarily be as important as the act itself. If these two possibilities are allowed, then Pseudo-Aristeas' accommodating attitude would become more obvious.<sup>32</sup>

What the various examples of the answers so far reveal is that there seems first of all a common understanding of the word 'God'. Even though the translators would have known to what God Philadelphus devotes himself since they are learned men, the author puts them in a very friendly position with positive words uttered about the king and his religious and moral life. The way the translators refer to God, as if the king understood and accepted their God even though he has a different God, suggests that the author has a higher purpose: the encouragement of mutual recognition of each other's contributions,

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. 280 where the king is praised for having been given a crown of righteousness by God.

<sup>32</sup> Remaining examples may be briefly mentioned: God grants the king right judgement (267) and gives him good counsel (270; cf. 271-72), the gift of kind-heartedness (274), an alert understanding and powerful judicial ability (276). All this is due to the fact that the king models his deeds after God (281). One may argue that these are said out of political expediency. However, if we understand this to be fictional, then the kind of things said about the king would reflect an accommodating and friendly Pseudo-Aristeas not only towards the king, but also towards the God of the pagan king! Thus, God is the one who fulfils the king's desires (283). His actions of care, restraint, and decency are honoured by God (285) who directs all the king's actions (287). He has conferred on Philadelphus the gifts of governing the country (290) and given him a pure mind that is untainted with evil (292). There is thus a conceptual overlap in Pseudo-Aristeas between the Jews' God and the Gentiles' Gods.



even religious ones. Thus, based on such an analysis, Pseudo-Aristeas would appear to display an attitude that is basically open, although he is careful to note the difference of the God of the Jews from the idolatry of the Greeks and the Egyptian animal cults (cf. 134-38). As mentioned earlier, Pseudo-Aristeas seems to view Zeus as the name with which the Greeks address the true God. But he rejects the idols which the pagans use to represent Zeus.

It is possible to detect Pseudo-Aristeas' principle in this accommodation elsewhere in the letter, besides the fact that he is a highly acculturated Jew.<sup>33</sup> In section 227, Philadelphus' question, 'with whom should we vie in generosity?' is given the following answer. Humanity in general would be quick to think that generosity is to be accorded to those who agree with themselves. However, the translator opines that a keen and open-hearted generosity is due to those who disagree with us so that we may win over our dissenters to what is right, which is at the same time to their own interest. By such a principle of 'kindness to thy dissenters', Pseudo-Aristeas seeks to win others to what is right. The author's accommodating stance is seen further in his care in using the phrase 'what is right' (τὸ καθῆκον, 227) rather than 'the true God'! By this, the translator's advice to the king can also be given to Jews. It is equally possible for the Jews to be turned to τὸ καθῆκον according to non-Jews. The neutrality of τὸ καθῆκον makes accommodation towards each other's values a mutual attitude. Those who face dissenters must entreat their God to help them win over their dissenters. And the author does not make clear who this God is, except that he rules the minds of all people (ταῖς γὰρ ἀπάντων διανοίᾳς κρατεῖ, 227). And if we recall what Aristeas says in 15-16, it is not impossible that the question as to who the God is remains an open one.

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Barclay 1996:147-48.

### 4.3.2 Preliminary conclusion to the *Letter of Aristeas*

The *Letter of Aristeas* demonstrates the accommodating stance of a Jew towards the pagan religious tradition – the equation of the God of the Jews with the God whom all people worship, except that they call the God they worship by Zeus and Dis. The same attitude is also seen in various examples such as the king's 'pious action' and the translators' overall positive description of the king's religious life.

Pseudo-Aristeas' accommodation suggests that not all Jews responded negatively to pagan culture and religious traditions, particularly those in the Diaspora who had come to terms with the reality of the religiously pluralistic environment in which they lived. Could this be a parallel to the 'strong' in 1 Cor 8-10 and their religiously pluralistic environment?

The examination of the *Letter of Aristeas* shows that some Jews adopted a more open and accommodating stance towards pagans and their God/s. The example of Pseudo-Aristeas' equation of the God of the Jews with other people's God suggests that there is a possibility of a conceptual identification/overlap of the true God with other Gods. Is it possible that this might parallel the concept of the one God held by the 'strong' in Corinth? Like Pseudo-Aristeas, is there also a conceptual identification/overlap in the thought of the 'strong' concerning the true God and other Gods? Even though our definitions of idolatry in chapter two would have classified Pseudo-Aristeas' identification of the true God with Zeus under idolatry by mixing the true God with other Gods, what Pseudo-Aristeas is doing precisely reveals that at the conceptual level what constitutes idolatry can be ambiguous and such ambiguity can be exploited.

The above questions about the 'strong' regarding a conceptual overlap call for further discussion of other evidence, both literary and inscriptional, which points to that



possibility by showing the use of Theos Hypsistos by both Jews and Gentiles to refer to their Gods.

#### 4.4 The use of Θεὸς Ὑψιστος: a brief survey

The term Ὑψιστος usually means, in the superlative sense, 'highest', 'loftiest'.<sup>34</sup> Thus, Θεὸς Ὑψιστος is often taken to mean the 'highest God' or 'the most high God'. This could imply that the 'Most High God' is at the top of a divine hierarchy of Gods, at least to the worshipper.<sup>35</sup> However, Jewish usage of the term appears to be inclined towards the absolute sense, i.e. *the* God who alone is the true God, rather than the superlative sense.<sup>36</sup>

In the LXX, Ὑψιστος occurs 110 times. Apart from a few topographical uses, Ὑψιστος is always a term for the God of the Hebrews in the LXX, i.e. it is a term for Yahweh, and is usually the translation of *עֲלִיּוֹן* or *עֲלִי*. The designation *עֲלִיּוֹן* is a reference to God as the 'Highest' or 'Most High' in the OT.<sup>37</sup> Thus it serves as a proper name of Yahweh. Ὑψιστος, when used to translate this Hebrew designation, would clearly mean 'Most High' in the absolute sense. The use of Ὑψιστος in the LXX in referring to Yahweh often takes the forms of ὁ Θεὸς ὁ Ὑψιστος and κύριος ὁ

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<sup>34</sup> Liddell-Scott 1940:852.

<sup>35</sup> Trebilco 1991:128 points out that the epithet 'the Highest' was used by pagans to indicate that the God they were worshipping was the 'most important god'; cf. Nilsson 1963:102 who claims that it would seem natural for the Greeks to refer to Zeus as the High God since Zeus was recognised as the king of the Gods, although a few pages later he also says that people deemed it unnecessary to call the High God by the name Zeus (106). Nock et al. 1936:64 do not see the pagan use of Θεὸς Ὑψιστος and Zeus Hypsistos as being influenced by Jewish usage; on the other hand, Levinskaya 1996:84-95 argues that the idea of Theos Hypsistos being influenced by pagan usage has been exaggerated by modern scholars and that examples of Hypsistos being used with a pagan deity are relatively few.

<sup>36</sup> Levinskaya 1996:98 observes that the translators of LXX definitely have in mind the absolute sense of Ὑψιστος.

<sup>37</sup> E.g. Num 24.16; Deut 32.8; Ps 18.14; 2 Sam 22.14; Pss 9.3; 21.8; 46.5; 50.14; 73.11; 77.11; 78.17; 83.19; 87.5; 91.1, 9; 92.2; 107.11; Isa 14.14; Lam 3.35, 38; see also Bertram 1972:615-17 for its Semitic usage.

ὑψιστος. It is perhaps reasonable to assume, then, that for the translators of the LXX, the θεός of the Hebrew people is also the ὑψιστος and vice versa.

The term's use can also be seen in Jewish authors. Philo uses the term, either when quoting the LXX or when referring to the Jewish God. In *Legat* 157 and 317, Philo refers to the benevolence of Caesar in not only allowing the Jews complete freedom to offer sacrifices, but also charging the expenses to his own account. It is here that Philo refers to the God of the Jews as ὁ ὑψιστος θεός.<sup>38</sup> Elsewhere, the term is used as a title for the God of the Jews when non-Jews are being addressed. This can be seen, for example, in Agrippa's letter to Gaius (Philo, *Legat* 278) and the description of Flaccus' failure to maintain the peace which resulted in the persecution of the Jews (Philo, *Flacc* 46). But the most interesting use of the term that might provide some insight into the position of the 'strong' in 1 Cor 8-10 is found in Philo's comment on Gen 14.18 in *Leg* 3.82 in which Philo appears to be aware of the potential misunderstanding of the term ὑψιστος. He first explains that the use of the term ὑψιστος in referring to God does not mean there is a range of exalted deities (οὐχ ὅτι ἐστὶ τις ἄλλος οὐχ ὑψιστος). For Philo, the θεὸς ὑψιστος in Gen 14.18 is to be understood in the absolute sense. His further elaboration is a close parallel to 1 Cor 8.4:

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<sup>38</sup> Levinskaya 1996:95-96, n76, has suggested that the Roman authorities probably used the term to designate the God of the Jews. However, she concedes that Philo may not be citing the documents verbatim. Even though she argues that both Josephus (*Ant* 16.163) and Joannes Lydus (*De mens* 4.53) use the term in their quotation of Augustus' and Julian's decrees respectively, it could well be that ὁ ὑψιστος θεός was used in both decrees because that was seen as the way Jews referred to their God, if those decrees were indeed cited verbatim. In the absence of overwhelming evidence, it would be better not to draw a conclusion as Levinskaya has done. Cf. Trebilco 1991:239, n12 who points out that Celsus and Julian both used the title but they were both familiar with biblical usage. The latter is cited by Levinskaya as part of her argument (1996:96, n76). \*This is a questionable citation as *De mens* 4.53 does not refer to such a decree, nor mention the term.



| Philo, <i>Leg</i> 3.82  | 1 Cor 8.4  |
|---|--|
| οὐχ ὅτι ἐστὶ τις ἄλλος οὐχ ὑψιστος<br>not that there is some other not most high                        | οὐδὲν εἰδωλον ἐν κόσμῳ<br>an idol (or image) is nothing in the world |
| ὁ γὰρ θεὸς εἷς...καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἕτι<br>πλὴν αὐτοῦ<br>for God being one...and there is none beside<br>him | οὐδεὶς θεὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς<br>there is no God but one                     |

Such a parallel is interesting in that it shows, to some extent, that the ‘strong’ in the Corinthian church could well have had Jewish influence in terms of their concept of the one God similar to that of Philo above. What is important is that while Philo’s position resulting from such a belief is that of condemnation of all other Gods,<sup>39</sup> the ‘strong’ in Corinth appear to be more accommodating as may be seen in their participation in pagan cults, or presence at pagan temples.

In a similar vein, Josephus uses the term rather rarely and, whenever he uses it, cautiously. Trebilco observes that Josephus uses the term when quoting the decree of Augustus.<sup>40</sup> In *Ant* 16.163, Augustus is represented as having decreed that Jews may follow their own customs as they did in the time of the high priest Hyrcanus. Hyrcanus is here designated as ἀρχιερεὺς θεοῦ ὑψίστου. Thus, θεὸς ὑψιστος appears to be used as a reference to the God of the Jews in Josephus, in a rather careful way. Perhaps, the limited use of the term in Josephus might suggest that he, like Philo, wants to avoid any misunderstanding that the term might generate.<sup>41</sup>

In *Joseph and Aseneth*, the use of ὑψιστος seems to be exclusively reserved for referring to the God of Joseph. At various points when ὑψιστος is used by Jews or the

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, *Decal* 52-81, *Spec* 1.12-31, and *Contempl* 3-8. See further *Spec* 2.165 where Philo makes a stunning statement that all the Greeks and Barbarians worship the same one God, ‘the Father of Gods and men and the Maker of the whole universe,...’. Yet, his conclusion is that all should therefore ‘cleave’ (ἀνῆφθαι) to the one true God and not invent new Gods.

<sup>40</sup> Trebilco 1991:130.

<sup>41</sup> Trebilco 1991:130.

‘heavenly man’, it is clearly in reference to the God of the Jews.<sup>42</sup> However, others who are non-Jews or pagans use the term too. It is not clear whether the writer or author of *Joseph and Aseneth* intends to convey the idea that even pagans recognise the God of the Jews as the Most High when he puts the term in their mouths. But the description of Aseneth destroying and discarding all her idols (10.13) and the address of the God of Joseph as the Most High in her first soliloquy (11.1) indicate that ὕψιστος is here meant to refer to the God of the Jews only, to the exclusion of other deities. Like Philo, the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* seems to adopt a position which allows or requires the understanding of the term to deny and reject other religious traditions and practices.

Thus far, we have looked at the literary evidence which demonstrates the Jewish use of ὕψιστος or θεὸς ὕψιστος in the absolute sense which at the same time is considered by those who use it to deny and reject the religious traditions and practices of pagans. There are also Jewish inscriptions in which the term θεὸς ὕψιστος is found.<sup>43</sup>

This language of dedication is seen in two inscriptions which concern the dedication of a prayer-house or proseuche (προσευχή) to the Most High God (θεῶι ὑψίστῳ, CPJ 1433 and 1443). The first is located in Hadra, Alexandria in second century BCE and the second in Athribis in second or first century BCE. Horbury and Noy rightly remark that the use of the word ‘proseuche’ to refer to the building makes its Jewishness unambiguous.<sup>44</sup> Together with the dedicatory language of θεὸς ὕψιστος, it is without doubt that the God of the Jews was meant.

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<sup>42</sup> E.g. 8.10, 14.7, 15.6-8, 13, 16.7-8, 19.2, 22.5, 23.10.

<sup>43</sup> Trebilco 1991:133-37 provides a list of all the known θεὸς ὕψιστος inscriptions which are Jewish. I shall discuss only those relevant ones in terms of dating, i.e. those which fall within the Second Temple period, before the second century CE.

<sup>44</sup> Horbury-Noy 1992:14. Cf. Schürer II.440, n61 who points out that the term occurs in Gentile worship to refer to a place of prayer which may have had Jewish influence. Levinskaya 1996:207-25 discusses the various criteria for distinguishing Jewish inscriptions and the meaning of the term προσευχή and draws two conclusions: (1) there is no clear evidence that the Gentiles ever borrowed the term to



Two inscriptions originating from the island of Rheneia, the burial place of the inhabitants of Delos, contain an appeal to God for vengeance on the murderers of two girls (*Inscriptions de Délos* no. 2532; *CIJ* 725). Both are almost identical and date no later than the end of the second or the beginning of the first century BCE.<sup>45</sup> The malediction appears to reflect the belief of the person or persons making the prayer. The appeal is addressed to the Most High God (τὸν θεὸν τὸν ὑψιστον). The interesting point is that the next line actually reveals what this Most High God was to the dedicant: τὸν κύριον τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ πάσης σαρκός (the Lord of the spirits and of every flesh). A number of lines down, the Most High God is addressed as ‘the one who watches over all things’ (κύριε ὁ πάντα ἐφορῶν). Although it is not explicitly stated that this Most High God is the true God, the description does indicate that the θεὸς ὑψιστος in this prayer is to be understood in the absolute sense in that this highest God is the creator, thus the true God, at least to the dedicant.

There are a number of inscriptions from Delos which make use of θεὸς ὑψιστος to refer to the God of the Jews. Trebilco lists five of these inscriptions which have been found in a building claimed to be the synagogue at Delos and constructed in the first half of the first century BCE.<sup>46</sup> Two of the inscriptions will be highlighted and discussed here since their dating falls definitely within the period under our consideration.<sup>47</sup> The first is a dedication dated in the first century BCE which is about a

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designate their places of worship; and (2) there was only one occasion when the term was used by a Judaizing group ‘precisely because the term was markedly Jewish’. Thus, the term προσευχή seems to be exclusively used by Jews alone.

<sup>45</sup> Schürer III.70.

<sup>46</sup> Trebilco 1991:133-34; see further Trebilco 1991:241, n30 for the entire list of the inscriptions and the various scholarly works that have been carried out on them.

<sup>47</sup> Two have the possibility of being in the second century CE, while a third, namely *CIJ* 726, does not use the term θεὸς ὑψιστος at all; thus they will be left out of our discussion.

woman named Laodice who was cured of a disease (*CIJ* 728). It reads: Λαωδίκη θεῶι Ὑψίστῳ σωθεῖσα ταῖς ὑφ' αὐτοῦ θαρραπῆαις εὐχην (Laodice to the Highest God, who cured her of her infirmities, a vow).<sup>48</sup> The second is similarly dated in the first century BCE, about a man named Lysimachos who dedicates a thank-offering to the Highest God (Λυσίμαχος ὑπὲρ ἑαυτοῦ θεῶι Ὑψίστῳ χαριστήριον, *CIJ* 729). From the inscriptions alone, it cannot be absolutely determined that they are Jewish, since dedications to 'Theos Hypsistos' could possibly be rendered to 'Zeus Hypsistos'. However, we have seen in an earlier discussion on two inscriptions,<sup>49</sup> that Jews on Delos addressed their God, i.e. Yahweh, as θεὸς Ὑψιστος. Further, Trebilco points out that the building from which these inscriptions were discovered was unlikely to be the temple of Zeus since "Zeus Hypsistos" had his own sanctuary on Mount Cynthus on Delos'.<sup>50</sup> In addition, one of the inscriptions found in the same building but which is not discussed here (*CIJ* 726, dated first century BCE) contains the words ἐπὶ προσευχῇ, of which προσευχή is almost an exclusively Jewish term.<sup>51</sup> If the building was a synagogue and the inscriptions are Jewish, the 'Theos Hypsistos' on them would quite certainly refer to the God of the Jews. Even though it is possible for Jews who dedicate their thank-offerings to 'Theos Hypsistos' to conceptually think that their 'Theos Hypsistos' is the same as 'Zeus Hypsistos',<sup>52</sup> it is most likely that they would

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Trebilco 1991:134.

<sup>49</sup> I.e. *CIJ* 725 and *Inscriptions de Délos* no. 2532, cited in Schürer III.70.

<sup>50</sup> Trebilco 1991:134.

<sup>51</sup> Mazur 1935:21, cited in Trebilco 1991:134 and 241, n33; see also Levinskaya 1996:213-25 for her treatment on the meaning of the term προσευχή. Cf. Schürer II.440 who claims that the term συναγωγή did not pass into the language of the Diaspora until the first century CE. This would suggest that Jews used the term προσευχή to refer to their prayer-house before that time. See also Barclay 1996:26, n22 for a discussion of the two terms. See n44 above.

<sup>52</sup> See pp. 153-54 above for the discussion on the *Let.Aris* 15-16.



view their God as the only true God, rather than the one at the top of the pantheon of Gods. In other words, 'Theos Hypsistos' is most likely understood in the absolute sense.

Two inscriptions further show 'Theos Hypsistos' being used by Jews to refer to Yahweh. In *CIJ* 690, a manumission inscription from Gorgippa in the Bosporan kingdom, dated 41 CE, reads: θεῶι ὑψίστῳ παντοκράτορι εὐλογητῷ (To God Most High, almighty, blessed). While this beginning line suggests that this is a Jewish inscription, the concluding line, which is a pagan juridical formula, reads: ὑπὸ Δία, Γῆν, ἥλιον (under Zeus, Earth, Sun). Further, the words παντοκράτωρ and εὐλογητός are common Jewish terms.<sup>53</sup> The fact that this dedication is made in the προσευχή also indicates that this inscription is Jewish.<sup>54</sup> Since this inscription can be judged to be certainly Jewish, the 'Theos Hypsistos' would most certainly refer to Yahweh.

In an undated inscription found at Sibidunda in Pisidia,<sup>55</sup> the dedicant describes the θεὸς ὑψιστος also as the holy refuge (θεῶ 'Υψίστῳ καὶ 'Αγείᾳ καταφυγῇ). It is to be noted that καταφυγή is found in the LXX as a description of God as the 'Refuge'.<sup>56</sup> In other words, the dedicant had followed after the fashion of the LXX in calling and describing God as his καταφυγή. This indicates that the θεὸς ὑψιστος must, to the dedicant, refer to Yahweh.

It appears that in the above inscriptions, 'Theos Hypsistos' is used by the Jews to refer to (a) Yahweh, i.e. the God of the Jews; and (b) the true God, i.e. in the absolute sense of the word ὑψιστος, rather than in the superlative sense. In other words, it is

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<sup>53</sup> Lifshitz 1975:67 in prolegomenon of *CIJ* I.

<sup>54</sup> See Levinskaya 1996:225 whose conclusion has already been cited in n44 above.

<sup>55</sup> Bean 1960, no. 122, cited in Trebilco 1991:136.

<sup>56</sup> E.g. Exod 17.15; Pss 9.10; 17.3; 143.2; Jer 16.19.

reasonable for us to conclude that most Jews would regard their God, i.e. Yahweh, as the true God. How they apply this belief with regard to other people's Gods is something that cannot be determined easily. They could, in applying such a belief, reject all other religious traditions and practices as evil and demonic (as Paul has done, 1 Cor 10.20). Or, they could accept that all other religious traditions and practices are equally valid for they are directed to the true God, since there is no other God (as the 'strong' have done, 1 Cor 8.10; 10.14, 20-21).

Besides Jewish inscriptions using the term 'Theos Hypsistos', there are also pagan inscriptions which make use of the same term. For example, we are told that there were two altars to Zeus Hypsistos in Olympia (Pausanias V.15, 5). And according to Nock et al., the titles Zeus Hypsistos and Theos Hypsistos are found at various points in the Greek world. At times, Hypsistos alone is used to refer to a God.<sup>57</sup> Nock et al. tabulate the evidence under three columns: Ζεὺς ὕψιστος, θεὸς ὕψιστος, and the third column refers to the use of both terms.<sup>58</sup> From the table they show that the statue of Zeus Hypsistos had been found in Corinth. Further, votive inscriptions of Zeus Hypsistos are found in Edessa (including a cult association, 51 CE), Imbros, Anchialos, Philippopolis Corcyra, Lagina, Panamara. Other than those found in Edessa, all the votive inscriptions are not dated. Further, the votive inscriptions of Theos Hypsistos and Zeus Hypsistos are found in Athens (undated). And dedications (first century BCE) and prayers to Theos Hypsistos are found in Delos, while a precinct wall and altars are found to have been set up to Zeus Hypsistos on Mount Cynthus in Delos, near Semitic shrines.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Nock et al. 1936:55; apparently, they are sometimes treated as equivalents.

<sup>58</sup> Nock et al. 1936:56-59.

<sup>59</sup> Not all of those mentioned by Nock et al. are cited here as some are dated in the second century CE while others third century CE. These examples are sufficient to show that the epithet ὕψιστος is widely used by Zeus worshippers. For a more thorough survey of the evidence, see Cook 1925, 2, ii:876ff.



Could it be possible that pagans who used the term 'Theos Hypsistos' were influenced by their Jewish counterparts? What do we make of those pagan inscriptions which used the term 'Theos Hypsistos' or 'Hypsistos'? Trebilco argues that the epithet ὑψιστος or the term θεὸς ὑψιστος was used for pagan deities throughout the Roman Empire.<sup>60</sup> This generalisation has been dismissed by Levinskaya who shows that there are in fact only a few inscriptions which definitely used the term.<sup>61</sup> Thus, she finds Trebilco's generalisation unwarranted.<sup>62</sup> However, Levinskaya makes the suggestion of the possibility of Jewish influence on pagan choice of a title, which could also include some Jewish ideas of divinity. She explains that this could account for the absence of images of the God in most of the pagan dedications to Theos Hypsistos. She argues that it is possible for Jews or Gentiles under Jewish influence, when they witness pagan dedications to Zeus the Most High, to find it necessary to honour in the same place the God of Israel.<sup>63</sup> But if Gentiles could make use of a Jewish term for Yahweh to render dedications to their Gods, then it suggests that these Gentiles might have viewed the Theos Hypsistos of the Jews to be no different from their deities. Or it could be that these Gentiles might be God-fearers,<sup>64</sup> although this cannot be proven.<sup>65</sup> One such

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<sup>60</sup> Trebilco 1991:128.

<sup>61</sup> Levinskaya 1996:92-93 and also her nn58-63 provides her list as follows: several times Helios is called Theos Hypsistos; once Apollo was so called; Hypsistos was used with the name of Attis and in the dedication πατρὶ θεῷ Σαμοθράκι ἀθανάτῳ ὑψίστῳ; Isis was called the Most High in one dedication while another dedication was to Thea Hypsiste in Lydia.

<sup>62</sup> The comment of Nock et al. 1936:59, '...Zeus Hypsistos has a temple at Thebes, a statue at Corinth, possibly a priestess at Argos, a precinct at Iasos, a priest (shared with Agathe Tyche) at Mylasa, not to mention a cult association at Edessa. The cult under this name has therefore in these places full standing', strongly argues against the position of Levinskaya.

<sup>63</sup> Levinskaya 1996:94.

<sup>64</sup> Trebilco 1991:138.

<sup>65</sup> Kraabel 1981:113-26 has argued that there was never a circle of God-fearers associated with ancient Judaism and that were it not for the book of Acts 'God-fearers' would have been unknown to us. This position has been ably challenged and proven wanting by Overman 1988:17-26, and also his n9, and others such as Wilcox 1981:102-22 and Finn 1985:75-84.

example is the inscription found recently near Acmonia,<sup>66</sup> which begins with a pagan formula (Ἀγαθῇ Τύχῃ, with good fortune) but whose dedicants, Onesimus and his spouse, set up the monument to the Most High God (Θεῷ Ὑψίστῳ). The pagan formula, unlike that of *CIJ* 690, is not a legal necessity. Thus, the use of the pagan formula makes the inscription unlikely to be Jewish. At the same time, the use of a common Jewish term for Yahweh suggests Jewish influence. Trebilco observes that there was a sizeable Jewish community at Acmonia and in nearby Apamea and that the Jews at Acmonia did call their God by the term 'Theos Hypsistos'.<sup>67</sup> He therefore suggests that the dedicants were linked to the Jewish community and appeared to fit the category of 'God-fearers'. It is not certain who the dedicants of this inscription were. They could be Gentile God-worshippers, or worshippers of pagan deities, or both.

What is noteworthy is that Gentile usage of 'Theos Hypsistos' might hint at the possibility that it does not concern the Jews, or constitute an offence to the Jews, that pagans are using the same term or epithet to refer to their deities. It is possible that Jews could view pagan usage of θεὸς ὑψίστος as legitimate since to them pagans are in fact addressing the one true God of the Jews, when they use the term. Although this theory cannot be proven, it is certainly possible. The reverse is equally possible, that is, as a result of the Gentile usage of θεὸς ὑψίστος, some Jews might think that their God is the same as the Gentiles' God, except that Gentiles sometimes address the true God by a different name (cf. *Let. Aris.* 15-16). Could this be true of the 'strong' in 1 Cor 8-10 since, according to Pausanias (II.2, 8), the cult of Ζεὺς Ὑψίστος was officially recognised in Corinth? Although the term ὑψίστος is never used in 1 Cor 8-10, nor indeed in the entire epistle, our discussion at least indicates that (1) Jews could use a

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<sup>66</sup> Trebilco 1991:138, 243, n54.

<sup>67</sup> Trebilco 1991:138.



term recognisable among the Gentiles, with the possibility of mutual recognition of the term; and (2) there were Jewish ways of referring to the 'one God' which could have non-exclusive practical consequences. This may lead to a more accommodating attitude towards pagan religious tradition and practices among some Jews.

Could there be a conceptual overlap between Gentiles and Jews about the true God when they used the term θεὸς ὑψιστος, even though they may differ in their conceptions of God? And could this be an area of ambiguity in the definitions of idolatry which can be exploited?

While the idea of θεὸς ὑψιστος in the absolute sense could serve as a parallel to Paul's position, it could equally serve as a parallel to the view of the 'strong' with regards to the true God. Is it not possible that both the 'strong' and Paul hold similar views about the true God, but draw opposing conclusions about the religious traditions and practices of the pagans? Could it be that for the 'strong' in 1 Cor 8-10, pagan worship is in fact directed to the one true God since 'there is no God but one', but that Paul views pagan worship as directed to demons, not to the true God (1 Cor 10.20)? Are there different practical implications for both the 'strong' and Paul, i.e. the practical implication of the position of the 'strong' is that they are accommodating towards others' religious traditions and practices - the one true God is inclusive; whereas the practical implication for Paul is that worship of the true God appears to have to conform to Paul's definition of what constitutes true worship and the place where worship is considered valid - the one true God is exclusive?

Besides the example of the *Letter of Aristeas*, the use of θεὸς ὑψιστος between Jews and Gentiles, Artapanus also serves as an example of an accommodating Jew. In fact, Artapanus goes further to suggest that Egyptian religious traditions originated from Moses.

#### 4.5 Artapanus

Nothing certain can be known about Artapanus,<sup>68</sup> although the name is of Persian origin.<sup>69</sup> Scholarly opinion is now agreed that Artapanus is an Egyptian Jew, who may not have come from Alexandria.<sup>70</sup> Fraser argues that Artapanus appears to be familiar with the native life of Egypt and the purely priestly traditions, he could have been a Jew of mixed descent and possibly a resident of another centre such as Memphis.<sup>71</sup> This theory is possible, although it is not necessary to tie him to any centre, as Collins rightly says.<sup>72</sup>

The date of Artapanus is generally put between 250 BCE and 100 BCE. Within this period any date is possible. However, the tendency is to place him sometime in the second century BCE.<sup>73</sup>

The work of Artapanus is scarce. We have only three fragments of it, preserved by Alexander Polyhistor. This means some redactional effort is probably involved.<sup>74</sup> The paucity of his work, however, does not in any way minimise Artapanus' importance and significance in our understanding of Egyptian Judaism. On the contrary, Artapanus' work differs from those other Jewish authors who in general appear to adopt a comparatively more exclusivist stance. Within his work, we not only see efforts of cultural convergence or integration, but also, and not least, the religious accommodation of a Jew towards the Egyptian cults, despite the fact that he displays tremendous pride in

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<sup>68</sup> Holladay 1983:189.

<sup>69</sup> Fraser 1972, 2.985, n199.

<sup>70</sup> Collins 1983:33 is right in saying that it cannot be doubted that Artapanus wrote in Egypt, but by Egypt we need not think of Alexandria since Artapanus has little in common with the known Jewish literature of Alexandria.

<sup>71</sup> Fraser 1972, 1.706; 2.985, n199; cf. Holladay 1983:189.

<sup>72</sup> Collins 1983:54, n48.

<sup>73</sup> Collins 1985:890f; cf. Barclay 1996:127, 446.

<sup>74</sup> Collins 1985:889.



the Jewish tradition represented in Moses.<sup>75</sup> He seems much more accommodating to other cults outside Judaism.

From the beginning of his work, we are able to witness a relatively friendly disposition, particularly in Artapanus' portrayal of Moses, towards the Egyptian cults. In the following analysis of Artapanus, I shall confine myself to Artapanus' accommodating stance towards the Egyptian religious tradition.

Although Artapanus represents a Jewish effort to glorify the Jewish people and culture, there seems no hostile stance towards the pagan religion and the pagan Gods. Instead, we read that the family of Joseph built both the temples in Athos and Heliopolis (23.4). While this may be a way in which Artapanus seeks to show the Hebrews' contribution to the Egyptian religious culture, thus glorifying the Hebrew people, it reveals Artapanus' openness to the use of pagan religious institutions to magnify what to him is a positive aspect of the Hebrews.<sup>76</sup> Moses is turned into the teacher of Orpheus (γενέσθαι δὲ τὸν Μωϋσον τοῦτον Ὁρφέως διδάσκαλον, 27.4) by Artapanus. But Holladay has rightly pointed out that the relationship of Musaios to Orpheus normally is that of a son or a disciple.<sup>77</sup> In other words, Musaios is never the teacher of Orpheus!<sup>78</sup> Since Orpheus is traditionally understood to be the one who transmits sacred wisdom to the Greeks which he gained during the Egyptian travels, by making the alteration, Artapanus makes Moses the source of Greek wisdom. Such

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<sup>75</sup> Gruen 1998:157ff argues that Artapanus used a range of sources, both pagan and Jewish, and shaped and moulded them to his own taste, so that Moses is reinvented as a 'culture hero' for the Egyptians; Moses also doubled as a 'military hero' (159) who was victorious in the war against the Ethiopians.

<sup>76</sup> Athos is unattested as a city in Egypt. Collins 1985:898 observes that this may be the biblical Pithom in Exod 1.11. Cf. Holladay 1983:230, n27. If Athos has any connection with Pithom in Exod 1.11, then Artapanus might well be concluding that the Hebrews also built the temple since they had built cities there. As for Heliopolis, Holladay 1983:230, n28 makes the association with the Jewish temple in Leontopolis. This, however, is not certain.

<sup>77</sup> Holladay 1983:232, n45.

<sup>78</sup> For a broader treatment of Orpheus, see Ferguson 1993:151-53.

an alteration of a tradition shows that Artapanus' accommodating stance can be extensive: he is prepared to go to the extent of making a claim that is not totally correct.<sup>79</sup> But it reflects his positive attitude to the sacred wisdom of the Greeks!

More intriguing is Artapanus' attribution of all kinds of inventions in Egypt to Moses, even the Egyptian religious cult (27.4)! But, first of all, he (Moses) was called Μουσαῖος. The term is linked to Μοῦσα, which in the plural is also the term for the Goddesses of song, music, poetry, dancing, and such like. Artapanus does not appear to have any reservation in so calling Moses. Even though the term Μουσαῖος is the name of a pre-homeric mythical Greek poet and seer of Attica,<sup>80</sup> either meaning would equally expose the accommodating stance of Artapanus.

While Moses is greatly exalted in Artapanus' efforts in glorifying the Jews, a strict Jew, i.e. one who holds zealously to the Jewish notion of the one God, would hardly expect Artapanus to attribute the Egyptian animal cult to Moses,<sup>81</sup> the kind of religious cult that has invited vehement attack from the writer of Wis, Philo, and Josephus. In 27.4, Moses is said to have divided the city (τὴν πόλιν) into thirty-six nomes and to each of these he assigned the God to be worshipped (ἐκάστω τῶν νομῶν ἀποτάξαι τὸν θεὸν σεφθήσεσθαι), and the Gods include cats, dogs and

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<sup>79</sup> Thus Gruen 1998:160 rightly states that Artapanus exhibits 'a light touch,...a caprice and whimsy that tempered liberally with the Scriptures and inverted or transposed Gentile traditions to place the figures of Jewish legend in the center'.

<sup>80</sup> Holladay 1983:231, n44.

<sup>81</sup> Collins 1985:893 suggests that Artapanus' attitude must be seen in the light of his 'euhemeristic tendency' to explain pagan cults. His argument that the legitimisation of the Egyptian cults is done only in an attenuated sense is not convincing. For that would reduce Moses' own importance, since he attributes these cults to Moses. And if Artapanus represents what he calls 'competitive historiography', then Artapanus cannot attenuate the legitimisation of Egyptian cults; but on the contrary, he probably heightens the cults' importance, at least to the Jews, since it was Moses who introduced them! See Barclay 1996:130-32.



ibises.<sup>82</sup> The term σεφθήσεσθαι denotes the rendering of awe and fear, and as passive infinitive it serves to explain or spell out the function of all the Gods: to be worshipped! In 27.12, we read further that Moses made a recommendation of bringing in a breed of oxen for the religious purposes of the king. And the king, in trying to ensure that he was the origin of Egyptian animal cults, ordered that those animals which Moses consecrated be removed and buried. Although the little phrase, κατακρύπτειν θέλοντα τὰ τοῦ Μωϋσίου ἐπινοήματα, appears to reflect the king's self-centred and conceited efforts, it speaks about Moses much more than about the king! It is consistent in showing that Moses' ideas gave rise to the Egyptian religious cults and they cannot be suppressed. Such description about Moses as the founder of Egyptian polytheism goes against the Pentateuchal representation of Moses as the lawgiver of Israel and enforcer of the ten commandments. One wonders how, if Artapanus' chief concern is the glory and honour of the Jewish people, such descriptions can go down well with the Jews themselves.<sup>83</sup> The interesting point to note is that such notions about Moses, if viewed from the standpoint of the definition of idolatry in chapter two above, would come very close to being idolatrous. This is so particularly since Moses is viewed as the one to whom Yahweh gave the covenant. By attributing the Egyptian religious tradition to Moses, Artapanus comes close to making Moses idolatrous! However, this is precisely an area of ambiguity which is being exploited here. It shows an accommodating Artapanus even though he remains committed to the God of the Jews (cf. 27.21-22, 25-26).<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Freudenthal 1875:147 notes similar language in 27.12 as well as in Diodorus Siculus 1.89.5: καθ' ἑκαστον δ' αὐτῶν καταδείξαι τοῖς ἐγγχωρίοις σέβεσθαι τι ζῶον; this is cited in Holladay 1983:233, n49.

<sup>83</sup> Schürer III.523 says that Artapanus seems more interested in the glory and honour of the Jewish nation than in the purity of divine worship.

<sup>84</sup> Thus, Artapanus remains a pious Jew. Cf. Collins 1983:35 who says that Artapanus' piety is 'conspicuously similar to that of Hellenistic paganism'. However, since the biblical material forms the basis of Artapanus' reinterpretation, the implication is that the biblical material is equally similar to Hellenistic paganism, an implication that is hard to deny, nor is it an implication easy to defend. Collins

Further, Moses' contributions are said to be so great that the masses came to love him and accord him the worth of divine honour. He was called Hermes because of his ability to interpret the sacred writings (27.6). Artapanus does not leave us in any doubt. He tells us that Moses was the one who assigned the sacred writings to the priests (τά τε ἱερὰ γράμματα τοῖς ἱερεῦσιν, 27.4), thus his ability to interpret them should be a natural one. Holladay cites pagan parallels in Artapanus' portrait of Moses and the claims made for Hermes can be found in other writings such as Plato, *Phdr* 274-75, Diodorus Siculus 1.16.1 and others.<sup>85</sup> He argues that the portrait has apologetic value in that it responds to 'pagan charges that Jews had produced no figures who had made genuine contributions to humanity',<sup>86</sup> but this does not explain why Artapanus should turn Moses into Hermes. We should note that the attribution to Moses of the subsequent founding of a city named the city of Hermes (27.4) suggests that Moses is elevated to a status that is on par with Hermes (cf. 27.9), who was a 'messenger of the Gods'.<sup>87</sup> Thus, Moses has been turned into a 'messenger of the Gods'.

Even if Holladay's hypothesis that it is an apologetic stance, what Artapanus says also means that he holds a relatively open attitude towards the Egyptian religious cults.

In a later passage, in 27.32, Artapanus reports the Egyptians as being favourable to Moses, despite his less than friendly acts towards Egypt when he tried to liberate the Jews. After witnessing what his rod was able to do, the Egyptians set up a rod in every

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1983:37 argues that because the issue to Artapanus is not religion, Moses does not attempt to convert the Gentiles to the worship of God; no reason is therefore given for the Jews' persecution. And the divinity of Egyptian cults receives positive attitude from Artapanus, rather than condemnation. But Collins does not take into consideration Moses' prayer to God concerning the Jews' sufferings (27.21), and his reply to the king that the Lord of the universe had commanded him to liberate the Jews, when the king summoned and enquired of his reason for returning to Egypt (27.22). And the fact that Artapanus attributes the Egyptian animal cults to Moses shows that religion remains an issue.

<sup>85</sup> Holladay 1983:232, n46.

<sup>86</sup> Holladay 1983:233, n46.

<sup>87</sup> Ferguson 1993:143.



temple. What is even more interesting is the less favourable attitude towards Isis. The Egyptians did the same for Isis as they did for Moses' rod. But the two were carried out with different reasons. For Moses, the reason is that he introduced the Gods to be worshipped, and was now introducing a rod that would work wonders. The reason for Isis is her ability to perform wonders – which was due to Moses' rod. This portrayal of Moses as being greater than Isis successfully transfers to Moses what is attributed to Isis.

It must be emphasised that Artapanus in no way minimises or reduces the uniqueness of the Hebrew God. Whereas the Egyptian cults are explicable in terms of their origin, the God of the Hebrews remains the 'master of the universe' (τὸν τῆς οἰκουμένης δεσπότην, 27.22). And when the Egyptians and the Hebrew people faced each other, it was the former who together with their Gods were destroyed by fire and water (27.37). The basic difference between Artapanus and the Jewish authors like Philo and Josephus is that Artapanus does not object to portraying Moses as one worthy of divine honour, nor does he abstain from making positive remarks about the Egyptian animal cults. Indeed, he views them as culturally beneficial to humanity.

The above shows that while Artapanus remains committed to the Jewish people as superior and to the God of the Jews as the master of the universe, he displays an attitude that appears accommodating to other Gods. His accommodation to other religious traditions allows him not only to view them reasonably positively, but also gives him the relative freedom to even attribute the Egyptian animal cults to Moses. In Artapanus, we do not see an attitude that vilifies pagan religious traditions. Unlike Philo, Josephus, the writers of *Wis* and *Sibylline Oracles* who pour scorn on idolatry and draw a clear line between the Jewish tradition and the pagan cults, our examination of the texts above shows Artapanus to be accommodating in his attitude towards the pagan cults.

We see further that, while the *Letter of Aristeas* identifies the God of the Jews with Zeus and revolves most of its discussions around this identification, Artapanus goes beyond Pseudo-Aristeas by making Moses the origin of the Egyptian religious traditions. In other words, Artapanus brings the two religious traditions together, i.e. Jewish tradition and Egyptian religious tradition, and gives the impression that there is little difference between them. But the fact that Moses' God is portrayed as powerful, identifying Moses as the origin of the Egyptian religious tradition would imply that there is power in the Egyptian religions, thus attributing power to what is for other Jews powerless. And by bringing the two religious traditions together under one man, i.e. Moses, Artapanus runs the risk of confusing the true God with other Gods. Both of the above can be seen as idolatrous under our definitions of idolatry. But Artapanus seems to exploit the fact that Moses is not God, and therefore being accommodating in his view and descriptions of Moses need not be idolatrous. Could such a similarly friendly disposition towards other religious traditions be seen among the 'strong' in Corinth?

Both the *Letter of Aristeas* and Artapanus represent the cognitive level of Jews' open attitude towards other people's religious traditions. We will now look at the literary and inscriptional sources that reveal actual participation and accommodation of the Jews to idolatry.

#### **4.6 Jews' participation in/accommodation to pagan cults**

In reality, Jews in the Diaspora did not always adopt an exclusivist stance, nor did they consistently adopt a condemning attitude towards pagan cults, although evidence for such alternative behaviour/attitude is not altogether abundant. This could be due to the possibility of avoiding official censure or condemnation or worse still punishment. However, the evidence available from inscriptions and papyri might be telling; and it is possible that such evidence might represent some kinds of Jews who



continued to view themselves as Jews and at the same time saw no contradiction in participating in pagan cults. There are also literary sources which reflect such participation, but mostly in a rather disapproving manner such as Philo and Josephus. In the following, I shall look at some inscriptions and papyri as well as hints from authors like Philo and Josephus that show Jews' participation in pagan cults.

There are clearly different or varying degrees of participation but participation nonetheless. It is necessary to clarify, at the outset, that by participation we do not mean that it always involves actual worship or the ritual of worship. The participation in pagan cults revealed by inscriptions and Jewish authors may involve visitation to pagan temples without clear evidence of actual participation in the worship of the cults. Or it may involve the use of juridical oath-formulae which invoke the pagan deities. Sometimes, participation in pagan cults could involve conducting legal transactions at pagan temples, with the pagan Gods acting as intermediaries. Or it may involve serving as priests of the Gods. Or it may involve actual worship of the deities in terms of making offerings for various reasons or setting up shrines and dedicating them to the Gods. Some of these might overlap, that is, one aspect of participation such as the priestly service of the Gods might at the same time involve the worship of the Gods and certainly temple attendance. All these various aspects of participation reflect different ways and degrees in which idolatry at the practical level is practised by Jews, although the Jews involved may not necessarily agree that what they were doing constitutes idolatry. In other words, there remain ambiguities.

#### **4.6.1 Jews' participation in pagan cults**

Some inscriptions show that Jews visited temples of pagan deities for various reasons. From a few graffiti which are on the rocks near the Temple of Pan near Apollinopolis Magna/Edfu in Upper Egypt, dated sometime from second century to first

century BCE, it is evident that Jews visited the Temple of Pan. There are at least three examples of such visits. The first two show two Jews, one Theodotos who gives praise to God for his safe return from the sea (*CIJ* no.1537) and the other Ptolemaios who renders praise to God (*CIJ* no.1538). To be sure, both these inscriptions do not specify the God to whom the praise is directed. Although Theodotos and Ptolemaios' presence at the Temple of Pan could be taken to suggest that they were rendering praise to Pan, there is no reason why they could not give praise to the true God (since θεός is a common designation of God). Besides, Pan could well mean the 'universal God' to the Jews in question (as the word πᾶν, 'everything' shows).<sup>88</sup> Thus, could Theodotos and Ptolemaios consider Pan to be the equivalent of the Jews' God? The open declaration of themselves as Jews raises the question as to why they should make themselves known if they were praising a pagan God. However, if they intended to praise the true God, the use of the common term θεός without specifying who this θεός was could lead others to confuse the 'true' God with the pagan God. This means that by mentioning the 'true' God, such confusion could be avoided. Why then did they not mention the 'true' God? Could it be that rendering praise to Pan by Jews was more widespread and common than we think? There is for now no ready answer to this question, although the next inscription might suggest this possibility. What can be concluded is that Theodotos and Ptolemaios, both Jews, visited a pagan temple.

The next inscription, also found in the Temple of Pan, on the rock facing the east of the temple (Horbury-Noy, no.123; second or first century BCE), refers to a Jew named Lazaros who visited the Temple of Pan for a third time.<sup>89</sup> This third visit of Lazaros

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<sup>88</sup> Barclay 1996:100 raises several questions which render the issue of whether Theodotos and Ptolemaios praised the true God or the pagan God an uncertain one. My concern here is to illustrate that Jews visited pagan temples. What their purposes were can be uncertain if no evidence exists.

<sup>89</sup> A similar but uncertain inscription in the name of Lazaros is provided in Horbury-Noy 1992:211-12, no. 124.



might suggest the possibility that it is much more common for Jews to visit pagan temples than we think. This may explain why Theodotos and Ptolemaios openly declared themselves to be Jews if they had the pagan God in mind. If visits to pagan temples were more common, it might be that some form of participation in the pagan cult was also relatively common such as giving praise to Pan. In that light, there is little reason for Theodotos and Ptolemaios to conceal their Jewish identity.<sup>90</sup> These are, however, speculations. We cannot be absolutely certain or conclusive about these Jews simply on the basis of what is written on a few inscriptions.<sup>91</sup> What can be certain is that these Jews, i.e. Theodotos, Ptolemaios and Lazaros, had all visited a pagan temple, and one of them (Lazaros) was even there a third time.<sup>92</sup> The above inscriptions show that some Jews did not appear to have difficulty visiting pagan temples. The reasons and purposes may vary from Jew to Jew. The interesting point to note is that such visits to pagan temples suggest the possibility that there were other Jews who also found attendance at or visits to pagan temples something that did not necessarily render them unfaithful to their Jewish tradition.

#### 4.6.2 Use of pagan oath-formulae and legal transactions at pagan temples

Two inscriptions from Gorgippa (*CIJ* nos. 690, 41 CE; 690a, 67-68 CE), reveal the use of the pagan oath-formulae by Jews. The formula is a simple line invoking Zeus,

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<sup>90</sup> Thus, in referring to Theodotos and Ptolemaios, Goldenberg 1998:64 is not convincing in his argument that a Jew thanking his God in a pagan temple will naturally do so with calculated vagueness, since the declaration of their Jewish identity is not so vague after all.

<sup>91</sup> Horbury-Noy 1992:208 point out that the inscription is written on the rock face west of the temple, inside a frame, without the dedication to Pan Euodos. Taking their cue from A. Bernard's suggestion that the frame is intended to isolate the inscription from the neighbouring text, which is to Pan, they argue that the positioning and the wording of the inscriptions (i.e. no's 121-124) suggest that the God referred to is not Pan. However, there are difficulties with such a theory. First, it would be almost impossible to establish its purpose; and second, if the inscription was not to Pan, an equally difficult question would arise as to how it came to be placed next to those dedicated to Pan. This conclusion of Horbury and Noy is therefore not necessary, nor is it convincing.

<sup>92</sup> Horbury-Noy 1992:211 cite a Dr Thompson as suggesting that τρίτος could also mean that there were 'two others'. But in the absence of such evidence in inscriptions and the single mention of Lazaros, the more likely translation of τρίτον remains 'a third time'.

Earth and Sun (ὕπὸ Δία, Γῆν, ἥλιον). Both inscriptions are addressed to God most high (θεῶι ὑψίστῳ), which suggests that the persons making the oath were Jews. Of the two, *CIJ* 690 is more uncertain in term of its Jewish origin. Lifshitz, writing in the prolegomenon to Frey's *CIJ*, however, notes that the epithet παντοκράτωρ cannot be pagan while εὐλογητός can only be Jewish.<sup>93</sup> Thus, he is of the opinion that the Jewish origin is beyond question.<sup>94</sup>

Both inscriptions, as may be apparent, show that the Jews concerned at least remained loyal to the 'God most high'. The first in fact reveals that Pathos was dedicating his slave in the prayer-house (ἀνέθηκεν ἐν τῇ προσευχῇ, 8-9). The second shows that the Jew Neokles manumitted his slaves with the order that sought to ensure their safety. They did not seem to view their identity as Jews a reason for avoiding the use of such a pagan oath-formula.<sup>95</sup>

In an inscription from Delphi (*CIJ* no.711, 119 BCE), a Jew by the name of 'Ιουδαῖος (Ioudaios)<sup>96</sup> made a sale to Apollo of his slave named ' Αμύντας (Amyntas), apparently a will meant to manumit Amyntas should Ioudaios die (Ἐπεὶ δὲ κά τι παθῇ 'Ιουδαῖος, ἐλεύθερος ἔστω ' Αμύντας, 5-6). It is not clear whether Amyntas was a Jew; nor is it clear whether Ioudaios was a practising Jew (i.e. law observing Jew) either. What is clear is that Ioudaios was a Jew who participated in the pagan cult of Apollo by making a sale of his slave to Apollo. Such a legal transaction

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<sup>93</sup> *CIJ* prol., 67.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Williams 1998:123 who similarly accepts the Jewish identity of the inscription, and the next (i.e. *CIJ* 690a), on the basis of the divine epithets that appear in them.

<sup>95</sup> Such oath-formulae might have gained a reputation of being efficacious among the Gentiles. Further, it might prove a more effective rendering of a manumission which may otherwise not be recognised. Oaths in the ancient world often carry the element of malediction against the transgressors of the oath, particularly imprecations on tombs against those who might rob the graves of the deceased. See Ferguson 1993:219-20.

<sup>96</sup> According to Williams 1998:195, n48, this name is probably a Hellenised form of Judah.



usually took place in the pagan temple, with the deity serving as an intermediary. This is because slaves in the ancient world could not enter into a legal contract with their masters.<sup>97</sup> However, Ioudaios as slave owner had the choice of how he would free his slave but chose the pagan way, i.e. using the pagan oath-formula in a pagan temple, even though this may not square with his ancestral tradition.<sup>98</sup>

Two further examples of the manumission of Jewish slaves may be seen in two inscriptions (*CIJ* nos.709 and 710; Delphi, mid second century BCE).<sup>99</sup> The first (*CIJ* no.709) shows the sale of three Jewish women slaves to the Pythian Apollo (τῶι Ἀπόλλωνι τῶι Πυθίῳ). As mentioned earlier, since slaves in the ancient world had no legal rights to enter into any legal contracts with their masters, their manumission could be obtained in a number of ways: by paying for their own freedom; or by being granted freedom by their masters; or by being purchased by another free person who then set the slaves free; or by sacral manumission, which was one of the popular forms.<sup>100</sup> This sacral manumission was the form to which the present inscriptions refer. The three women were freed by being sold to Apollo, a sale which they themselves had entrusted to Apollo (καθὼς ἐπίστευσε Ἀντιγόνα καὶ Θευδώρα καὶ Δωροθέα τῶι θεῶι τῶν ὀνάν). That the sale took place in the temple of Apollo is beyond doubt since the sacral manumission had to be conducted before the presence of the God.

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<sup>97</sup> For a more detailed treatment of the rights of slaves with regard to legal contracts with their masters, see Westermann 1955:34-39.

<sup>98</sup> It is of course possible that Ioudaios has abandoned his Jewish customs. But there is no evidence to suggest that and any such guesses can only be speculative.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Feldman 1996:63. Williams 1998:5 makes the assumption that these Jewish slaves have been Seleucid prisoners of war who had been enslaved and taken to Greece during the early period of the Maccabean period.

<sup>100</sup> According to Westermann 1955:35-36, the manumission by self-purchase through trust sales to the God Apollo consisted of four elements: status, personal inviolability, right to work as one pleased, and the privilege of going where one pleased. Such Delphic manumissions involve the God Apollo acting as the medium, which is the entrustment sale itself. The more important type in this group are the 'outright' manumissions which allow an immediate and complete separation of the slave from any control by the owner. This could account for its popularity.

Further, it involved the priest of Apollo Amyntas (ὁ ἱερεὺς τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος Ἀμύντας) as one of the witnesses.

The second inscription is a shorter one but otherwise similar (*CIJ* no.710). It, too, is about a sacral manumission of a slave by sale to Apollo. The slave named Ioudaios who was of Jewish origin (Ἰουδαῖος τὸ γένος Ἰουδαῖον) had similarly entrusted the sale to the God (καθὼς ἐπίστευσε Ἰουδαῖος τῷ θεῷ τὰν ὄναν).

In the above discussions on sacral manumission, freedom of the slaves was obtained after the slaves had entrusted the sale to the God. Πιστεύω is here appropriately translated as ‘entrust’, while it also carries the meaning of ‘commit’. It suggests that the slaves in question were putting themselves and their manumissions in trust of the God by agreeing to the sale. It must be noted, however, that being slaves, they probably had little choice on where and how they were manumitted. What these inscriptions show is that while Jewish slaves had little choice on how and where they were manumitted, the more popular type of manumission, which was the self-purchase through trust sale to the God Apollo, might offer itself to those Jewish slaves who had a choice. The four elements mentioned by Westermann in this type of manumission would be attractive to Jewish slaves.<sup>101</sup> They may be quite prepared to participate in the pagan cult in order to secure these ‘elements’ of freedom. It also reveals that some Jews, when they were put in a situation where other alternatives were not forthcoming, were willing to follow the custom of the day, i.e. the customs of the surrounding Gentile environment, even though they might appear contradictory to their Jewish tradition.

#### 4.6.3 Jews in the service of the Gods

Two high profile Jews appear in literary works as well as some inscriptions, namely Dositheos son of Drimylos and Philo’s nephew Tiberius Julius Alexander, which

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<sup>101</sup> See n100 above.



unambiguously show them to be in the service of the Gods. Dositheos is recorded in the third book of the Maccabees as a renegade Jew who saved the life of Ptolemy IV Philopator (3 Macc 1.3). The author describes Dositheos as one who had renounced the Law (μεταβαλὼν τὰ νόμιμα) and abandoned his ancestral beliefs (τῶν πατρίων δογμάτων ἀπηλλοτριωμένος) (3 Macc 1.3).<sup>102</sup> Such a description no doubt comes from an author who does not view Dositheos favourably. To the author, Dositheos was unfaithful to the Jewish tradition, but only according to his perception and definition of what constitutes faithfulness.<sup>103</sup> One of the papyri shows that Dositheos had no difficulty in the service of the king, even the priestly service.<sup>104</sup> According to the papyri (*CPJ* nos.127d and 127e), Dositheos was priest of Alexander and the Gods Adelphoi and the Gods Euergetai (ἱερέως Δωσιθέου τοῦ Δριμύλου ᾿Αλεξάνδρου καὶ θεῶν ᾿Αδελφῶν καὶ θεῶν Εὐεργετῶν) during the reign of Ptolemy III Euergetes I, in 222 BCE. This, according to Tcherikover and Fuks,<sup>105</sup> was the highest priesthood in Hellenistic Egypt.<sup>106</sup> Other papyri tell us that Dositheos was ascending in his political career. In 240 BCE Dositheos was one of the heads of the royal secretariat (ὑπομνηματογράφος, *CPJ* no.127a); while in 225/4 BCE he travelled in Egypt with Ptolemy III (μετὰ τοῦ βασιλέως, *CPJ* no.127c). The highest priesthood must have come as a further ascent for Dositheos. Although this might indicate that he had abandoned his Jewish tradition and faith, it could well be that Dositheos continued to

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<sup>102</sup> Barclay 1996:104 observes that what Dositheos does goes against the Jewish communities in Egypt which avoid recognising the claimed divinity of the Ptolemaic kings.

<sup>103</sup> Barclay 1996:83-84 observes that the author of 3 Maccabees 'considered citizen rights, enlistment in the Dionysiac cult, proximity to the king and the abandonment of Jewish food laws as a 'package' which Jews either accepted or rejected'. Thus Dositheos is understandably described in an unfavourable light (3 Macc 1.3).

<sup>104</sup> The identification of Dositheos in our papyrus with that of 3 Macc is proven since *CPJ* nos.127d and 127e were discovered. For details of discussion, see Tcherikover and Fuks 1957-64, I.230-31.

<sup>105</sup> Tcherikover and Fuks 1957-64, I.231.

<sup>106</sup> For a more detailed treatment of the development of the ruler cult, see Ferguson 1993:185-97.

regard himself as a Jew who saw no contradiction in assuming the priestly office. This is particularly so if the priestly office was viewed more as a political office by Dositheos, in which case it would mean a political promotion. As far as the papyri (i.e. *CPJ* nos.127d and 127e) are concerned, Dositheos was clearly an active participant in the ruler cult of the pagans. He therefore represents the category of Jews who participated in pagan cults and Gods.

We turn now to Philo's nephew Tiberius Julius Alexander. Literary sources from both Philo and Josephus reveal something about Tiberius. While Philo mentions little about Tiberius (*Prov* 1 and 2; *Anim*),<sup>107</sup> Josephus tells us that he was brought up in a wealthy family (*Ant* 18.159-60) well connected politically (*Ant* 19.276-77). He joined the Roman service at a relatively young age,<sup>108</sup> and his ascent up the political ladder was almost unhindered.<sup>109</sup> His first appointment was to the post of epistrategos of the Thebaid in 42 CE. He was next appointed the procurator of Judaea in 46 CE, a post he kept for two years (Josephus, *Ant* 20.100-3).<sup>110</sup> In 63 CE, Tiberius was a high-ranking military officer. By 66 CE Tiberius had reached the peak of an equestrian career, being appointed by Nero as prefect of Egypt (Josephus, *Bell* 2.309). In the reign of Vespasian, between 69 CE and 70 CE, Tiberius was made 'prefect of all the army' (πάντων τῶν

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<sup>107</sup> In *Prov*, Philo appears to be engaged in a dialogue with Tiberius over the providence of God which Tiberius rejects. In *Anim*, both argue about the rationality of animals. Philo argues against animals having any reason at all and explains that the seemingly rational acts of animals are but due to the order of nature. Tiberius argues that animals do possess reason and that there is a moral and juridical relationship between animals and humanity. Against this reasoning of Tiberius, Philo argues that humanity is privileged with reason while animals are devoid of it. However, it is important to note that Tiberius is not speaking himself but his views are represented here. We may therefore have to take it with a pinch of salt.

<sup>108</sup> Tcherikover and Fuks 1957-64, II.188 inform us that Tiberius' first civil appointment was in 42 CE. If we date Tiberius' birth to sometime between 14 and 16 CE, then he would be only about 26-28 years old at his first civil appointment.

<sup>109</sup> There is an intervening period of up to 15 years, i.e. between 48 and 63 CE, during which we have no information about Tiberius. Whether or not he might have been sidelined politically during this period is uncertain, although it is strange that there is complete silence if he was continually ascending, or if he was doing what could eventually bring him further promotion, politically. If he was sidelined during the 'silent period', then his promotion in 63 CE must be due to a change in his political fortunes.

<sup>110</sup> See Feldman in the LCL vol 456, p54, note 'c'.



στρατευμάτων ἐπάρχοντος, Josephus, *Bell* 6.237). One wonders how as a high-ranking Roman official Tiberius could remain a practising Jew. Josephus tells us that Tiberius did not abide by the customs of his ancestors (τοῖς...πατρίοις οὐκ ἐνέμεινεν...ἔθεσιν, *Ant* 20.100). Tcherikover and Fuks are not convincing with their view that Josephus is not necessarily referring to any overt act of apostasy.<sup>111</sup> Tiberius' service in the Roman government, taking military oaths and the like, meant that he had to conform to the non-Jewish way of life. And Josephus probably has in mind Tiberius' honouring of the Egyptian deities. In *OGIS* 663, Tiberius plays an important role in setting up a relief of Claudius during which he also offers worship to the Egyptian deities Khonson and Seb. Further, in *OGIS* 669, he makes reference to the providence of the Gods and to the deity of the emperors.<sup>112</sup> The latter is also seen in *CPJ* no.418a in which Vespasian is proclaimed as εἷς σωτήρ καὶ εὐεργέτης (one saviour and benefactor), κύριε σεβαστέ (lord Augustus), Ἕμμωνος υἱός (son of Ammon),<sup>113</sup> and θεὸς Καῖσαρ Οὐεσπασιανός (divine Caesar Vespasian). By making the proclamation, Tiberius makes himself the 'priest' of the cult of Vespasian! It therefore shows that Tiberius, though a Jew, had not only served in the Roman administration, but also participated in both the Egyptian cults and the imperial cult. This raises the question whether Tiberius had totally abandoned his Jewish customs. Even if he had abandoned the Jewish tradition, did he still regard himself a Jew?

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<sup>111</sup> Tcherikover and Fuks 1957-64, II.188-89.

<sup>112</sup> Both *OGIS* 663 and 669 are cited in Barclay 1996:106, n6.

<sup>113</sup> This is clearly a religious title since Ammon is a deity accepted by the Greeks as identical with Zeus (Ferguson 1993:190). By proclaiming Vespasian as the son of Zeus, Tiberius and the crowds that support him are as good as rendering divine honours to Vespasian. Cf. *OGIS* 383 where the same honour given to Antiochus I of Commagene in the first century BCE with the title 'The Great King Antiochus, the God, the Righteous One, the Manifest Deity' allows the setting up of the image of Antiochus alongside the great Gods and the offering of sacrifices in honour of him also, in addition to the Gods (cited in Ferguson 1993:192, n82).

Barclay carefully notes that Tiberius' assimilation would require him to abandon most if not all the Jewish customs.<sup>114</sup> While it is highly probable that Tiberius had abandoned most of his Jewish tradition, there are at least some hints that he still regarded himself a Jew, and therefore continued, possibly, to view some elements of the Jewish tradition with at least respect if not reverence. Josephus (*Bell* 6.236ff) records Tiberius as one of those generals who were against the destruction of the Temple of the Jews. While it could be politically expedient for Tiberius to both agree with Titus' opinion as well as gain the general support of the Jews, it could equally be possible that the Temple still represented an important part of his heritage. Josephus (*Ant* 20.100) comments that Tiberius' father was known for his religious devotion. Even though Tiberius himself did not seem to adhere to his ancestral tradition, he would quite certainly have been taught the central motifs of the Jewish faith, not least the Temple and its significance. Another hint may be seen in the fact that Josephus never mentions Tiberius' 'unfaithfulness', until much later when he was probably dead. Turner notes the difference in tone between Josephus' *Jewish War* and *Antiquities*.<sup>115</sup> He points out that at the time when Josephus published his *Jewish War*, Tiberius was still alive and therefore a patron about whom he 'deliberately abstained' from making offensive remarks. It was around 93 CE when Tiberius was either dead or 'politically null' that Josephus mentioned Tiberius as having abandoned his ancestral customs. But if any reference to Tiberius as 'unfaithful' were offensive to him, it might imply that Tiberius did not regard himself as such.

Further, Tiberius had been generally tolerant of the Jews, leaving them as much as possible to live according to their customs when he was governor of Egypt (Josephus, *Bell* 2.220). Even though he gave orders to crush the riots in Alexandria, it was not

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<sup>114</sup> Barclay 1996:106. See further Barclay 1998a:87-88 where Tiberius is included among the 'apostates'.

<sup>115</sup> Turner 1954:63.



without some efforts on the part of Tiberius to mediate between the warring Jews and Greeks (Josephus, *Bell* 2.487-94).<sup>116</sup>

Thus, Tiberius may still regard himself a Jew, although others would most probably consider him an apostate. His involvement or participation in the worship of Egyptian deities as well as the ruler cult shows him to be disregarding his ancestral tradition of worshipping the one true God of the Jews. At the same time, his declaration of Vespasian by various honorific titles constitutes a setting up of the cult of Vespasian, thus putting himself in the 'priestly service' of the imperial cult. He thus serves as another example of a Jew who participated in pagan cults and ruler cult.

#### 4.6.4 Jews' worship of the Gods

One of the ways in which Jews had engaged in pagan cults can be seen in their joint dedication of religious shrines to pagan Gods with other pagans. Three pagan inscriptions which Horbury and Noy include in their appendix (no.3) bear Jewish names,<sup>117</sup> indicating the Jews' dedication to pagan cults. One is dedicated to various Gods (Θρίπιδι Κολάνθαι Πανὶ θεοῖς συννάοις τὸ ἱερόν, the shrine to Triphis, Kolanthes, Pan and their fellow Gods, Horbury-Noy, no.154, Ptolemais in 138/7 BCE), while the other two are dedicated to Apollo, Zeus, and the associated Gods (Ἀπόλλωνι καὶ Διὶ καὶ τοῖς συνεστίοις θεοῖς τὸ ἱερόν, Horbury-Noy, nos.155 and 156, Hermopolis Magna 80-69 BCE and 78 BCE respectively). Even though they are all pagan inscriptions set up for the express purpose of dedicating their shrines to the Gods, the combined number of Jewish names comes to ten.<sup>118</sup> The first inscription (Horbury-Noy,

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<sup>116</sup> Since Josephus views Tiberius as one who 'did not abide by the Laws of his fathers', it is unlikely for Josephus to say anything positive about Tiberius. Thus, anything positive about Tiberius by Josephus would have to be taken seriously.

<sup>117</sup> Horbury-Noy 1992:246-50.

<sup>118</sup> Ἀβραμ Ἀλωσματοῦτος, col. b. l.19 (Horbury-Noy 1992:246, no.154); Ὑρκανὸς Πτολεμαίου, col. I. l.19, Χάβας Ἡροφῶντος, col. II. l.121, Ἀπολλόδωρος Ζαββδήλου, col. II.

no.154) mentions the names of those on the inscription as members of the association (οἱ συνοδίται). It is uncertain as to the nature of the σύνοδος. However, it is likely that religious activities, including worship of the Gods, formed part of the routines of the σύνοδος. The second and third inscriptions mention the citizens as founders (οἱ συμπολιτευόμενοι κτίσται) whose names appear on the inscriptions. It is most likely that they were founders of the shrine dedicated to Apollo, Zeus and the Gods. Since they were soldiers posted to Hermopolis, they may have little choice as Horbury and Noy have suggested,<sup>119</sup> although it is also possible that they had voluntarily chosen to engage in the dedication. The question of the soldiers' willingness in participating cannot be settled conclusively. What is unambiguous is their participation in a joint dedication with their fellow pagans of religious shrines to pagan Gods.

While we have seen inscriptions concerning manumission of Jewish slaves who entrusted their sale to the Gods, another inscription shows a Jew, Moschos, setting up an altar to the Gods (*CII* I no.711b; Amphiareion of Oropos, third century BCE).<sup>120</sup> Apparently Moschos had a dream in which he received a command from the Gods Amphiaraos and Hygieia (Ἀμφιαράου καὶ τῆς Ὑγιείας) to record on an inscription the vision he had seen. Subsequently he set up an altar to the Gods at the temple. While it is impossible to control what one dreams about, Moschos was prepared to believe in the Gods of his dream and obey their command.

The above discussions take us through different ways in which idolatry was practised by Jews. In these various idolatrous practices, at least four observations

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I.124 and Πτολεμαῖος Δωσιθέου, col. II. I.134 (Horbury-Noy 1992:247, no.155); Ἀγγίων Χρυσίππου, col. I. I.65, Καϊνίων Κοσακάβου, col. II. I.88, Χελκίας Διονυσίου, col. II. I.93, Ἀγγίων Συνμάχου, col. II. I.112, Μίλιχος Βαράκου, col. III. I.179 (Horbury-Noy 1992:249, no.156).

<sup>119</sup> Horbury-Noy 1992:248.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. *CII* prol., 82. See Schürer III.65 who compares the various manumission inscriptions to sieve out evidence for Jewish communities in Upper Egypt.



emerge: (1) in almost all the examples cited above, the Jews involved in idolatry did not appear to have abandoned fully their identity as Jews; (2) in almost all the examples, the practices do not always fit perfectly our definitions of idolatry set out in chapter two; for example, a visit to the pagan temple remains ambiguous in terms of whether it is an idolatrous act; (3) while most of the examples cited above could be argued as examples of 'divided loyalty', i.e. 'unfaithfulness', to the true God of the Jews, the reverse could be argued, i.e. 'divided loyalty' suggests ambiguity and thus need not be viewed as idolatrous, so long as one remains 'faithful' to one's ancestral tradition. And (4) idolatry is not as clear-cut as it may seem at first, that is, while there are clearly defined terms there remain ambiguities which can be exploited.

The above observations once again raise the question which we raised in the beginning of this chapter. Could such ambiguities of what constitutes idolatry be one reason that accounts for the behaviour of the 'strong' in 1 Cor 8-10? And could our examples cited above, both literary and archaeological (inscriptions and papyri), provide helpful parallels to the behaviour of the 'strong' in 1 Cor 8-10?

#### **4.7 Summary and conclusion**

The function of this chapter has been to examine the possible background and parallels to the behaviour of the 'strong' in 1 Cor 8-10.

We examined first of all the LXX ban on reviling other people's Gods in Exod 22.27a and asked whether the 'strong' could have been aware of the ban and that their restraint from criticising other Gods might be a result of their familiarity with such a command. We raised a question as to why the 'strong' should visit pagan temples and participate in pagan cults, an act which did not seem to square with the requirement of the second commandment, and raised the possibility that the 'strong' may have a different understanding of the true God.

The *Letter of Aristeas* serves as an example of such a possibility. In *Let. Aris*, we see an accommodating Pseudo-Aristeas who, through the courtier Aristeas he created, equated the God of the Jews with other people's Gods, i.e. Zeus. This became the central motif around which the entire *Letter* revolves. Such accommodation is seen in various examples such as the viewing of the king's action as pious and also the translators' overall positive description of the king's pagan religious life. The example of Aristeas' equation of the true God of the Jews with other people's Gods suggests that there is a possibility of a conceptual overlap between some Jews and Gentiles over the true God. A brief survey of the use of θεὸς ὑψίστος by both Jews and pagans in literary and inscriptional sources shows that Jews and Gentiles could use a common term to refer to God. It therefore indicates that such a conceptual overlap exists. Could there be a conceptual overlap in terms of the true God in the theology of the 'strong'?

We moved on to consider Artapanus, who serves as an affirmation of Pseudo-Aristeas and of the conceptual overlap between the true God and other Gods. But Artapanus goes beyond Pseudo-Aristeas. For in Artapanus, we see a confluence of two different religious traditions: Jewish and Egyptian. For example, Moses is turned into a 'cultural hero', and a 'military hero', to use Gruen's words, who warded off the Ethiopian invaders. The lack of concern about the use of non-Jewish religious material in Artapanus reveals Artapanus' accommodation to other religious traditions. Artapanus' use of Moses further raises the question of the exploitation of ambiguity in the definitions of idolatry. We asked whether there might be areas of ambiguity for the 'strong' as to what constitutes idolatry.

But Pseudo-Aristeas and Artapanus represent Jewish accommodation to other religious traditions only at the intellectual level. We looked at practical examples of Jews' accommodation and participation in pagan cults from literary and inscriptional



sources and saw that Jews did participate in pagan cults in varying degrees, even though some of them probably continued to regard themselves as Jews. Although some Jews participated in pagan cults because of coercion or compulsion, many seem to have done so willingly. But we also made four observations and concluded that while there may appear to be clear-cut definitions of idolatry, there remain ambiguities which can be exploited.

These examples of Jews' accommodation/participation in pagan cults might throw light on the behaviour of the 'strong' in 1 Cor 8-10. Could they serve as parallels to the behaviour of the 'strong' in 1 Cor 8-10 where the 'strong' Corinthians, possibly under Jewish influence, might similarly have believed that the God of the Christ-believing people is the same as the God/s of other religious traditions, since there is only one God? Like the various examples of Jews' accommodation/participation in pagan cults seen in both literary and inscriptional sources, could the 'strong' have attended pagan temples and participated in religious rituals which included the eating of idol-meat, without believing that their behaviour was idolatrous? In other words, what we are doing here in this chapter may enable us to look at the 'strong' in a different light, i.e. from a cognitive level to a practical level the 'strong' could have operated with a rather different understanding of what constitutes idolatry, an understanding different from that of Paul.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### LEADERSHIP AND DISCIPLINE IN THE JEWISH DIASPORA

#### 5.1 Introduction

In chapter 4, we looked at examples of Jewish accommodation to idolatry and concluded that not all Jews during the Second Temple period fully abstained from participation in idolatrous acts. This is due to the fact that there were ambiguities in what really constituted idolatry, which were exploited to varying degrees by different Jews. The question arises as to what is their standard of judgment? Put differently, what happened if a member of the community were to commit an act considered idolatrous by the community? Who decides for the community what constitutes right or proper behaviour, particularly with regard to idolatry? In other words, how did the Jews in the Diaspora discipline themselves as a community? To be sure, Jews in the Diaspora had differences of opinion and practice in relation to idolatry, but also had some means to adjudicate such differences. This chapter will therefore examine the structures of leadership in the Diaspora Jewish communities and the common cultural norms which are encapsulated in the law, to which appeal could be made. In our case, it is important to examine how Jewish communities responded or reacted to idolatry, although we will also look at other cases of deviance. We will also look at what role the law played in the Jewish Diaspora.

This chapter is important for several reasons. First, an examination of the leadership structures of the Jewish Diaspora would shed light on our understanding of the issue of discipline and authority in the Corinthian assembly, where the law is not the basis for action. Second, while the material on leadership of the Diaspora Jewish assembly is limited, it provides a window into how Jews functioned as an assembly. This will shed light on how they dealt with deviance in the communities and to what



authority they might appeal for their decisions and actions. This paves the way for our later chapter (chapter 7) which deals with the question of Paul's authority. We will compare and contrast the leadership structures of Paul and those of the Jewish Diaspora, and would be able to examine whether the norms to which Paul appeals in fact reproduce those used in the Diaspora communities.

It is necessary, at the outset, to draw a distinction between leadership and discipline. By studying leadership and discipline, we are not saying that the two are necessarily linked all the time. In fact, as we will show below, leadership indicates how the communities were organised and functioned. At times, leadership is important for dealing with deviant members. But most of the time, our material on discipline hardly shows the role of leaders. The important point for us is to see how the communities dealt with serious cases of deviance and, as mentioned above, other cases of deviance.

This chapter will therefore take the following shape. First of all, I will briefly survey the organisation of the Diaspora Jews, which would involve surveying the terms by which they called themselves, or others called them. This will be followed by a survey of the leadership structures of the Jewish Diaspora, before looking at practical examples of decision-making concerning discipline in the communities, within the context of 'deviance' and in relation to idolatry.

## 5.2 The organisation of the Jewish Diaspora

The Jews were scattered throughout the Roman empire during the Second Temple period.<sup>1</sup> This means that they had to live in the midst of Gentiles whose

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<sup>1</sup> Literary sources indicate that Jews either emigrated or were transported by their Gentile rulers to Egypt, Asia Minor, and the regions surrounding Palestine. See Josephus, *Ant* 12.7, 9, 147-53; cf. *Letter of Aristeas* 12-14. In the second century BCE, manumission of Jewish slaves has been shown on inscriptions (*CIJ* I<sup>2</sup> no.710 [Delphi; 162 BCE]; *CIJ* I<sup>2</sup> no.709 [Delphi; 170-157/6 BCE]), which are often taken to refer to prisoners of war as a result of the Jewish revolt against the Seleucids. Cf. Philo, *Legat*

communities and religious beliefs differed very much from theirs. The widespread Jewish population in Egypt, Asia Minor and beyond could survive only because they organised themselves into self-regulating communities.<sup>2</sup> This is necessary as they needed to maintain their boundaries, and therefore their identity.

Evidence for how the Jews organised themselves is limited, and what follows is a brief description of what meagre information we have. We therefore cannot draw large conclusions about the organisation of the Diaspora Jews. However, we do have evidence of names for Jews as collective associations and for specific leadership titles (see 5.3 below). Various terms were employed to refer to the Jewish communities. Apart from the common ethnic description of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι (*CIJ* II, no.1440),<sup>3</sup> we should note the fact that as aliens Jews were allowed to form associations for cultic purposes.<sup>4</sup> This would suggest that the Jews had begun to form themselves into organised bodies or communities. Pseudo-Aristeas, when referring to the Jewish people in Alexandria, uses the term πολίτευμα (*Let.Aris* 310).<sup>5</sup> The term could mean a ‘political body’ or ‘body of citizens’. We will start with the term πολίτευμα as it is the most discussed. But, as I will show, it is not as revealing as some have claimed.

Kasher has recently proposed the theory that the Jews in Egypt and, indeed, all over the Hellenistic Diaspora, had organised themselves into independent ‘political

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155. Strabo, quoted by Josephus, describes the Jewish people as having penetrated into every city (πόλις) and made their presence felt wherever they were (*Ant* 14.115); cf. *Legat* 281-82.

<sup>2</sup> Schürer III.87 comments: ‘The survival of the Jewish religion and way of life among the various groups dispersed throughout the world was obviously possible only if the Jews, even among foreigners, in the midst of the pagan world, organised themselves into self-supporting communities within which the faith and law of the fathers could be observed as in the Holy Land’.

<sup>3</sup> This has been improved by *CPJ*, vol III, p. 141, which removed the additional Ἰουδα(ῖ)οι from line 8.

<sup>4</sup> Applebaum 1974:464-65.

<sup>5</sup> Schürer III.88 thinks that the term here refers to ‘the entire Jewish people in Alexandria’. However, the clause in *Let.Aris*. 310 does not explicitly say so (οἱ ἀπὸ τοῦ πολιτεύματος).



units' called πολιτεύματα in order to fight for equal rights.<sup>6</sup> He is of the view that the Jews were doing this as a result of their resistance to assimilation into the Greek culture through its civic bodies. However, it is also possible that this term πολίτευμα does not designate the whole Jewish community but only a small body such as a council of the great and the good, as Lüderitz has argued.<sup>7</sup> This is well argued by Zuckerman who, in a review article of Kasher's book, examines all the extant sources and concludes that there is no reference to 'a single Jewish *politeuma* in all of Egypt',<sup>8</sup> with the exception of *The Letter of Aristeas*.<sup>9</sup> Zuckerman's study shows that nothing indicates that *politeumata* enjoyed any legal status, nor were they set up by any royal decree or such like.

Two undated Jewish inscriptions from Cyrenaica, however, seem to indicate that, in that location at least, the *politeuma* was a well developed and organised body which could honour a public servant and to which members could make practical contributions.<sup>10</sup> However, these inscriptions display Hellenistic tendencies and customs which, according to Zuckerman, were apparently not shared by the Jewish community as a whole.<sup>11</sup> It therefore suggests that the Jewish *politeuma* may not have been a widespread organisation in the Jewish Diaspora. What appears certain is that Jews in the Diaspora, including those of Berenice in Cyrenaica, formed themselves into assemblies in different localities in the Diaspora. Whether the *politeuma* had any legal status or was a widespread phenomenon is not at all clear. The point here is that

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<sup>6</sup> Kasher 1985.

<sup>7</sup> Lüderitz 1994:183-225.

<sup>8</sup> Zuckerman 1988:173.

<sup>9</sup> Zuckerman 1988:181-82 argues that Kasher's is a wrong interpretation of the text by switching the role of the 'officially recognised' community, that is, the *plethos*, to the *politeuma*.

<sup>10</sup> Lüderitz 1983:148-58 (no.70 and no.71); cited also in Williams 1998:118. The dating of both is uncertain but is unlikely to be later than the first century BCE; see further Williams 1998:194, n27 and 195, n33.

<sup>11</sup> See Zuckerman 1988:179, and his n21.

the term *politeuma* is rarer than Kasher et al. have thought; it appears infrequently and where it does it is difficult to determine what it really refers to. We therefore cannot draw large conclusions about it.

Other terms have also been found to refer to the Jewish people. In the second century BCE, the term κατοικία was used to refer to a military settlement set up near the Temple of Onias at Leontopolis.<sup>12</sup> Although the term's use as a reference to military settlers during Ptolemaic Egypt is well established, it was also used to refer to Jews during the Roman period (τῇ κατοικίᾳ τῶν ἐν Ἱεραπόλει κατοικούντων Ἰουδαίων, *CIJ* II, no.775).<sup>13</sup> However, there is little evidence to suggest what sort of organisation of the Jewish communities this term might convey.

In the first century BCE, the Jews from Sardis had their own σύνοδος. Josephus quotes a letter by Lucius Antonius to the magistrates, council and people of Sardis which mentions the official position with regard to the Jewish community there. In particular, the letter says that the Jews had had an 'association of their own in accordance with their native laws and a place of their own' (*Ant* 14.235). While it is not totally clear as to what the σύνοδος here refers to, it is most probably a reference to the Jewish community as a whole, an assembly of the Jews where, as the same letter quoted by Josephus says, the Jews 'decide their own affairs and controversies with one another' (τά τε πράγματα καὶ τὰς πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἀντιλογίας κρίνουσιν, *Ant* 14.235).<sup>14</sup> Thus, the term σύνοδος indicates that the Jews in at least some

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<sup>12</sup> *Ant* 14.117, 131; *Bell* 1.190.

<sup>13</sup> This is dated around second or third century CE and may therefore be a later development. But it is certain the term refers to concentrated Jewish settlement during the reigns of Philopater and Euergetes II.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Acts 18, where the assembly of the Jews failed to have Paul charged in the tribunal of Gallio who dismissed the case on the ground that it was a matter περὶ λόγου καὶ ὀνομάτων καὶ νόμου τοῦ καθ' ὑμᾶς (v 15). This shows that even Gallio recognised the privilege of the Jewish community to



locations in the Diaspora organised themselves into assemblies in which to decide their own affairs.<sup>15</sup>

Another term which refers to the assembly of the Jews is συναγωγή. The term is a reference to any assembly of the Jews. In *CPJ* 138, it refers to Jewish associations.<sup>16</sup> This is probably because the Jews called themselves συναγωγή. Josephus<sup>17</sup> and Philo<sup>18</sup> use the term to refer to the Jews. What can be certain, therefore, is that the term συναγωγή speaks of the association of the Jews.

In terms of functions, Philo, for example, speaks of people gathering on the Sabbath to learn the virtues of life at many schools (*Spec* 2.62). Although no mention is made of any of the terms such as the synagogue, the assembly of the people is clearly that of the Jewish community. In *Legat* 156, Philo says the Jews in Rome gather on the Sabbaths to receive training in ancestral philosophy (τὴν πατριον... φιλοσοφίαν), which includes the 'instructions in the laws' (πρὸς τὰς τῶν νόμων ὑφηγήσεις, *Legat* 157; cf. *Somn* 2.127). The study of the Law, according to Philo, was imposed by Moses as the only object for the assembly of the Jews during the Sabbath (*Opif* 128; cf. *Apologia* 7.12). The fact that the law is mentioned suggests

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decide its own affairs, although whether this was a right legally bestowed upon them is not clear. The fact that they brought Paul to the Tribunal but beat up Sosthenes later, instead of Paul, is evident that they were taking the word of Gallio to mete out punishment upon Sosthenes, an official of the Jewish community. They could not do the same to Paul as he could then claim that the Jews were committing a crime against a Roman citizen. See further below.

<sup>15</sup> The letter highlights several important features of the Jewish community in Sardis. First, the fact that Jews had had their own σύνοδος suggests that they enjoyed a considerable amount of 'independence' from the local authorities in terms of social and religious matters. Second, the Jews operated within their own assembly or community 'in accordance with' their native laws, as the word πατριός indicates. Third, the Jews of Sardis had their own 'judges' to adjudicate disputes among themselves. Fourth, the letter provides the authoritative and legally binding permission to the Jews to carry on what they had done in the past, that is, to continue operating as an 'independent' community in resolving disputes and managing their own affairs.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Horbury-Noy no.20 (*CIJ* 1447).

<sup>17</sup> *Ant* 19.300; *Bell* 2.285.

<sup>18</sup> *Legat* 311.

that it is a well recognised, and probably a very important and primary activity of the Jews on the Sabbaths.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the study of the Law on the Sabbath serves as one of the important functions of the assembly of the Jews, that is, it united the community around the Law.

Another purpose for which the Jewish community meets is legal matters.<sup>20</sup> For example, an inscription from Bosphorus, dated towards the late first century CE, refers to the manumission by a Jewish woman of her home-bred slave Heraklas with the Jewish community acting as the guardian (συνεπιτροπευούσης δὲ καὶ τῆς συναγωγῆς τῶν Ἰουδαίων, *CII* I<sup>2</sup>, no.683). This inscription suggests that the assembly of the Jews had the acknowledged legal authority in validating the manumission. It is possible that the Jewish communities elsewhere might also have had similar arrangements in order that they could manage their own affairs. As mentioned earlier, the Decree of Sardis, quoted by Josephus, states that the Jews adjudicate suits among themselves (*Ant* 14.260; cf. *Ant* 14.235).<sup>21</sup> We have at least one such example in the NT which attests to the fact that the Jews did mete out punishments on those who violated the Law. In 2 Cor 11.24-25, Paul speaks about receiving from the Jews the thirty-nine lashes. The description here is probably a reference to official synagogue

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Prob* 81-82; *Contempl* 30-33. Josephus, similarly, suggests that every week the people ceased all their other occupations to assemble and listen to the law so as to acquire a thorough and accurate knowledge of it (*C Ap* 2.175; *Ant* 16.43).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *CPJ* I:33 where Tcherikover has made four observations concerning papyrological evidence that shows the Jews in Alexandria to have been influenced by Hellenistic legal practice. See *CPJ* I, nos. 1, 18, 19, 22-24, 26, 37, 128. See also *CPJ* II, no. 143 which records the resolution of the dispute between Dionysia and Alexandros; and *CPJ* I, no. 128 which is about a complaint against the breach of an agreement.

<sup>21</sup> LCL, *Ant* 14.260, note 'c' suggests that the document cited in 14.235 mentions that the Jews have had their own courts while 14.260 refers to an additional synagogue. Whether a physical building of a synagogue is meant here cannot be ascertained. Most likely it is not. What the two texts more likely refer to is the community or assembly of the Jews who carry out their own laws and manage their own disputes.



punishment for acts which were considered a violation of the Law.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Josephus suggests the same understanding that the official punishment of ‘thirty-nine’ lashes should be imposed on those whose acts contradicted the Law (*Ant* 4.238).

Collection of dues and taxes constitutes another function of the Jewish assembly, who gathered regularly (during the first-fruits) to make a collective financial contribution for Jerusalem (*Legat* 156-57). The financial contributions serve as a practical way in which they express their common ethnic origins. This seems to be corroborated by Josephus who tells us that Agrippa had on behalf of the Jews given instructions to the ‘magistrates, council and people of Ephesus’ (Ἐφεσίων ἄρχουσι βουλῇ δήμῳ χαίρειν, *Ant* 16.167) that the money collected for the Jerusalem temple should be put in the charge of the Jews in Asia according to their ‘ancestral customs’ (τὰ πάτρια). Further, the Jews were given the special privilege of royal protection of their money that was meant for the Jerusalem temple (*Ant* 16.169-70). Thus, one of the functions of the synagogue of the Jews in the Diaspora was to collect such financial dues.

Worship is another function of the assembly of the Jews. Among other things, the Decree of Sardis, quoted by Josephus, states that a place (τόπος) should be given to the Jews so that they may ‘offer ancestral prayers and sacrifices to God’ (*Ant* 14.260).

Finally, we have two inscriptions which indicate that the Jews also met for social and formal purposes. The first shows a large number of Jews gathering for feasts (*CPJ* I, no. 139, Apollinopolis Magna; first century BCE). The second indicates

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Deut 25.2-3 which seems to state that the ‘thirty-nine’ lashes are the official method for punishing those who violate the law. Gallas 1990:191 has suggested that Paul falls under the Jewish criminal law, just as any other Jew who was condemned.

that the Jews came together for an official meeting of the burial workers (*CPJ* I, no. 138, provenance unknown; possibly (?) in the first century BCE).

It is clear that the Jews in the Diaspora not only organised themselves into assemblies for various functions, but also constituted a partially independent entity. Because they were allowed to offer sacrifices and prayers to their God and given the space to carry out their own business transactions and such like, they were independent of the local authorities in their decisions concerning their own affairs. In other words, the independence of the Jewish communities was limited: so far as the affairs of the Jews as a people were concerned, and as long as they did not encroach on the state, the Jews were independent.

The above discussion shows that the Jews organised themselves into assemblies for various purposes: (1) the reading and studying of the law; (2) worship of God in prayers and offerings of sacrifices; (3) legal matters, e.g. manumission of slaves; and the meting out of official sanctions; (4) the collection of dues and taxes; (5) social as well as business purposes.

If the Jews had the social and legal space to manage their own affairs, the question arises as to who in the community had the leadership to rule on the various matters. From both literary and inscriptional sources, it is evident that there are various terms used to refer to dignitaries and officers within the Jewish communities. Some of these have clear responsibilities over specific matters, others may be honorific titles for important members of the community. In what follows, I will look at a range of evidence including some taken from later periods, that is, the third, or even fourth century CE. Care must be exercised when using evidence from later periods so as not to fall into anachronism. However, if the same evidence can be found in an early



period, and is again found in a later period, it may suggest that there is some continuity and that the later evidence might help to explain the leadership of the communities.

### 5.3 Leadership of the Jewish communities

Leadership of the Jewish communities in the Diaspora varies in terminology but appears to revolve around a number of similar functions. I shall classify leaders under three main headings: (1) the head of the ruling council; (2) the members of the synagoga council; and (3) the archisynagogos.<sup>23</sup>

#### 5.3.1 Head of the ruling council

##### Ethnarch

In Alexandria there was for a while an ‘ethnarch’ who seemed to have very great power over the people. According to Strabo, the ‘ethnarch’ (ἐθνάρχης) in Alexandria governs the people (διοικεῖ τε τὸ ἔθνος), adjudicates suits (δισιτῶ κρίσεις), and supervises contracts and ordinances (συμβολαίων ἐπιμελεῖται καὶ προσταγμάτων) (*Ant* 14.117). The description of Strabo, ὥς ἂν πολιτείας ἄρχων αὐτοτελοῦς, suggests that there was a leader who had charge over almost all the aspects of the Jewish community. And Philo says that Augustus reintroduced a *gerousia* into the Jewish community after the death of the ‘ethnarch’ (*Flacc* 74), which implies that it was there before but dissolved at some point in time and that Augustus

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<sup>23</sup> I have deliberately left out discussion of ‘honorific titles’ for several reasons: (1) ‘honorific titles’ among the Jewish Diaspora are not easy to determine, for it is possible that some of these titles might in fact be functionaries; (2) by ‘honorific titles’, we are suggesting that certain titles were given to persons in the assembly as an ‘honour’ towards them; perhaps, they had contributed to the community in ways that made the community deem it fit to honour them. As such, ‘honorific titles’ mean that the holders did not possess any real leadership over the community. Thus, it would be irrelevant to our discussion concerning the leadership of the Jewish communities in the Diaspora; (3) Williams rightly observes that ‘honorific titles’ such as Father and Mother of the community are found on inscriptions predominantly in Rome, and in areas where Roman cultural influence was strong (1998:46). Thus, such ‘titles’ may be too localised to be able to illuminate leadership on a wider scale.

had brought it back to perform the functions of the 'ethnarch'.<sup>24</sup> The title of 'ethnarch' appears to have been employed only in Alexandria.

### Γερουσιάρχης

*Gerousiarch* is the most widely attested term for the leader (or president) of the synagogal council. The term used in the Greek is γερουσιάρχης συναγωγῆς (e.g. *CII* I, no. 561, Puteoli; first century CE; no. 368, Rome; third and fourth centuries CE). In *CII* I, no. 368, Kyntianos was the γερουσιάρχης of the community. There are other inscriptions which attest to this title, but its precise duty or responsibility is uncertain.<sup>25</sup> Of these, the most significant is *CII* I, no.533, which is about the acquisition of a plot of land by the Jewish assembly. This was done through passing a motion. And the plot of land was presented as a gift to a γερουσιάρχης named Gaius Iulius Iustus, who was probably well regarded and influential enough to receive such a 'gift'. It is significant that the motion received 'unanimous agreement' of the γερουσία. The fact that the γερουσιάρχης was the president of the ruling council (γερουσία) suggests that he had relatively great power.

### Προστάτης

The next most common term for the president is *prostates* (προστάτης). The word means 'one who stands before', a 'front-rank' person.<sup>26</sup> An inscription from Xenephyris, dated around 140-116 BCE mentions the dedication of a gateway by the Jews to the prayer-house during the presidency (προστάτον) of Theodoros and Achillion (*CII* II, no.1441). The mention of the presidency suggests that the act of

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Schürer III.93.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *CII* I, no.9; Noy II, no.487 (Rome; third and fourth centuries CE [?]); *CII* I, no.147; *CII* I<sup>2</sup>, no.408; *CII* I, no.301; *CII* I<sup>2</sup>, no.119; and *CII* I, no.533.

<sup>26</sup> Liddell-Scott 1940:1526.



dedicating the gateway was undertaken under the leadership of the two προστάται, and that their leadership was probably instrumental in that dedication. We cannot be fully certain what the duties of a προστάτης entailed. But it is likely that a προστάτης, like the γερουσιάρχης, held leadership of the ruling council and therefore probably had considerable authority in deciding matters pertaining to the Jewish community, in this case, in Xenephyris.<sup>27</sup> Although both titles are found between second and fourth centuries CE in Rome,<sup>28</sup> it is not certain what differentiates between the two. It could be that they held similar power but performed different functions within the leadership of the council. Or it could be that they complemented each other in their official duties as leaders over the ruling council. Or it could be that different Jewish communities in different localities used different terms for the same leadership roles.

### Πολιτάρχης

In an appendix, Horsley has demonstrated the abundance of epigraphic attestations of πολιτάρχης in general, particularly in northern Greece.<sup>29</sup> In an Egyptian inscription (*CPJ* III, no.1530a, Leontopolis; first century CE), one such πολιτάρχης among Jews was honoured with the headship in two places (δισσῶν γάρ τε τόπων πολιταρχῶν αὐτὸς ἐτείμω). Although the word τείμω is used, which suggests that the title was possibly honorific, the next line speaks of the πολιτάρχης performing his double duty generously (τὴν διμερῇ δαπάνην

<sup>27</sup> Cf. also *CIJ* I<sup>2</sup>, no.100 (third and fourth centuries CE [?]) and *CIJ* I, no.365 (third and fourth centuries CE [?]). And see also Williams 1998:184, n15.

<sup>28</sup> Two other inscriptions are found in different places: *CIJ* I, no.561 in the vicinity of Puteoli and dated in the first century CE while *CIJ* II, no.1441 in Xenephyris and dated from 140 to 116 BCE. Thus, it suggests that the leadership of the ruler of the council is an established position.

<sup>29</sup> Horsley 1994:419-431.

ἐξανύσας χάρισιν). What the inscription also suggests is that a leader of a ruling council of the community could be the leader of another community in another geographical location.<sup>30</sup>

The above few titles reflect the conception that the Diaspora Jews organised themselves into assemblies in which they either elected or appointed their own ruling council with a leader. At times, there might be more than one such head over the ruling council. It is also possible that different Jewish assemblies in different geographical localities or at different times may have used different terms for these leaders.

### 5.3.2 Members of the synagogal council<sup>31</sup>

#### Ἄρχοντες

The most widely attested term for the members of the synagogal council is *archons* (ἄρχοντες). However, some *archons* were elected for a fixed term (*CIJ* I, no.457); some were re-elected (*CIJ* I, no.397, third and fourth centuries CE); and others remained *archons* for life (*CIJ* I<sup>2</sup>, no.416). A title that is possibly honorific is ἄρχων πάσης τε<ε>μῆς ('*archons* of all honour', *CIJ* I, no.85; *CIJ* I<sup>2</sup>, no.324; both from Rome; third and fourth centuries CE). The functions of the *archons* most probably included the general management of the community's day-to-day affairs. They probably formed the majority, if not the total, membership of the *gerousia* mentioned in Josephus (*Bell* 7.410-16; cf. Philo, *Flacc* 76). Philo refers to the leadership of the Jewish community as *gerousia* and *archontes* interchangeably (*Flacc* 74 and 117).

<sup>30</sup> One other term that possibly refers to the leadership of the ruling council of the Jewish community in the Diaspora is ἐπιστάτης τὸν παλαιόν (*CIJ* II, no.800, Bithynia; undated). Although it is possible for the title to be a reference to the head of the ruling council, its paucity of attestation renders it too uncertain to be included in this discussion.

<sup>31</sup> By 'synagogal council', I do not mean a particular council overseeing the physical building of the synagogue, but rather, a council of leaders overseeing the assembly of Jews in their day to day affairs and such like.



And according to Tcherikover, *archons* played the principal role in all Jewish communities of the Roman empire.<sup>32</sup> In Cyrenaica, three inscriptions<sup>33</sup> cited by Applabaum bear the term *archons*. The first lists seven *archons*, the second nine and the third eleven. The increase in the number of *archons* over the years suggests that the community had grown in size. It is not clear whether they were elected or appointed to represent the community.<sup>34</sup> Applebaum is of the opinion that they were elected; but there is no convincing evidence to say that they were not appointed. They could be included among the members of the *gerousia* whose political leadership over the people is indicated by their ability to convene a general assembly of the people for the purpose of exposing the revolutionaries.<sup>35</sup> And the assembly of the Jews seemed willing to listen to and accept these leaders' ruling.

### Φροντιστής

This term literally means 'manager'. The duties of a *φροντιστής* were probably financial and managerial. For example, an inscription on the decoration of the synagogue with mosaics (*CIJ I*<sup>2</sup>, no. 723, Aegina, fourth century CE) mentions a *φροντιστής*, which suggests that he was linked to the decoration. The decoration would have involved money and official approval, and thus leadership.<sup>36</sup> However,

<sup>32</sup> Tcherikover, *CPJ I*.10; cf. Schürer III.98-101.

<sup>33</sup> The first is *CIG* no. 5362, 8-6 BCE (Applebaum 1974:486); the second is *CIG* no. 5361, dated 24-25 CE (Applebaum 1974:487); the third is not cited by Applebaum (1974:487) but dated 56 CE.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *CIJ I*, no.397 (Rome; third and fourth centuries CE [?]); *CIJ I*<sup>2</sup>, no.384 (Rome; third and fourth centuries CE [?]); and *CIJ I*<sup>2</sup>, no.391 (Rome; third and fourth centuries CE [?]). These inscriptions speak of three *archons*, namely, Sabbatis, Pomponis, and Prokoulous, who have all been *archons* twice. This suggests that either they were re-elected or re-appointed. The inscriptions do not reveal much about the way in which these leaders were made *archons*, except the fact that they held the position *twice*. It is also possible that some of the *archons* serve as leaders for life (cf. *CIJ I*<sup>2</sup>, no.416, Rome; third and fourth centuries CE [?]; *CIJ I*, no.398, Rome; third and fourth centuries CE [?]).

<sup>35</sup> See *Bell* 7.409ff for such an example.

<sup>36</sup> The post of a *φροντιστής* is possibly an elective one, though there is no reason why it cannot be by appointment. Whether it is a more senior post than that of an *archon*, we cannot be sure; see, for example, *CIJ I*, no.337 (Rome; third and fourth centuries CE), and *CIJ I*, no.494 (Rome; third and fourth

φροντισταί are not very well attested, and all the attestations are late (?), which indicates that only a minority of the Jewish assemblies had such officers.<sup>37</sup> Thus, all that can be said is that some Jewish assemblies, probably the financially more able ones, had φροντισταί for the purpose of management of finance and possibly property.<sup>38</sup>

### Πρεσβύτερος

The title of πρεσβύτερος is rather ambiguous. It can mean either an 'elderly person' or an ordinary, non-executive member of a synagogal council. The title of πρεσβύτερος is attested in both literary and inscriptional sources. In the inscriptions mostly of the fourth century CE, both men and women 'elders' have been attested. While we cannot be totally certain about their functions, some tentative statements may still be made about them, based on the evidence that we have. Most of our literary references to πρεσβύτερος come from the NT. In Luke 7.3-5, it is recorded that the centurion sent for Jesus via the 'elders' of the Jews. In this passage, the elders appear in the plural, suggesting that they operated as leaders of the assembly. Brooten points out that these elders, being in the town of Capernaum, could have been Jewish elders of the city.<sup>39</sup> But Luke does not clarify the position of the 'elders' or their functions. Another NT reference to πρεσβύτεροι relates the arrest of Jesus (Matt 26.57; cf. Mark 14.53; Luke 22.66). Although this passage is filled with uncertainties, v 57 includes the πρεσβύτεροι in the group of Jewish leaders. Since the Gospel of

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centuries CE) where Eupsychos and Domnos had both been *archon* more times than they had been *phrontistes*.

<sup>37</sup> Williams 1998:41.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *CIJ* I<sup>2</sup>, no.722 (Aegina; fourth century CE) which mentions one Theodoros who, while being the ἀρχισυνάγωγος, also held the position of φροντιστής for four years during which he built the synagogue from its foundations out of 85 gold coins from the revenues (perhaps the community's treasury?) and 105 gold coins from the gifts (possibly a bequest) to God.

<sup>39</sup> Brooten 1982:47.



Matthew has been recognised by scholars to have been written by a Jew for a Jewish audience, the mention of the Jewish leaders here would probably reflect some social reality. Thus we can at least make a tentative suggestion that the ‘elders’ were members of the ruling Jewish council.<sup>40</sup> And several inscriptions confirm this. For example, in *CII* I<sup>2</sup>, no.663 (Elche, Spain; fourth century CE), the titles of *archons* and ‘elders’ (πρεσβύτεροι) are inscribed alongside each other. This parallelisation of the two titles suggests that the πρεσβύτεροι, like the *archons*, were members of the Jewish synagogal council. Similarly, *CII* I<sup>2</sup>, no.731f (Samos; second and third centuries CE) mentions πρεσβύτεροι of the Jewish synagogue, which corroborates to some extent what *CII* I<sup>2</sup>, no.663 suggests.<sup>41</sup> Although some inscriptions attest to women ‘elders’ (πρεσβυτέραι),<sup>42</sup> the number of these inscriptions is not great.<sup>43</sup>

The above discussion shows that the title of ‘elders’ can be held by men (πρεσβύτεροι) and women (πρεσβυτέραι). The ‘elders’ were members of the council of the Jewish assembly. It is not absolutely clear what their duties and functions entailed. What can be stated with confidence is that the ‘elders’, together

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<sup>40</sup> Brooten 1982:47 cites several NT texts: Acts 11.30; 15.2, 4, 6, 22-23; 16.4; 21.18; Jas 5.14, and says that these elders ‘usually appear in the plural as a decision-making body of the church’. While this observation may illuminate our understanding of ‘elders’, the problem with using Christian texts to understand Jewish leadership has its drawbacks, even though Brooten emphasises the fact that these ‘elders’ appear in a Jewish-Christian context. For example, the ‘elders’ in the Christian church could well be a separate and independent development, with a ‘loan’ term of πρεσβύτερος from their Jewish counterpart, but without the meaning or function of the Jewish πρεσβύτερος. See Campbell (1994) who argues against any continuity of the function of ‘elders’ between the NT and Judaism.

<sup>41</sup> See further *CII* II, no. 829 (Doura-Europos; mid third century CE).

<sup>42</sup> E.g. *CII* I<sup>2</sup>, no.731c (Crete; third and fourth centuries CE); *CII* I<sup>2</sup>, no.581 (Venosa; third and fourth centuries CE); and Noy I, no.163 (Rabat, Malta; fourth and fifth centuries CE). See Brooten 1982:12 who demonstrates that a πρεσβυτέρα was a functionary title.

<sup>43</sup> Brooten 1982:1 reveals that there are nineteen Greek and Latin inscriptions in which women bear the various leadership titles of the Jewish assemblies. In the case of Venosa, Brooten argues that the ‘concentration of ... five inscriptions in one catacomb is striking ... to suggest that the Venosan community may have had a tradition of granting women official functions’ (1982:44).

with the other members of the Jewish council, led the Jewish communities in the Diaspora in the management of their community's affairs.<sup>44</sup>

### 5.3.3 Archisynagogoi

In the following, I will discuss those inscriptions that bear directly on Jewish leadership in cultic matters. This is in accordance with Williams's outline of the Jewish officials and dignitaries, which has ἀρχισυνάγωγοι/ ἀρχισυναγωγίσσαι and their cognates as the primary leaders over cultic matters. I do not find this title to necessarily refer to the 'ruler' or 'head' of the synagogue, as Brooten takes it to be. The reasons why Brooten's decision to treat the title as 'head' of the synagogue is not necessarily correct will become clear in the discussion that follows. However, the character of the title ἀρχισυνάγωγος is difficult to determine, as the inscriptions bearing the title do not provide sufficient information. And it is necessary to clarify that while the titles ἀρχισυνάγωγος and ἀρχισυναγωγίσσαι do indicate that the holders of these offices were leaders of the Jewish assembly, they may not be the 'heads' at all.<sup>45</sup> We can only draw tentative conclusions about what aspects of communal life they were responsible for.

Literary sources from the NT attest to the office of ἀρχισυνάγωγος which may illuminate our understanding of its function. The story of the ἀρχισυνάγωγος

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<sup>44</sup> Although it has been claimed that the γραμματεὺς was an employee of the synagogue, inscriptional evidence shows that γραμματεῖς included parents (*CII* I, no.145, Rome; third and fourth centuries CE), children (*CII* I, no.149), and a grandson (*CII* I, no.146). Further, a γραμματεὺς could be an official, either elected or appointed (cf. *CII* I<sup>2</sup>, no. 121, Rome; third and fourth centuries CE [?]). The fact that it is a well attested title suggests that its holder was more than just a mere employee of the synagogue. The title could carry with it official duties and authority. And the appearance of both γραμματεὺς and *archon* in *CII* I, no.145 suggests that the two titles are of equal importance. But little is known of the functions and significance of this post, even though there are other individual γραμματεῖς attested (e.g. Noy II, no.575 (Rome; third and fourth centuries CE [?]); *CII* I, no.456 (Rome; third and fourth centuries CE [?]); and *CII* I, no.148 (Rome; third and fourth centuries CE [?])).

<sup>45</sup> In this connection, I do not disagree with Brooten's argument that women in the ancient synagogues did hold positions of leadership which were functional and not honorific.



Jairos is told in all the Synoptic Gospels. In Mark 5.22, 35, 36, 38, and Luke 8.49, the term ἀρχισυνάγωγος is mentioned with reference to Jairos. However, in Luke 8.41 Jairos is not referred to as ἀρχισυνάγωγος but rather as ἄρχων τῆς συναγωγῆς. Matthew refers to Jairos neither as ἀρχισυνάγωγος nor ἄρχων τῆς συναγωγῆς but simply as ἄρχων (Matt 9.18, 23). Brooten argues that these titles seem identical possibly because the Christian writer was unaware of the Jewish distinction and therefore used the titles loosely.<sup>46</sup> Her solution that the different titles could be due to geography and time is possible, but does not rule out that a person could hold two posts simultaneously.<sup>47</sup> The question is, what duties does the post of an ἀρχισυνάγωγος entail?

The Gospel of Luke 13.10-17 suggests that the ἀρχισυνάγωγος 'was responsible for keeping the congregation faithful to the Torah' (Luke 13.14; cf. Acts 13.15),<sup>48</sup> which is also echoed in Acts 18.1-17. Schürer has similarly argued that the special responsibility of the ἀρχισυνάγωγος was 'to attend to public worship', and that 'as a rule, he was probably chosen from among the elders'.<sup>49</sup> Although the function of the ἀρχισυνάγωγος is difficult to determine, Schürer and Brooten's point seems to find some support from rabbinic literature. For example, in mYoma 7.1, the procedure for the public reading of the Torah scroll is laid down. It reads,

...The minister of the synagogue used to take a scroll of the Law and give it to the chief of the synagogue, and the chief of the synagogue gave it to the

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<sup>46</sup> Brooten 1982:15.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example; *CIJ* I<sup>2</sup>, no.731c which refers to one Sophia who was both πρεσβυτέρα and ἀρχισυναγωγίσσα at the same time; and *CIJ* I<sup>2</sup>, no.722 in which Theodoros was both ἀρχισυνάγωγος and προντιστής simultaneously.

<sup>48</sup> Brooten 1982:16.

<sup>49</sup> Schürer II.435.

Prefect, and the Prefect gave it to the High Priest, and the High Priest received it standing and read it standing (cf. mSota 7.7, 8).

The 'chief of the synagogue' in the Hebrew is *רִשְׁתֵּי הַכְּנֶסֶת*, whose Greek equivalent is etymologically *ἀρχισυνάγωγος*, as observed by Brooten.<sup>50</sup> This suggests that the *ἀρχισυνάγωγος* was probably among those who played the leading roles in the administration of the worship proper. This seems to parallel Acts 13.13-15 where Paul and Barnabas were invited by the *ἀρχισυνάγωγοι*, on a Sabbath, to speak to the people if they had any word of encouragement (Acts 13.15). We cannot be altogether certain if the *ἀρχισυνάγωγοι* here played exactly the same role as the *רִשְׁתֵּי הַכְּנֶסֶת* of the Mishnah. All that can be known about the *ἀρχισυνάγωγος* in Acts 13.14-15 is that the title possibly involved some aspects of leadership over the cultic matters of the community.

It is possible that the *ἀρχισυνάγωγος* is also involved in other matters, such as the management of the community's property. For example, an inscription states that an *ἀρχισυνάγωγος* named Ilasios contributed 150 feet of pavement of the entryway of the synagogue with mosaics (*CIJ* II, no.803, Apamea in Syria; 392 CE). This same inscription also testifies to the fact that there could be several *ἀρχισυνάγωγοι* of the assembly at a given time, suggesting that the responsibility of an *ἀρχισυνάγωγος* could be more than mere cultic matters. Another inscription, which has already been discussed earlier, shows that the *ἀρχισυνάγωγος* could also be responsible for the care of the assembly's property which at times might even

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<sup>50</sup> Brooten 1982:17.



include the building of the property itself (*CIJ* I<sup>2</sup>, no.722, Aegina; fourth century CE).<sup>51</sup> Such a responsibility might be great enough to involve other leaders. Brooten argues against this hypothesis on the grounds that bearers of other titles as well as bearers of no titles have been listed as donors in inscriptions.<sup>52</sup> However, it is important for us to note that constructing a building in the ancient world was no easy task. Besides financial contributions and leadership, there would have been many others who were involved in the process. And it is natural for the loved ones of all others (or even the persons themselves) involved in the construction to inscribe their contributions on inscriptions. What is enlightening is that when a leader was described as having contributed to the foundations or construction (or both) of a community's project, in this case, a synagogue, it has to mean more than just contributing as a donor. It is not unreasonable to postulate that the leader in question probably also had a hand in the decision-making of constructing the building as well. Further, any leader of a community would most naturally want his/her reputation to be enhanced by either the construction or the upgrading of a public building, or both. The Theodotos inscription (*CIJ* II, no.1404, Jerusalem; before 70 CE) reveals two basic functions of the ἀρχισυνάγωγος: (1) responsibility over the cultic matters such as scripture reading; and (2) responsibility over the community's property. Although the Theodotos inscription refers to the ἀρχισυνάγωγος in Jerusalem, rather than the Diaspora, the title's functions may shed light on our understanding of its duties in the Diaspora. While the inscription does speak about the guest-house and its various facilities, it is not clear whether what is inside the building is part of the responsibility of the ἀρχισυνάγωγος. Meggitt rightly points out that the few inscriptions do not say

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<sup>51</sup> Other examples can be seen in *CIJ* II, no.744 (Teos in Ionia; third century CE); *Le Bohec*, no.14 (Salamis, Cyprus; third century CE [cited in Williams 1998:45]); *CIJ* I<sup>2</sup>, no's.282, 584 and 638.

<sup>52</sup> Brooten 1982:24.

conclusively what the ἀρχισυνάγωγοι did, and that we should not assume that their duties and positions were uniform throughout all the Diaspora communities and throughout the six centuries from which our sources come.<sup>53</sup> It is thus necessary for us to say that what can be known about the ἀρχισυνάγωγοι is only tentative. And from the information we have gathered so far, fragmentary though it may be, there seem to be two basic functions for the ἀρχισυνάγωγοι, that of cultic matters and that of property management. Beyond this, nothing conclusive or definitive can be said.<sup>54</sup>

When we look at the Jewish communities organising themselves into assemblies for the above functions, then the authority/leadership of the leaders mentioned above become important for the successful operation of the Jewish assembly in the Diaspora. This raises the question of how deviant members should be dealt with, that is, those who do not conform to the community's norms. What sort of sanctions are imposed on them?

#### **5.4 Deviance and discipline in the community**

I shall, at the outset, define 'deviance' as the failure to conform to the norm/s, which are what the majority of a community accept as the values and principles governing the relations within that community, between its members, and between it and outside communities (or outsiders). In the case of the Jewish community, the 'norms' would clearly be the Jewish scripture. The leadership of the community as seen above would be the ones who decide (or interpret) what constitutes

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<sup>53</sup> Meggitt 1998:141-43.

<sup>54</sup> Rajak 1999:161-73 suggests that the ancient synagogue operates like a mini-city within the Graeco-Roman world of which the operations within the Jewish assembly, including its cult, are a microcosm of the larger Graeco-Roman world. Sanders 1999:3 comments: 'Jews generally wished to be able to assemble, to keep their ancestral customs, to worship in their own ways, to keep the Sabbath, to observe dietary restrictions, to decide their own internal affairs, and to collect money to spend on their own community activities, or to send to Jerusalem, or both'.



obedience/disobedience to the law. Thus, 'deviant behaviour' would be the behaviour which goes against the values and principles of the community, as defined by the law and interpreted by the leadership.<sup>55</sup> Central to my thesis is the issue of idolatry. As explained in chapter two, one of the acts which constitute idolatry is that of 'unfaithfulness' to one's ancestral tradition. What therefore constitutes 'deviant behaviour' in our case would be acts which are contrary to ancestral tradition, that is, the covenant as enshrined in the Torah, through which the leaders were able to pull the people together as a distinct community. Thus, Josephus speaks of a community of harmony which displays 'unity and identity of religious belief, perfect uniformity in habits and customs' (*C Ap* 2.179). This idealisation of the community is to Josephus due to the institution of the Law which could not be improved (*C Ap* 2.184-85). It is likely that Josephus' concept of the Law as a perfect constitution was held by most Jews. Philo affirms this by emphasising reading, studying and obeying the Torah as the main things in life and the central activities of the community,<sup>56</sup> for which there are two basic purposes: (1) 'faithfulness' to the ancestral tradition (*Spec* 1.56); and (2) abstinence from idolatrous acts (*Spec* 1.25, 28ff). The first purpose is seen in Philo's allusion to Num 25, which will be discussed further below. The second purpose is seen in Philo's reference to the commandment of God not to make Gods of silver and gold, nor anything that is meant to represent the true God (*Spec* 1.21-22). Thus, reading and studying the Torah should rightly lead to obedience to its commands and precepts, and so serve the purpose of motivating the people to abstain from idolatry.

What the above means is that any disobedience will be judged by the community on the basis of the Law. Seland has suggested recently that deviance from

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<sup>55</sup> Still 1999:99, '*Deviance, then, is any behaviour or belief that is perceived by a particular social group as a violation of their given norms or conventions*' (italics original).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *Opif* 128; *Spec* 1.56; 2.62; *Hypoth* 7.12f; *Prob* 80-82.

accepted norms can instigate a 'clash of interests', and that in every society there are some rules which allow for or regulate the use of coercion.<sup>57</sup> These can take various forms, formal or informal, undertaken by either groups or individuals who consider themselves as acting on behalf of some authorities.<sup>58</sup> The acts of coercion are categorised by Seland under three main headings: (1) measures of accommodation; (2) measures of official disciplinary punishments; and (3) measures of violence.<sup>59</sup> He then argues that in the Lukan Acts, acts of violence against those who are perceived by the 'establishment' to have violated the Law are not lynching but legitimate acts on the basis of 'zeal' for the Law.<sup>60</sup>

There are several examples from Jewish authors concerning Jews who have not followed their ancestral tradition or have participated in idolatrous acts. In chapters two and four, we have seen examples of idolatry in the OT and Jews' participation in idolatry in the Second Temple period, respectively. Such Jews according to our definitions of idolatry in chapter two would be considered to have 'deviated' from the 'norms'. What sanctions are imposed on such acts?

The OT lists several punishments, particularly in Deuteronomy. According to H. Goldin, there are seven classifications of punishment under the Mosaic system, while later rabbinic tradition adds another three. They may be briefly mentioned: (1) by death; (2) by 'karet'/excision; (3) by banishment; (4) by flagellation; (5) by the *lex talionis*; (6) by fines; and (7) by penal slavery.<sup>61</sup> The rabbinic additions are: (1) imprisonment; (2) death at the hand of heaven; and (3) death at the hands of the mob

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<sup>57</sup> Seland 1995:6.

<sup>58</sup> Seland 1995:6.

<sup>59</sup> Seland 1995:7-12.

<sup>60</sup> Thus, his argument seeks to critique Goodenough's theory of lynching in Philo. For details of his evaluation of Goodenough, see Seland 1995:20-42.

<sup>61</sup> Goldin 1952:14f, cited in Seland 1995:9, n26.



(mSanh 9.6). The rabbinic tradition in this case specifies that the ‘zealots’ may fall on such a person who violates the Law by going to an Aramean woman, a possible allusion to Num 25. Of these, we have evidence of punishment by death, and in the NT, by flagellation (in the case of Paul, cf. 2 Cor 11.24). Horbury has recently argued that the OT treatment of apostasy is capital punishment but mostly in theory, although sometimes the capital punishment may actually be practised.<sup>62</sup> Such punishment involves curses, exclusion/expulsion, and death, with the second acting as a prelude to the third, that is, the death penalty.<sup>63</sup> I will examine a few examples of sanctions to determine how the Diaspora communities dealt with serious cases of deviance. The examples are not all related to idolatry, but most of them are and give us an overall picture of how sanctions are imposed. My focus below will initially be on the issue of idolatry and the Phinehas/zeal tradition, but will move on to other cases of deviance, including the case of Paul himself.

#### 5.4.1 ‘Zeal’ of Phinehas in Num 25

Num 25.1-17, which has been looked at in chapter two above, records an idolatrous event involving Israelite youths. This caused a great anger in God who brought about a plague that killed many of the Hebrew people. The hero of the story, Phinehas, became instrumental in stopping the plague when he took it upon himself to slay an Israelite man and a Midianite woman (Num 25.6-9).<sup>64</sup> Subsequently, Phinehas is said to have turned back the wrath of God by displaying such zeal on behalf of God (ἐν τῷ ζηλωσαί μου τὸν ζῆλον ἐν αὐτοῖς, Num 25.11; LXX), and he is described as being ‘zealous’ for his God (ἐζήλωσεν τῷ θεῷ αὐτοῦ..., Num 25.13;

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<sup>62</sup> Horbury 1985:13-38.

<sup>63</sup> Horbury 1985:16-18. The punishment of exclusion is discussed in two Deutoronomic contexts: the laws governing admission to a congregation; and the penalties for breach of covenant.

<sup>64</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the passage, see chapter 2.3.2 above.

LXX). It seems the author of Numbers is bringing out at least two points in relating the story. First, idolatry (in this case, sexual liaison with Gentile women seems to be the cause of the idolatry) provokes the wrath of God and his 'jealousy'. Second, 'zeal' (ζήλος) for God legitimates the act of killing. In the case of Phinehas' act, it is considered 'zeal' on behalf of God.

### 1 Maccabees

A similar kind of sanction is illustrated in the military campaign of the Maccabean brothers against the Gentile rulers who seek to defile the Temple and force the Jews to abandon their God and their ancestral tradition, that is, the Law. 1 Macc records the campaign of Antiochus Epiphanes in plundering the city of the Jews and the Temple in Jerusalem (1 Macc 1.20-24; cf. 2 Macc 5.11-16). And two years later he further issued a decree which required all to become one people (1 Macc 4.41-46) and that each nation was to renounce its own particular customs. The author tells us that the renunciation of one's customs involves: (1) adopting foreign customs (v 44); (2) banning offerings/sacrifices, profaning the Sabbath (v 45); (3) defiling the sanctuary (v 46); (4) building altars, shrines and temples for idols, sacrificing pigs and unclean beasts (v 47); and (5) leaving sons uncircumcised (v 48). All these were done in order that the people might 'forget the Law and revoke all observance of it' (v 49). While some accepted the decree, many Jews remained faithful, among whom was Mattathias (cf. 1 Macc 2.15-18) who, being 'zealous' (ἐζήλωσεν, 2.24), killed a young Jew who offered sacrifices on the pagan altar.<sup>65</sup> It is interesting that the author likens Mattathias' 'zeal' (ζήλος) to that of Phinehas in Num 25. The same term,

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. Hengel 1989:150-51 who points out that the tradition of Phinehas received much greater importance during the 'religious persecution' under Antiochus Epiphanes, but based not only on the king's religious policy but also on a 'reform' by the Jews themselves. Hence, Bickermann 1979:83-90 rightly concludes that the war was a 'religious struggle between orthodoxy and reformers'.



ἐζήλωσεν, is used in the description of both Phinehas and Mattathias. And the comparison of Mattathias to Phinehas is again seen when Mattathias later went out to the city and called on everyone who had ‘zeal for the Law’ (παῖς ὁ ζηλῶν τῷ νόμῳ, v 27) to follow him. Before his death, Mattathias reminded his sons to have a ‘zeal for the Law’ (ζηλώσατε τῷ νόμῳ) and to stand firm for the ‘covenant of our ancestors’ (διαθήκη πατέρων ἡμῶν) (2.50). His last words included recalling Phinehas who received an everlasting priesthood for his ‘zeal’ (2.54). Although most of the story concerns itself with details of military operations, the author is careful to show his readers that the main motivations lying behind the violent military resistance movement were the Law, the nation of Israel and the Holy Place of the Jews (i.e. the Land and the Temple).<sup>66</sup> The story ends with Simon and his brothers being credited with safeguarding the integrity of the sanctuary and the Law (σταθῆναι τὰ ἅγια αὐτῶν καὶ ὁ νόμος, 14.29). In 1 Macc 14.14-15, the author shows that those who did not observe the Law were in fact ‘lawless’ and ‘wicked’ and that they deserved the kind of violent actions meted out by the Maccabean brothers.

### Josephus

Josephus discusses the story of Num 25 and embellishes it with extra details, thus providing us with another example of the possible sanctions which the community of the Jews might impose on those who committed ‘deviant’ acts. In *Ant* 4.126-55, Josephus describes the act of the Israelites as a transgression of the ‘laws of their fathers’ (παρέβησαν τὰ πάτρια). Their actions are ‘contrary to that which their Law ordained’ (ἐπὶ τουναντίον οἷς ὁ νόμος αὐτῶν ἐκέλευε ποιοῦντες

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<sup>66</sup> E.g. Mattathias’ son Judas sought to encourage his people by appealing to ‘our law’ (τῶν νομίμων ἡμῶν, 3.21, 47-48, 56) and to the ancestral tradition of courage and the covenant of God (4.8-11). Thus, *contra* Hengel who observes that “zeal for the law” receded more and more into the background in confrontation with other themes’ (1989a:152).

διετέλουν) (*Ant* 4.139). And in a defiant speech in response to Moses, the chief of the tribe of Simeon, Zambrias, openly announced his idolatry (*Ant* 4.149). This led to Phinehas taking the law into his own hand by killing Zambrias and the woman with whom he was consorting (4.153-54). The rest of the law-abiding youths followed suit. All the 'transgressors' were slain while many others were destroyed by a pestilence, including those kin who failed to restrain the transgressors. This act of Phinehas and his fellows is then described as a malady launched by God, thus giving the act of Phinehas and his fellows the divine stamp of approval, while it also means that those killed had received a divine punishment. The preservation of the Law is therefore attributed to Phinehas (4.159). Seland has argued that Josephus is interested more in the speeches he inserts in the Phinehas episode than the actions of Phinehas and that the omission of the word ζῆλος and its equivalents is due to Josephus's experiences with the revolutionaries who called themselves ζηλωταί.<sup>67</sup> However, the speeches could well be inserted to lend greater weight to the justification of the act of Phinehas. And the fact that Phinehas is credited with the preservation of the Law suggests that Josephus sees the Law as the 'final court of appeal' for such an act as that of Phinehas. Seland sees Josephus' omission of the word ζῆλος as positive evidence for the importance of 'zeal' in contemporary Judaism.<sup>68</sup>

While Josephus clearly has in mind the temptations posed by the surrounding Gentile world of his audience,<sup>69</sup> the story nevertheless illustrates to us the possible

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<sup>67</sup> Seland 1995:60. Cf. Hengel 1989:154-55.

<sup>68</sup> Seland 1995:61, 'the conclusions to be drawn from his omission are nevertheless not totally negative. On the contrary, his exposition can be taken to represent a witness to the issue arising from the Phinehas episode and the ζῆλος set forth therein had gained influence in Josephus' own time, and that he disliked, to say the least, this tendency. Accordingly, he suppressed this feature in his retelling of the Phinehas episode'. Indeed, if Hengel's idea is valid that Josephus consciously suppressed any elements that may connect the Maccabees's 'zeal' and the later 'zealots' (1989:155), why then did Josephus not leave the story out completely?

<sup>69</sup> Cf. van Unnik 1974; and chapter 3.4.2 above.



conception of the sort of sanction/s which Jewish communities in general might hold. It is not clear whether the death penalty was a theoretical concept or did in fact receive endorsement or was ever carried out during the Second Temple.<sup>70</sup> In this connection, we may note that Luke records that the death sentence of Stephen was carried out by stoning (Acts 7.58-60), which is one of the punishments listed by Goldin. But when the extreme penalty by death is subtly endorsed, it opens the way for other less but nevertheless severe punishments.

### Philo

Philo views the honour of God as something to be upheld with the utmost integrity and reverence. For him, anyone who betrays God's honour by abandoning the vital duty of the service of 'piety and religion' must suffer the utmost penalties (*Spec* 1.54). But those who are to carry out such punishments on the impious are described as those who 'have a zeal for virtue' (τοῖς ζῆλον ἔχουσιν ἀρετῆς). The meaning of the word ζῆλος may be seen in Philo's description of the motivation of those who execute the punishment: 'hatred of evil and love of God' (*Spec* 1.55). They therefore may be said to possess a 'zeal' (ζῆλος) for virtue. And he considers the 'zealous' to be in the position of authority of all the leaders – councillors, jury, high sheriffs, members of the assembly, prosecutors, witnesses, laws, people, etc. With this, he goes on to cite the Phinehas example to illustrate his point.

It is noteworthy that Philo begins by emphasising that he is citing a reference from the laws: ἀναγέγραπταί τις ἐν τοῖς νόμοις ('There is recorded in the laws...'). This could well be intentional, to point out the fact that the story is itself

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. Brown 1994:328-97, especially 348-72. What can be known is that in most cases, the Roman authorities would allow the Jews to execute their own punishments on such crimes as the violation of the temple and adultery. Beyond this, the jurisdiction must lie with the Roman authorities. In the case of the trial of Jesus by the Sanhedrin, political factors appear to have been involved.

recorded in the laws and thus reflects a legal legitimization of what is written in it. He then describes the behaviour of some Israelites as ‘spurning their ancestral customs’ (ἀλογοῦντας...τῶν πατρίων) and ‘seeking admission to the rites of a fabulous religion’ (τελουμένος δὲ τὰς μυθικὰς τελετάς). This is seen particularly in the ringleader’s public sacrifices to idols (θυσίας ἀγάλμασι καὶ ξοάνοις ἀθύτους) (*Spec* 1.56). This act of the ringleader constitutes idolatry and makes him an ‘impious’ person on whom punishment is to be meted out. Phinehas, whose name Philo does not mention but is clearly in view here, took it upon himself to kill both Zimri and the Midianite woman. In the steps of the biblical tradition, Philo commends the act of Phinehas by saying that God gives him a twofold award, that of peace and priesthood. Thus the act of Phinehas receives the divine approval, making ‘zeal’<sup>71</sup> for God and his Law a legitimate basis for violent action against the ‘deviant’ persons. The context of *Spec* 1.54-57 is in fact Philo’s exposition of the first two commandments, which shows that the reference to the Phinehas’ story is part of Philo’s effort in trying to illustrate the evil of idolatry and the use of ‘zeal’ as the basis for such a violent action against the idolater.<sup>72</sup>

In his *Jurisprudence of the Jewish Courts in Egypt*, E. R. Goodenough argued that Philo’s *Spec* serves as a record of the many laws practised by the Jewish courts in Alexandria.<sup>73</sup> And he argued that *Spec* contains evidence of lynch-law used by Jews

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<sup>71</sup> Thus Seland 1995:105 is right to say that ‘it is most reasonable to take the function of ζῆλος in 1.55 as another reference to the ζῆλος of Phinehas’.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Seland 1995:108 who argues that Philo is thus not discussing ‘theoretical law’ but dealing with actual cases of apostasy and suggesting actual reactions to be taken against those who violate the first two commandments. Thus, ‘zeal’ for the Law forms the basis for violent action against those who commit ‘deviant’ acts. See Seland 1995:109-81 for detailed discussion of Philo’s view of apostasy, the various crimes, their punishments and the punishing agents and his studies on the theme of ζῆλος in Philo’s works (1995:126-32).

<sup>73</sup> Goodenough 1968:10.



against their fellow Jews who have violated the laws.<sup>74</sup> Seland reviews the cases mentioned by Goodenough and shows that he over-interprets nine out of the twelve cases of which some are the result of misunderstanding Philo.<sup>75</sup> He argues that Philo is in fact advocating punishment by death for those who betray the honour due to God not by inflicting disciplinary punishment but by measures of violence, which he terms 'establishment violence'.<sup>76</sup> While Seland departs from Goodenough on the point of the definition of what Philo is advocating, both Seland and Goodenough appear to have one aspect in common: ζῆλος for the Law forms the basis for carrying out the death penalty on those who apostatise.<sup>77</sup> And apostasy in the context of Philo's statements is that of betraying God and his honour. Thus, Philo's use of the Phinehas story in Num 25 appears to affirm the concept that 'zeal' (ζῆλος) for the Law constitutes the basis for meting out violent punishment, including death, on those who have committed 'deviant' acts of apostasy (i.e. idolatry in terms of dishonouring God).

#### 5.4.2 'Zeal' in 3 Maccabees

3 Maccabees, though historically unreliable,<sup>78</sup> reflects the general attitude of the majority of the Jews towards 'deviant' behaviour. The story begins with Ptolemy IV Philopater of Egypt during the second century BCE who, after being saved by a renegade Jew, Dositheos, went on to defeat Antiochus III (1.1-5). As the story unfolds, the king was cheered by a delegation of the Jews whose warm reception in

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<sup>74</sup> Goodenough 1968:253-54. See further 1968:34f, 48, 74, 87, 115f, 121ff.

<sup>75</sup> Seland 1995:30-36.

<sup>76</sup> Seland 1995:125.

<sup>77</sup> Seland 1995:131 concludes: '...Philo describes those persons suggested to take action against those betraying the honor due to the One God as "zealous." ...they are told not to bring the offender before any court, the persons denoted are not to be restricted to court officials, or any other known group formations, but *any zealous Jew may take such actions*' (emphasis mine).

<sup>78</sup> Collins 2000:122, '3 Maccabees is a melodramatic account of two alleged episodes in the career of Ptolemy IV Philopator (222-203 BCE)'. Schürer (III.537) points out that the episode in 3 Maccabees is a 'romantic fiction' that is based on 'vague reminiscences' of historical events'.

Jerusalem led the king to demand entry into the Holy of Holies (1.10-16). Thus the happy occasion turned sour, and, with the whole city of Jerusalem turned into an uproar, the high priest Simon led the people in an entreaty to God asking that this misfortune not take place (2.1-20). And just before the king set foot in the sanctuary, he was struck with paralysis (2.221-23). However, this 'righteous judgement' only infuriated the king even more. Upon his return to Egypt, he issued a decree which required all people to offer sacrifices at a pillar he set up at the palace before they entered their temples. The Jews were then required to register themselves and to be reduced to a condition of slavery (2.28), failing which death would be the result. Those who enrolled themselves received the brand of the emblem of Dionysus on their bodies (2.29), while an offer of Alexandrian citizenship was made to those Jews who would join the initiates of the 'mysteries'. Some of the Jews willingly surrendered, citing the high price for which they had to pay to maintain their religious practice; but the rest resisted the king's demands (2.31-33). The king's fury led to further outrage, which was now expressed through a most terrifying execution: death by being crushed by drugged elephants. It is with these crushing fears scaring the Jews out of their life that the author weaves in the divine intervention.<sup>79</sup> The king came to his senses and regretted what he had done. He reversed all his evil deeds and supplied the Jews with all the material necessary for their celebration (6.30ff). With their misfortunes now turned into blessing, the Jews formally requested the king to allow them to punish those Jews who had 'transgressed against the holy God and his Law'. This request was granted and the Jews went on a killing spree, putting to death over three hundred men (7.15).

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<sup>79</sup> First, the king oversleeps and so the execution of the Jews is postponed; then the king suffers a strange amnesia that he does not recall at all that he has such a plan to annihilate the Jews (5.31). Eventually, the Jews still have to face death. At the prayer of Eleazar and the rest of the elders (6.1-15), two angels appear and cause great confusion to the king's soldiers and the elephants. Thereupon the elephants turn back on the soldiers and trample them to death (6.18-21).



The story is packed with theological themes which serve as the author's agenda, chief of which is the supremacy of the God of the Jews and the superiority of the Jewish race. The story is simple enough for our purpose here. Throughout, there are two kinds of Jews: those who resisted the king's demand and so remained faithful to their God and their Law; and those who abandoned God and their ancestral beliefs. The Law here is clearly the Torah. And the 'apostate' Jews are described as those who 'yielded themselves readily' (εὐχερῶς ἑαυτοὺς ἐδίδοσαν, 2.31), and 'voluntarily transgressed against the holy God and his Law' (τὸν ἅγιον θεὸν αὐθαίρετως παραβεβηκότας καὶ τοῦ θεοῦ τὸν νόμον, 7.10). The 'norm' is 'worshipping God and living according to the Law' (σεβόμενοι δὲ τὸν θεὸν καὶ τῷ τούτου νόμῳ πολιτευόμενοι, 3.4). Those Jews who had given up their ancestral tradition were considered by the majority as 'apostates'. They had 'deviated' from the 'norms' of the community. Although this story is fictional, the author seems to reflect the concept of a community that worshipped God and obeyed his Law as one that was ultimately blessed by God. Although there is no mention of the leadership of the community taking the decision to mete out punishment on the 'deviant' Jews, the death penalty imposed by the majority suggests that such 'deviant' acts were considered serious enough as to warrant the death penalty, particularly when they were idolatrous acts. Throughout, the Law serves as the principal basis for the death penalty, although it is possible that other factors such as the betrayal of the community may be at play.

### 5.4.3 Other examples of the law as 'final court of appeal'

#### Paul

In 2 Cor 11.24, Paul says he has received from the Jews the 'forty minus one', a reference to the synagogue flogging based on Deut 25.2f.<sup>80</sup> It is not known when, where and why Paul received such a flogging. Barrett says that the flogging here described 'represents a common practice in the first century CE'.<sup>81</sup> Although Paul does not say that he has received the punishment from the synagogue, his statement that he 'received from the Jews' (ὕπὸ Ἰουδαίων...ἔλαβον) suggests that the penalty was an official punishment and therefore probably took place within the synagogue, or in its precinct.<sup>82</sup> In addition, the fact that Paul tells us that he received this 'five times' (πεντάκις) indicates that he faced expulsion from the assembly which he did not accept. In other words, he probably insisted on remaining within the community, but was punished for allegedly teaching what contradicted the Law and Moses (cf. Acts 21.21).<sup>83</sup> Gallas outlines several possibilities for Paul's condemnation.<sup>84</sup> Even though Paul never mentions the reasons for which he was punished, it is possible to deduce from his work as missionary to the Gentiles the kind of reasons for the punishments. For example, by preaching about Jesus Christ, it is entirely possible for Paul to be accused of apostasy. Further, Luke tells us that his preaching created uproars in various places as well as in synagogues (e.g. Acts 17.1-8; 18.12ff). However, according to Gallas, these are mere conjectures. Gallas puts forward the 'increasing

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<sup>80</sup> Gallas 1990:178 says, 'Der Ausdruck »vierzig weniger einen« wurde als *terminus technicus* für die synagogale Geißelungsstrafe auch ohne das Substantiv »Schläge« verstanden'.

<sup>81</sup> Barrett 1973:296.

<sup>82</sup> Gallas 1990:181 argues that while the examination and proceedings of the court can take place completely in the synagogue, Josephus (*Ant* 4.238) seems to indicate that the flagellation was in public. Cf. Williams 1998:184, n11 who says this is an allusion to the corporal punishment by the synagogue in the Diaspora, probably in the earliest phase of Paul's ministry.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Seland 1995:263-65.

<sup>84</sup> Gallas 1990:183-84.



reference' to unclean food in mMak 3.2 as the possible ground for Paul's condemnation but argues that it cannot be safely determined.<sup>85</sup> The floggings Paul received could be due to the results of his 'conversion'. Thus, Seland is right to suggest that Paul's crimes were due to the rumours circulating about him that he taught apostasy and against circumcision, which were religiously and politically dangerous given the inherent nature of religion in Mediterranean societies, particularly in Jewish societies.<sup>86</sup> Barrett rightly points out that Paul could be accused of 'consorting with Gentiles and eating forbidden food', which he probably has eaten after becoming a Christian.<sup>87</sup> Paul's floggings suggests to us that the Jewish assembly carried out their own punishment on the basis of the Law. And Acts 21.20ff tells us that there were Jewish Christians 'zealous' for the Law (ζηλωταὶ τοῦ νόμου) who were angry with Paul for teaching against the Law and Moses. While it is not clear exactly why Paul was flogged, it is not unreasonable to suggest that his teaching and preaching and possibly even his own behaviour are among the reasons for his punishment.<sup>88</sup> But more importantly, the Law serves as the principal basis for his punishment. And as mentioned above, since Jewish Christians who were 'zealous' for the Law had heard or even possibly helped spread the rumours about Paul being an 'apostate', Paul's eventual reception of the thirty-nine stripes may be said to be a punishment as a result of the 'zeal' of those Jews for the Law and Moses. In other words, Paul's punishment

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<sup>85</sup> Gallas 1990:184.

<sup>86</sup> Seland 1995:264-65 further comments that '(I)n Jerusalem Torah-observance was not only a self-evident issue but also an indisputable one'. As such, when Paul emphasises that circumcision/uncircumcision do not matter (Gal 5.6; 6.15; 1 Cor 7.19), he stands accused of apostasy.

<sup>87</sup> Barrett 1973:296. We may deduce from the dispute over table fellowship with the Gentiles in Gal 2.11-14 that forbidden food might have been involved. On this and other issues involving table-fellowship and Jewish food laws, see Dunn 1993:117-24.

<sup>88</sup> Thus, Barclay 1996:384 rightly points out that 'in fulfilment of his new mission Paul developed a life-style and a theology which questioned the authority of the 'ancestral customs' which he had once vigorously defended'.

shows that the Jewish assembly turned to the 'Law' as their 'final court of appeal', when the crime in question was about the Jews' own religion (cf. Acts 18.15).

### **Gallio (Acts 18.12-17)<sup>89</sup>**

The story recorded by Luke is interesting for discussion since in this passage we have a situation in which Paul faces a united attack from the Jews who brought him before the tribunal (18.12). The accusation against Paul in v 13 concerns three points. First is the concern for the worship of God. Second, the Law is to be the guide on how God is worshipped. And third, Paul's teaching contradicts the Law on the proper worship of God. Thus, Paul's accusers are 'zealous' for the Law. Luke tells us that Gallio, who is proconsul of Achaia, is responsible for the maintenance of law and order, not over the internal religious matters of the Jews (vv. 14-15). Thus Gallio tells Paul's accusers that they should resolve the matter among themselves. And Luke's description suggests that there is a certain degree of 'independence' given to the Jews to judge their own internal religious matters. Luke's description of Gallio's nonchalance towards the action of the 'mob' against Sosthenes further suggests that the Roman authorities did not wish to be involved in the internal affairs of the Jews, particularly religious ones. This story also shows another aspect that we have been arguing in this chapter: the Law serves as the 'final court of appeal' for the Jews, when official sanctions cannot be imposed on those who commit 'deviant' acts.

## **5.5 Summary and conclusion**

The above discussion shows that the Jewish Diaspora organised themselves into self-supporting and self-regulating assemblies, which were 'independent' of the local government in at least religious and intra-communal matters. These assemblies had leadership structures which comprised three categories: (1) head of the ruling

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<sup>89</sup> See above n14.



council; (2) members of the council of the assembly (or synagogal council); and (3) ἀρχισυνάγωγοι. Within these structures conformity to the community's norms could be expressed. And on matters of serious deviance, such as idolatry, the community could appeal to the law as their norm. This is seen most clearly in the various examples cited, such as Num 25 in Josephus and Philo, and Paul in the NT.

The example of Num 25 and its uses by other Jewish authors such as 1 Maccabees, Josephus and Philo, shows that, in relation to idolatry and the failure to keep the Torah or be faithful to the Jewish ancestral tradition, death is often the prescribed penalty. And our examples also show that at times, when it is not possible to apply the Law, 'zeal' for the Law is often cited as the justification for violent action or resistance. 3 Maccabees provides a good example, in addition to Num 25. Further, Josephus's appeal to the 'zeal' for the Law for justifying Phinehas' killing of Zimbri (or Zambrias) is another case in point. The violent resistance movement of the Maccabean brothers is similarly justified by the 'zeal' for the Law. We have also looked at other examples of the law as the 'final court of appeal' for the Jews. Paul's own reception of the synagogal penalty of 'forty minus one', Gallio's dismissal of the Jews' complaint against Paul in Acts 18, confirm that throughout, the Law appears to be the 'final' court of appeal for the Diaspora Jewish communities.

In chapter two, I have shown that the ban on idolatry was well-embedded within the Jewish Scriptures and supported in subsequent Jewish literature (chapters two and three). However, as I have argued, there remain ambiguities in the definition of idolatry which were exploited in some Jewish quarters as they accommodated to idolatry (chapter four).

These aspects of Judaism serve as the basis of comparison for our investigation of the situation in Corinth. In 1 Cor 8.1-11.1, it seems that the three parties, i.e. Paul,

the 'strong' and the 'weak', could all appeal to Jewish tradition for their positions.

And since they differ in all their positions, we would need to explore the possible basis for their differences of opinion on idolatry. And further, the question of how authority/leadership is exercised in the Corinthian community, especially with regard to how it decides between these different opinions on idolatry, will need to be addressed (see chapter seven below). We will also need to ask to what community norms Paul can appeal in deciding such matters. These questions pave the way for the investigation of the next and final part of our thesis: Paul versus the 'strong' (chapter six) and Paul's apostolic authority and example (chapter seven).



## CHAPTER SIX

### PAUL VERSUS THE 'STRONG' ON IDOLATRY

#### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we turn to Corinth, and to the differences of views there, which may have parallels to the variety we have seen in chapters two to four. What is the view of the 'strong' concerning other Gods? And what are the views of Paul? Are there areas of agreement or disagreement, and if so, what are they? Thus, in the following, we will first look at the 'knowledge/theology' of the 'strong' which forms their basis for attending pagan temples and eating idol-meat. Such a study can only be undertaken by a close examination of the slogans of the 'strong' in 1 Cor 8-10 itself; and Paul's argument in 1 Cor 10 concerning idolatry: how exactly does Paul view idolatry? And in 1 Cor 10.20-21, what does Paul mean when he hinges his critique of idolatry on the notion of δαιμόνια?

The discussion of the views of the 'strong' and Paul raises the question of authority, parallel to that we saw in relation to Diaspora Jews in chapter five, where the basis for violent actions against those Jews who violated the communities' norms was the law and zeal for the law. The examples cited show that in most cases of idolatry among the Diaspora Jews disciplinary action was meted out in order to preserve and maintain the Jewish identity as a people. The law thus constituted the final 'court' of appeal for the Jews in the Diaspora. In other words, for Diaspora Jews their authority for determining what constituted 'right' or 'proper' behaviour was the law. However, this cannot be said about the Corinthian church which, though influenced by Judaism/s, was not a Jewish assembly. What then is their 'authority'? And what is Paul's prescription for them?

Thus, this chapter will pave the way for the next (seven), which will look at the question of authority and the role of 1 Cor 9 in the overall argument of Paul.

The above study will enable us to compare the Diaspora Jewish views and practices concerning idolatry (chapters 3-4) with those of Paul, the ‘strong’, and the ‘weak’. And we should be able to see how our definitions of idolatry set up in chapter two may shed light on such a comparison. By making such a comparison, we will see the parallels between the different Diaspora Jewish positions and those in Corinth. This would then help to explain why the parties in Corinth have different positions and the reasons for the conflict over idolatry.

## 6.2 Idolatry of the ‘strong’ – a brief overview

What is the practice of the ‘strong’? A brief overview of 1 Cor 8-10 is necessary in order to understand the behaviour of the ‘strong’ and in what way their behaviour might be idolatrous based on our definitions of idolatry set out in chapter two.

In 1 Cor 8.9 Paul cautions the ‘strong’ on the use of their liberty. It is apparent that the ‘strong’ are attending pagan temples and eating idol-meat. This is made most explicit in verse 10, which reads, ‘For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol,...’. What is clear from this verse is that the ‘strong’ are attending the pagan temples and eating idol food there.<sup>1</sup> This kind of behaviour may be viewed as idolatrous according to our definition of idolatry as ‘wrong kinds of

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<sup>1</sup> Hays 1997:135 rightly comments: ‘One key to following Paul’s argument is to recognize that he is primarily addressing the problem of sacrificial food consumed *in the temple of the pagan god* (8.10; 10.14, 21). That must have been the primary issue raised by the Corinthians’ letter’ (italics original). Barrett 1968:196 points out that Christians could also be attending pagan temples, like their rationalistic Greek counterparts who continued attending such temples for social reasons, even though they saw no religious meaning to such events. Fee 1987:357-62 takes the view that some of the Corinthians returned to the ‘practice of attending pagan meals’ after Paul left Corinth. This practice was prohibited by Paul earlier but the Corinthians in their letter to him disagreed. This view has been taken to suggest that the ‘strong’ are Gentile believers. But there is no evidence to suggest that the ‘strong’ are Gentiles. And as we argued in chapter one, the ethnicity of the parties involved is not clear at all, other than that of Paul. Gooch 1993:80-83 rightly points out that pagan temple meals in Corinth always involved religious rites. This suggests that the food which the ‘strong’ ate in the pagan temple was idolatrous food.



worship'. In the case of the 'strong', whether they intend it or not, their action of attending a pagan temple and eating what has been sacrificed to idols renders them idolatrous on that definition.

Further, in 1 Cor 10.14, Paul tells the 'strong' to 'flee from the worship of idols'.<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor 10.14-21 seems to suggest that the 'strong' not only attend pagan temples and eat idol-meat, but their presence at the pagan temple also involves some form of pagan religious ritual (v 20) which Paul says is an act of partnership with 'demons'.<sup>3</sup> While we cannot be sure whether the 'strong' actually participated in the pagan religious ritual, it would be difficult to imagine why Paul should falsely accuse them of such an act. At least, their presence at the pagan temple is interpreted by Paul as participation in pagan religious ritual. Further, Paul suggests that the action of the 'strong' will lead to divided loyalty, i.e. between the Lord and 'demons'. And his interpretation of the behaviour of the 'strong' fits our definition of idolatry as 'unfaithfulness', i.e. the 'strong' are 'unfaithful' to God by turning to alien Gods, even though they do not recognise the idols that represent them. Further, since verses 16-17 and 1 Cor 11.25 refer to the Lord's supper as an expression of God's covenant in Christ, Paul's words in verse 21 suggest a breach of the ancestral tradition of the covenant of God in Christ by the 'strong'. This again fits our definition of idolatry as 'unfaithfulness'. However, the 'strong' probably do not agree with such an interpretation.

If, according to Paul, the 'strong' indeed appear to have been idolatrous in their behaviour, we need to ask what is the basis for their behaviour. Or put differently,

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Barrett 1968:230 who sees this as an injunction not only to disapprove but also to avoid occasions that involved feasts that had religious content.

<sup>3</sup> Essentially Fee's point (1987:359-60). See also Fee 1980:172-97. So also Gooch 1993:80-83 who argues against Willis 1985a:8-64, whose view is that most of these temple meals were purely social in nature.

what causes them to behave in an idolatrous manner? In chapter 4 above, we saw that there were Jews in the Diaspora who did not see anything wrong with their behaviour when they attended pagan temples or used pagan juridical formulae. This was further well demonstrated in chapter five in which we saw that law-abiding Jews condemned and killed 'idolatrous' Jews. We therefore need to examine the 'knowledge' or 'theology' of the 'strong' and ask if there might be parallels between such Diaspora Jews and the 'strong'. Such an examination will have to proceed from the cognitive level to the practical level.

### 6.3 The γνῶσις of the 'strong'

What is the basis for the behaviour of the Corinthian 'strong' with regard to idol-meat in 1 Cor 8-10? 1 Cor 8.1, περὶ δὲ τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων, indicates that Paul is responding to a subject raised in the Corinthians' letter to him, and that the issue extends throughout 1 Cor 8.1-11.1.<sup>4</sup>

In these chapters, Paul cites a few of the Corinthians' slogans as he responds to their letter. It is possible to tell from these slogans the belief or theology of the 'strong' which gives rise to their specific practice of attending idol-temples and eating idol-meat. In particular, 1 Cor 8.1, 4, and 6 are verses which need study. In the following, I will look at these verses and seek to answer the questions: (1) what is the 'knowledge' of the 'strong'? and (2) how does this 'knowledge' give rise to their practice of attending pagan temples and eating idol-meat?

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<sup>4</sup> Thus the question whether there is consistency between 1 Cor 8.1-13 and 10.23-11.1, and 10.1-22. In the first two sections, it is argued, Paul seems to take a more lenient stance, while in the last section he appears to treat idolatry quite differently. However, a closer examination of 1 Cor 8.1-13 and 10.23-11.1 would show that Paul is equally strong in his language against eating idol-meat in these sections (see below).



### 6.3.1 1 Cor 8.1 – πάντες γνῶσις ἔχομεν

That this is a quote of the Corinthians' words can be seen in the repeated οἶδαμεν ὅτι in vv 1 and 4 and the repeated ὅτι in v 4 ( οἶδαμεν ὅτι...καὶ ὅτι...).<sup>5</sup> Giblin has pointed out that when Paul is expressing his own ideas, he normally employs only one ὅτι.<sup>6</sup> There is general agreement among scholars that πάντες γνῶσιν ἔχομεν is a slogan of the Corinthian 'strong'.<sup>7</sup>

The quote is not 'we have knowledge', but 'we *all* have knowledge', thus indicating that the 'strong' have expected this 'knowledge' to be confined not just to a privileged élite but to be shared by all.<sup>8</sup> What is this γνῶσις? There have been various suggestions. Schmithals has suggested that the γνῶσις of the Corinthians is in fact 'Gnosticism' the content of which is the 'doctrine of knowledge'.<sup>9</sup> He argues further that γνῶσις is gospel for the Corinthian Gnostics. This suggestion is weak in that Schmithals is reading into the Corinthians' γνῶσις a second-century phenomenon.<sup>10</sup>

Barrett correctly argues that the word γνῶσις is much wider and includes 'speculative theology in general' which focuses on the 'doctrine of God'.<sup>11</sup> This is confirmed by verses 4 and 6 which are two further slogans of the Corinthians. As

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<sup>5</sup> Fee 1987:365, n30; see also Hurd 1983:120f.

<sup>6</sup> Giblin 1975:530.

<sup>7</sup> Hurd 1983:68 provides a list of scholars in favour of this position. Modern scholars include Conzelmann 1975:140; Barrett 1968:189; and Fee 1987:365, among others.

<sup>8</sup> Pearson 1973:43 and Murphy-O'Connor 1978b:545 agree that it is a 'knowledge' which is to be shared by all. Cf. Willis 1985a:67-70. Héring 1962:67 argues that Paul makes a digression about γνῶσις because the 'strong' had boasted in 5.2 that they had a superior knowledge which did away with the scruples about idol-meat.

<sup>9</sup> Schmithals 1971:143.

<sup>10</sup> See Fee 1987:365, n32 where Fee rejects this suggestion as 'circular reasoning'.

<sup>11</sup> Barrett 1968:189.

Murphy-O'Connor has pointed out, such a γνῶσις, which is shared by all the Corinthians, must be basic to the Christian belief.<sup>12</sup> Fee thinks that the Corinthians have believed γνῶσις to be a gift of the Spirit which makes them spiritual and that it is something all believers should have.<sup>13</sup>

R. A. Horsley advocates that this *gnosis*, in view of 8.4, is theological and refers to the 'knowledge of God'.<sup>14</sup> He shows that the language of the Corinthians in 1 Cor 1-4, especially that of the 'perfect vs. child', parallels the pneumatikos-psychikos distinction in Philo.<sup>15</sup> The 'perfect', he argues, refers to a spiritual status achieved by the Corinthian pneumatikoi. And the religious achievement of the Corinthians is reflected in their self-designations such as 'wise', 'powerful', 'nobly born', 'kings', and 'rich'.<sup>16</sup> These self-designations therefore refer to a spiritual élite who have established their status through an intimate relation with Sophia.<sup>17</sup> For the Corinthian 'strong', the way to the highest spiritual status is through the possession of wisdom, that is, Sophia, which will then free them from all earthly influences and bodily passions.<sup>18</sup> The best parallels to these features of the Corinthians' understanding can be found in Philo and Wisdom of Solomon, as Horsley has sought to show.<sup>19</sup>

What Horsley has done is to link the γνῶσις of 1 Cor 8.1 with the Sophia of 1 Cor 1-4 and show the two to be referring to the same thing. Horsley is correct in referring the γνῶσις of 1 Cor 8.1 to 'knowledge of God'. However, while he views

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<sup>12</sup> Murphy-O'Connor 1979b:78.

<sup>13</sup> Fee 1987:366.

<sup>14</sup> Horsley 1980:35.

<sup>15</sup> Horsley 1976:280.

<sup>16</sup> Horsley 1976:281; cf. 1977:231 and 1980:43.

<sup>17</sup> Horsley 1976:281; 1979:46-51.

<sup>18</sup> Horsley 1976:288; cf. 1977:244; 1979:48f.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Pearson 1973:35-7.



this ‘knowledge’ as likely having an affinity to the Sophia of 1 Cor 1-4, Paul seems to see a sharp distinction between the γνῶσις of 1 Cor 8 and the Sophia of 1 Cor 1-4. He can agree with the content of the ‘knowledge’ in 1 Cor 8, albeit with some qualification, but not so with the Corinthian Sophia in 1 Cor 1-4. Horsley’s equation of the knowledge in 1 Cor 8 with the wisdom in 1 Cor 1-4 therefore does not appear to stand on firm ground.

P. J. Tomson looks at γνῶσις as the ‘rational insight that idols are nothing and that dedication to the gods does not make food any different’.<sup>20</sup> For him, the ‘knowledge’ referred to in 1 Cor 8.1 is elaborated in verses 4 and 6 later.

Indeed, the context of 1 Cor 8 does point to two considerations: (1) the practical situation of whether or not eating idol-meat is permitted; and (2) the difference in the basis of eating idol-meat on the part of the ‘strong’ and the basis of refraining from eating on the part of the ‘weak’ as the root of the situation. This means that the γνῶσις of 1 Cor 8.1 is more likely to be a form of knowledge that either permits or disallows a person to eat idol-meat. What then is this ‘knowledge’? 1 Cor 8.4 gives us the clue.

### 6.3.2 1 Cor 8.4 – οὐδὲν εἰδωλον ἐν κόσμῳ καὶ οὐδεὶς θεὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς

This verse has two parts to it, (1) οὐδὲν εἰδωλον ἐν κόσμῳ; and (2) οὐδεὶς θεὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς. In the first part, οὐδὲν could be either attributive, that is, no idol exists in the world; or predicative, that is, an idol is nothing in the world.<sup>21</sup>

Murphy-O’Connor is right, however, in his argument that the attributive understanding

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<sup>20</sup> Tomson 1990:193.

<sup>21</sup> Fee 1987:371 recognises the ambiguity but quite correctly states that either case means there is ‘no reality to idols’.

is untrue but that the predicative creates no difficulty.<sup>22</sup> The first half of the slogan of the 'strong' would therefore be 'an idol is nothing in the world', that is, it is of no significance to the 'strong'.

The word εἰδωλον used in relation to objects of worship is a Hellenistic Jewish conception whose usage is not found among the pagan Greeks.<sup>23</sup> The term for the cultic objects in pagan Greek is ἄγαλμα, while human statues are normally called ἀνδριάνς and εἰκὼν; although it can be used for images of the Gods, shades or apparitions, the cultic object is never called εἰδωλον.<sup>24</sup> Conzelmann is therefore wrong to say that 'the Corinthians argue after the fashion of Greek enlightenment philosophy'.<sup>25</sup> It may be more accurate to say, as Horsley does, that this principle of the Corinthian 'strong' has arisen out of a Hellenistic Jewish enlightenment.<sup>26</sup> According to Büchsel, the New Testament usage of εἰδωλον rests on that of the LXX or the Jews,<sup>27</sup> which suggests that the 'strong' have based their idea on the LXX as well as Hellenistic Judaism.<sup>28</sup> This is even more probable if they (the 'strong') had been influenced by the type of Judaism seen in chapter four above, where we discussed Jews' accommodation to idolatry.

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<sup>22</sup> Murphy-O'Connor 1978b:546.

<sup>23</sup> Büchsel 1964:377.

<sup>24</sup> Büchsel 1964:376.

<sup>25</sup> Conzelmann 1975:142.

<sup>26</sup> Horsley 1980:36.

<sup>27</sup> Büchsel 1964:378.

<sup>28</sup> Horsley 1980:38-9 observes that within Judaism itself there were two distinct traditions of polemic against idols or false gods: (1) the tradition that contrasts lifeless idols with the one, true, creating and redeeming God; this is seen especially in Hellenistic Judaism; and (2) the tradition that saw in idolatry the service or influence of demons. The Corinthian 'strong' could have held (2) before but have probably modified their view to one that regards idols as totally nothing after their conversion to Christianity. This might suggest that there is a fundamental conflict of idea between Paul and the 'strong'.



In chapter three, we saw the critique of idolatry by the Diaspora Jewish authors. One of the emphases there is the rejection of idols and idol-makers, which could be summarised, in the words of Horsley, as the ‘antithesis between *ignorance of God* and *knowledge of God*’.<sup>29</sup> This possibly forms another aspect of the content of the γνῶσις of the ‘strong’. But it is also possible that the ‘strong’ hold a belief similar to that found in *Letter of Aristeas*, i.e. a recognition of other people’s Gods but not the idols that represent them. Such a belief would make it easier for the ‘strong’ to accommodate themselves to idolatry.

The phrase ἐν κόσμῳ reveals the Corinthians’ belief that the world is the realm within which idols in the form of wood or stone and such like are found. However, the κόσμος is but part of the creation of the one God. As Horsley has observed, ‘This is the significance of the frequency with which God is described as “Begetter”, “Father”, “Maker” or “Cause” in the several Philonic and Wisdom passages in which knowledge is discussed’.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, the ‘strong’ have a ‘knowledge’ that tells them that ‘idols are nothing in the world’ as their existence means nothing and they therefore have no power over them. This first half of the slogan, ‘idols are nothing in the world’ forms the negative aspect of the knowledge. There is a positive aspect of the ‘knowledge’ which is the second half of the slogan, οὐδεὶς θεὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς.

‘There is no God but one’ seems to be a clear statement of the monotheistic belief of the Corinthian ‘strong’. Murphy-O’Connor says, ‘When viewed in the perspective of Paul’s preaching *oudeis theos ei mē heis* can only mean that one God

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<sup>29</sup> Horsley 1980:39 argues that ignorance of God is in fact the same as thinking that idols are Gods and knowledge of God means a knowledge that idols are nothing. Cf. Fee 1980:180, ‘They all have γνῶσις about idols, namely that Jewish-Christian monotheism by its very nature rules out any genuine reality to an idol’.

<sup>30</sup> Horsley 1980:40.

alone enjoys the prerogative of existence'.<sup>31</sup> However, is this statement about the oneness of God affirmed by the Greeks? Or is it one of Christian monotheistic belief, or one of Hellenistic Jewish origin so that when the 'strong' use it, it is a modified view of their previous religious belief?

It is more possible that the 'one God' is a basic Jewish confession of God as One,<sup>32</sup> but has been inherited by Christian confession as may be seen in the confession of Christ as Lord in 1 Cor 8.6<sup>33</sup> in addition to the confession of 'one God'.<sup>34</sup> It must be emphasised that the Christian doctrine of God was still fluid even up to the third century CE,<sup>35</sup> so that what we have in 1 Cor 8 is probably a very basic and early confession of God. In other words, it is largely a Jewish confession. What is more important is that both Paul and the 'strong' could share the affirmation and its correlate that 'idols are nothing'; but they differed in what they said and did thereafter.

That 1 Cor 8.4 is a basic Jewish confession of 'God as one' can also be found in various works of Hellenistic Jewish literature such as Josephus, and Philo.<sup>36</sup> It is therefore more likely that the second half of the Corinthian slogan in 1 Cor 8.4 has originated from Hellenistic Jewish monotheism of the 'one God' to the exclusion of all other beings, Gods, and idols.<sup>37</sup> The question is: what does the concept of 'one God' really mean to the 'strong'? Is it the type found in *Letter of Aristeas*, i.e. that which allows for a conceptual overlap between the God of the Jews and the God of the pagans? This question is particularly important since the 'strong' do not seem to have

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<sup>31</sup> Murphy-O'Connor 1978b:546.

<sup>32</sup> Horsley 1980:36.

<sup>33</sup> Willis 1985a:84 is of the opinion that the monotheistic confession is inherited from Judaism, a fundamental truth for the 'strong' to conclude that 'idols are nothing in the world'.

<sup>34</sup> See Grant 1986:84-94 for a brief treatment of the 'Christian Doctrines of God'.

<sup>35</sup> Grant 1986:91-4 looks at Origen's work on God and makes such a conclusion.

<sup>36</sup> *Ant* III.91; *Spec* 1.30; *Opif* 170-2; *Conf* 170-1 and *Leg* 3.48, 126. See Horsley 1980:35 who links the 'strong' with those who seek wisdom in 1 Cor 1-4.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Deut 6.4; Isa 44.8; 45.5.



difficulty attending pagan temples and eating idol-meat, even though they hold the view that there is no God but one. As discussed in chapter four (4.2.3) above, if the ‘strong’ were aware of the LXX command not to revile other people’s Gods, and if there is a conceptual overlap in their understanding about other people’s Gods, then it would account for their behaviour. But such a concept would mean the ‘strong’ have, in Paul’s mind, confused the true God with other Gods, thus rendering them idolatrous at the cognitive level, as our definition in chapter two would classify them.

From the above, 1 Cor 8.4 provides us with an insight into the theological understanding of the ‘strong’ and there are two aspects of it: (1) negatively, it views idols as nothing in the world and therefore as having no power over their lives; and (2) positively, it holds the view that there is only one God, with the possibility of a conceptual overlap about the true God as discussed in chapter four. With this γνῶσις of the nothingness or non-reality of idols and the oneness of God, the ‘strong’ probably believe that their ‘freedom’ (ἐλευθερία) and ‘right’ (ἐξουσία) allow them to freely eat idol-meat, even at the pagan temple.

The above may be an introduction in the letter of the Corinthians to a more established position on the common confession of ‘one God’ and ‘one Lord’ in 1 Cor 8.6. It is a confession that may not be easily comprehended by all as Paul points out in 8.7 that ‘not all’ share this knowledge. To have a fuller understanding of the practice of the ‘strong’ with regard to the eating of idol-meat, we need a fuller understanding of their theology.

### 6.3.3 1 Cor 8.6 - the confession

The verse begins with the strong adversative, ἀλλ' ἡμῖν, which seems to point to a credal confession.<sup>38</sup> As 1 Cor 8.7 points out, this is a 'knowledge' that is not shared by all. In other words, it probably comes from the 'strong' who have worked out this confession in such a way as to be independent of Paul (but the content of which is fully agreed with by Paul) and not easy for the 'weak' to comprehend fully. It is also the confession which is central to the theology of the 'strong' that gives rise to their practice of eating idol-meat.

The confession may be studied in two divisions: (1) εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατὴρ ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν; and (2) εἷς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς δι' αὐτοῦ. The first brings us to the very reality of the 'one God' whom the Corinthian 'strong' confess as their Father. The expression of 'one God' is a clear reference to the famous Jewish *Shema* in Deut 6.4 with which the Jewish-influenced Corinthian 'strong' would have been familiar. It speaks of not only

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<sup>38</sup> Conzelmann 1975:145, n51; Willis 1985a:84 observes that the credal character of this verse is in the balanced phraseology of the style; see his n70. However, although Fee 1987:373f thinks it is possible for this verse to find its origin in a credal confession, he holds the view that the words were Paul's own. The question is sharpened by Murphy-O'Connor 1978a:257 who makes a distinction between a declaration and a confession and argues for the former on the basis that a confession is a considered declaration which is theoretical and abstract. Whereas a declaration or acclamation 'is rooted in the wonder inspired by the experience of power'. He goes on to say, 'This dimension of power as experienced confirms the classification of *I Cor.*, VIII, 6 as an acclamation, because this precise aspect is highlighted by the *hēmeis di' autou* which produces the effect *hēmeis eis auton*' (257f). This view is similarly held by Giblin 1975:534. However, if verse 6 is an acclamation due to the dimension of power experienced and that a confessional formula would have been too theoretical and abstract, it would mean that the 'weak' would less likely have any problem understanding it since they too had experienced conversion and thus probably the power that came with it. On the contrary, 1 Cor 8.7 tells us that ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐν πᾶσιν ἡ γνῶσις, which implies the possibility that verses 4, 6 and particularly verse 6 could well be a credal confession which is too highbrow for the 'weak'. See Horsley 1978c:130 who argues that the verse is a credal confession arising from Stoic doxology. It appears that it was a credal confession with which the Corinthians were familiar at their conversion and it could even well be possible that it was recited at their baptism (Murphy-O'Connor 1979b:80 states that it is in fact an acclamation uttered during a baptismal liturgy which begs the question then as to what the difference between a baptismal-liturgical acclamation and a baptismal credal confession is). Further, the context of 1 Cor 8 indicates that verse 6 is probably central to the γνῶσις of the 'strong'.



the fatherhood of God but the creatorship of God.<sup>39</sup> The expression τὰ πάντα has been a subject of debate. Is it to be understood as referring to the new order of salvation as Murphy-O'Connor has argued?<sup>40</sup> It must be noted that the context of 1 Cor 8 is that of eating idol-meat. Even though the confession probably has a much wider meaning for the Corinthians at the time of their conversion – when they turned from the former belief (in this case Judaism for the Jewish Christians, and pagan belief for those Jewish-influenced Gentile Christians)<sup>41</sup> to acknowledge Christ as their Lord and as the agent of all that they have and are – it seems to be applied to this very specific context of idol-meat. Thus τὰ πάντα would more likely be a reference to all creation.

It appears that the 'strong' possess the knowledge that all things come from the one God, which obviously includes food, even idol-meat. And since idols are nothing and insignificant, and since God is the one God who has created all things, it is perfectly all right for the 'strong' to eat idol-meat.

Such a γνώσις means for the 'strong' a legitimation for their very practice. They are in a spiritual state of 'freedom' and 'power' as they acknowledge God as their Father and creator and their own creatureliness, thus their dependence on and existence for him.<sup>42</sup> Eating idol-meat is therefore not a wrong at all; it is in fact a way

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Horsley 1980:46. Héring 1962:69-70 discusses various creation models but settles on the Jewish Kabbalah conception of creation which describes God as creating the universe by taking from himself all the elements of creation.

<sup>40</sup> Murphy-O'Connor 1978a:263-5.

<sup>41</sup> By this, I am not making a statement as to who are Jewish or Gentile Christians. The point is that even if all the Corinthians have this belief at the point of their conversion, the practical implications for different individuals or groups may still differ.

<sup>42</sup> Fee 1987:374-5 lists three realities about God in this verse: (1) that God is now to be understood to be the Father; (2) that God is the source and creator of all things; and (3) that Christians now exist for his purpose. And Barrett 1968:192 rightly states, 'He is therefore described as the Father (primarily of his only Son, Jesus Christ; secondarily also of those who through Christ have a derivative relationship), from whom come all things (that is, he is the Creator) and to whom our own being leads (literally, *and we unto him*; that is, we exist in order to serve him, and our destiny is to be found in him),...' (emphasis original).

in which they display their belief. Yet, this behaviour is viewed by Paul as sharing in the table of demons and which, according to our definitions, would be seen as a form of rebellion against the true God and a wrong kind of worship even if their intention is not wrong. But the 'strong' need not view this as Paul does. For them, the definitions of idolatry may be different.

That the one God is not only the creator but also the Father to the 'strong' means that they now have to live for him, that is, ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν. But living for God would also imply a conscious and deliberate effort in rejecting idols and all that they stand for. They are therefore not to be held back by any thought that idols have power over them. This would have given rise to their 'freedom' in the practice with regard to idol-meat. Indeed, such concept and practice are not without parallels. Artapanus could hold a positive view of Moses and Judaism while at the same time attribute to Moses all the Egyptian religious traditions (see 4.5 above). Further, it is highly possible for the 'strong' to view the true God as the 'most high God', just as Philo views the true God. But the 'strong' differ in their application of this knowledge of God as the highest (see 4.4 above). And again, in 4.4 above, we have hinted at the possibility that there might be a conceptual overlap between the understanding of the 'strong' regarding the true God and other people's understanding, since the cult of Ζεὺς Ὑψίστος was officially recognised in Corinth. A parallel is seen here.

With regard to the second part, the word κύριος may have many possible meanings.<sup>43</sup> However, it must be seen and understood in conjunction with what follows, namely, δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς δι' αὐτοῦ. For this phrase is a parallel to the one before, so that it speaks about the relationship of Jesus Christ to God in creation and redemption. The conception εἰς κύριος, according to Héring, 'was

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<sup>43</sup> See Quell-Foerster 1965:1039-95 for these studies.



kept by the Christians for the glorified Christ'.<sup>44</sup> The 'strong' would probably have acknowledged the lordship of Christ and understood him to be the agent of creation as well as the agent of redemption as may be seen in the word διότι, which, according to Barrett, means that Jesus Christ is not described as God.<sup>45</sup> And Barrett is thus correct to say that the word κύριος here 'stands in close relation, but is not identical, with God'.<sup>46</sup> The second part of the confession thus points to Christ as the agent of creation and, in terms of redemption, the intermediary between God and humanity.

This fits well with the context of 1 Cor 8 in which the 'strong' who have believed Christ to be the Lord know they are in the position of being redeemed. Idols are nothing in the face of Christ the Lord; and having been redeemed through Christ, they now belong to God the Father. It is therefore a 'freedom' into which the Corinthian 'strong' have been redeemed.

Horsley has pointed out that in Hellenistic Judaism, 'a sense of one's inability to sin can be rooted in the possession of *sophia* and *gnosis*'.<sup>47</sup> However, while it is possible that Jesus Christ as the agent of creation could well succeed to the place of *sophia* which is the instrument of God's creation in Jewish Wisdom literature,<sup>48</sup> this is not clear in the text. Thus, Horsely's view that they have attained a spiritual status of 'wisdom', 'power' and 'perfection' is possible but cannot be confirmed from the text.<sup>49</sup>

Armed with this confession as their γνώσις, the 'strong' are able to say, 'we all possess knowledge', 'idols are nothing in the world' and 'there is no God but one'.

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<sup>44</sup> Héring 1962:69.

<sup>45</sup> Barrett 1968:193.

<sup>46</sup> Barrett 1968:193.

<sup>47</sup> Horsley 1980:47.

<sup>48</sup> See Héring 1962:71.

<sup>49</sup> Horsley 1976:281; cf. 1977:231 and 1980:43; see also 1979:46-51. See further his commentary (1998:144-45) where Horsley recognises the various slogans to be the theological knowledge of the 'strong'.

This γνῶσις thus gives them the ‘right’ or ‘freedom’ to attend pagan temples and eat idol-meat. How this ‘right’ or ‘freedom’ is appropriated by the ‘strong’ will need to be examined, particularly because the concept is also seen in Josephus’s citation of the Num 25 incident.

#### 6.3.4 The ἐξουσία of the ‘strong’

In 1 Cor 8.9, Paul cautions the ‘strong’ on their use of their ἐξουσία, as he does not want their exercise of ἐξουσία to become a stumbling block to the ‘weak’. In 1 Cor 10.23 Paul cites yet another slogan of the ‘strong’ in their justification for eating idol-meat: πάντα ἔξεστιν, which is also seen in 1 Cor 6.12.<sup>50</sup> What is this ἐξουσία? Does it imply that the ‘strong’ are turning to themselves and their γνῶσις as their ‘authority’?

The word ἔξεστιν is defined as ‘it is permitted’, ‘it is possible’, and ‘proper’ by *BAGD*. In the light of the participation of the Corinthian ‘strong’ in eating idol-meat, the ‘permission’ or ‘possibility’ could be understood as a claim for ‘freedom’.<sup>51</sup> And according to *BAGD*, ἐξουσία carries the meaning of ‘freedom of choice’, ‘right to act, decide’, among others.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, the ‘strong’ appear to believe that eating sacrificial food is part of their ἐξουσία. Further, their present knowledge (γνῶσις) serves as the foundation for that

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<sup>50</sup> Fee 1987:384, n46, rightly observes that the words ἐξουσία and ἐλεύθερος/ἐλευθερία are ‘nearly synonymous’ in Paul’s argument. On 1 Cor 6.12, Fee is of the opinion that it is a crisis of the abuse of freedom ‘to act as they (the ‘strong’) pleased’ (1987:252). Barrett 1968:144 thinks that the slogan receives a qualified agreement from Paul who draws a different conclusion.

<sup>51</sup> Conzelmann 1975:108-9 carefully takes the term, ἔξεστιν, to mean ‘it is permitted’ and that it is linked to the ‘knowledge’ of the ‘strong’. As mentioned in 6.3.1, 6.3.2 and 6.3.3, the ‘knowledge’ of the ‘strong’ forms their theology which ‘permits’ them to behave in an idolatrous manner.

<sup>52</sup> Hays 1997:101 refers to this as a ‘philosophically-informed autonomy’, which means that the ‘strong’ are free to do anything as they please. However, Hays’ suggestion that the ‘strong’ could have drawn on the kind of philosophical tradition found in Epictetus has not taken into consideration the nature of the ‘knowledge’ or ‘theology’ of the ‘strong’, which we have shown to be Jewish. And if we can find Jewish parallel to such a claim to ‘freedom’, our case that the behaviour of the ‘strong’ is Jewish would be considerably strengthened (see further below).



ἐξουσία. And their slogan, πάντα ἔξεστιν, expresses their ἐξουσία to eat idol-meat.

There are at least two ways to explain 'freedom'. Firstly, 'freedom' could be viewed as the Christian claim of being 'freed' from the Mosaic Law, after their conversion to Christianity. Such 'freedom' represents a kind of liberation from something burdensome and oppressive, i.e. the burdens of the Law. The participation of the 'strong' in pagan temple meals which involves eating sacrificial food could be seen as an effort to claim this 'freedom' in a practical way. The second is the claim of the intrinsic value of humanity, i.e. human 'freedom'. This perspective sees 'freedom' as deeply rooted in the 'one God' who gives all people the 'freedom' to be what they are and live according to the γνῶσις that is derived from this 'one God'. In this sense, the 'strong' can claim their γνῶσις of the 'one God' and the 'non-entity of idols' and thus their 'freedom' to live according to this knowledge. Such a claim is not without parallel.

In Josephus' account of the Midianite women's seduction of the Israelite youths, a parallel to the claim of the 'strong' to their 'rights' and 'freedom' may be established. In *Ant* 4.131-154, the Israelite youths are described as having fallen in love with the Midianite women and, after these women's demand that the Israelites must conform to their (Midianite) belief system and follow their customs and worship their Gods, giving in to the women's demand (*Ant* 4.137).<sup>53</sup> *Ant* 4.139 tells us that the youths accepted the belief in a plurality of Gods and were certain about sacrificing to the Midianite women's Gods according to their (i.e. the Midianites') established rites. What follows is that Moses tried to reason with the youths (*Ant* 4.141-44),<sup>54</sup> only to receive a robust response

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<sup>53</sup> See the discussion on Josephus' account on the Midianite women's seduction of Israelite youths in chapter 5.4.1.

<sup>54</sup> See the discussion on Moses' mild disposition in the above chapter. What may be observed is that in Josephus Moses seems not so unreasonable after all, an impression the Bible might have given.

from the chief of the tribe of Simeon, Zambrias, who argued that Moses was a tyrant who secured the Israelites' obedience to the law by compulsion (*Ant* 4.145-46). Zambrias' accusation against Moses of 'robbing us of life's sweets and of that liberty of action' (τὸν βίον αὐτεξούσιον) may be seen as an expression of a belief that went beyond a mere giving in to the Midianite women's seduction.<sup>55</sup> The αὐτεξούσιος, which means 'free power' or 'self-determination', points to the meaning we have mentioned earlier, i.e. the 'freedom' given to all humanity.<sup>56</sup> Further, Zambrias' insistence that such 'freedom' belonged to 'free people' (τῶν ἐλευθέρων) who 'have no master' (δεσπότην οὐκ ἔχόντων) (*Ant* 4.146) shows his belief that he, and indeed all those who joined the Midianite women, were 'free people' and that they therefore ought to exercise their αὐτεξούσιον. Such an appeal to 'free power' and to 'freedom' (ἐλευθερία) shows that Zambrias was feeling oppressed and that he could not access the truth because of Moses' tyranny (*Ant* 4.149).

If Josephus' reworked story of the Midianite women is a reflection of the situation of the Graeco-Roman world of attractions, and thus 'temptations', to the Jews in the Diaspora, and if Josephus wrote this to address the issue of the dangers posed by Gentile cultural religious values on Judaism,<sup>57</sup> then it is possible that such a claim on one's 'self-determination' might be quite widespread. And this serves as a parallel to the

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<sup>55</sup> Borgen 1996:19 rightly maintains that Zambrias wants 'self-determination and freedom from the tyrant Moses'. Indeed, Josephus' portrayal of the temptation is one that interweaves the youths' desire to break free from the 'dictatorship' of Moses and their idolatry. This is significant for understanding the role of 'freedom' in the youths' idolatry.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Borgen 1996:19 who interprets this as a 'cherished Greek ideal'. Horbury 1998:119 notes that the Greek-speaking Jews understood the Israelites' worship of Baal-peor as 'a lapse to the mysteries'.

<sup>57</sup> van Unnik 1974:261. Feldman 2000:378, n391 observes that Num 25.1-2 speaks quite differently from Josephus' description. He is also right to point out the fact that while Josephus is addressing his work primarily to non-Jews, he is also directing his work at Jews as well, as seen in various indications such as the present incident of Israelites' worship of Baal-Peor here in Num 25 and Samson's relations with foreign women (Judg 14.1-16.31; *Ant* 5.286-317) (see Feldman 2000:378, n392).



claim of the ‘strong’ that ‘all things are lawful’ (πάντα ἔξεστιν, 1 Cor 10.23; cf. 1 Cor 6.12).

Although Paul recognises the ἐξουσία of the ‘strong’, he does not agree with the way they exercise their ἐξουσία, i.e. attendance at pagan temples and consumption of idol-meat (...ἡ ἐξουσία ὑμῶν αὕτη... 1 Cor 8.9).<sup>58</sup> For such actions are idolatrous and can lead to their destruction. And in the process, the ‘weak’ are also caused to stumble. Instead, he urges the ‘strong’ to imitate his willingness not to use his own ‘rights’ as an apostle, thus reiterating his opposition to the way the ‘strong’ are exercising their ‘rights’ (1 Cor 9.1; see chapter seven below for further discussion of Paul’s renunciation of his rights).

### 6.3.5 Conclusion

The above examination of three verses of the slogans of the ‘strong’ and their ‘freedom’ or ‘authority’ shows that they have taken a liberal stand over the eating of idol-meat. They hold the belief that idols are nothing in the world and that there is no God but one. Their knowledge of the ‘one God’ could possibly be paralleled by the conceptual overlap found in *Letter of Aristeas*, Artapanus and such like: the one God is universally worshipped, even though different people call him by different names. But their knowledge was further modified when they became Christians, and this γνῶσις is further seen in their creedal confession quoted by Paul in which the ‘strong’ acknowledge both the creatorship and the fatherhood of God. Because God is the creator of all things, including food and even idol-meat, and because the ‘strong’ hold the belief that their present existence is due to God and for his purpose, they feel free to eat what God has created. And in the process, they display their belief or γνῶσις.

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<sup>58</sup> Fee 1987:384-85 rightly points out that this ‘freedom’ of the ‘strong’ is close to ‘freedom to act as they please without restraint’. Cf. Horsley 1998:145 who reiterates that the ‘strong’ possess ‘absolute authority’ out of their knowledge.

Their confession also points to their acknowledgement of Jesus Christ as Lord. They have come to faith through Jesus Christ and their existence and redemption are due to him. This then forms the γνῶσις of the Corinthian ‘strong’ by which they attend pagan temples and freely eat idol-meat. The γνῶσις of the ‘strong’ also gives them the ἐξουσία to behave in an idolatrous manner according to their own preference, with little regard for the ‘weak’. Even though they hold similar views of the ‘one God’ as Philo does (see Philo, *Leg* 3.82, discussed in chapter 4.4 above), they differ over the practical application of this belief. While Philo’s view meant a total condemnation of idolatry, that there should be no contact with idols, the γνῶσις of the ‘strong’ gives them the legitimation for eating idol-meat freely.

Such behaviour is not without parallel. In fact, we saw in chapter four (4.6) above such idolatrous behaviour of some Diaspora Jews: attendance at the temple of Pan, conducting business transactions at the pagan temples and invoking the Gods in their juridical formulae and the like (chapter 4.6.2). Other Jews such as Dositheos son of Drimylos and Philo’s nephew Tiberius Julius Alexander gave themselves to the service of the Gods while continuing to regard themselves as Jews (see chapter 4.6.3).

There are several definitions of idolatry spelt out in chapter two (see chapter 2.1.1) by which the ‘strong’ could be considered idolatrous. First of all, the ‘strong’ could be considered idolatrous for being ‘unfaithful’ to God through their participation in the ritual eating in the pagan temple. Within the category of ‘unfaithfulness’ the ‘strong’ would have been considered idolatrous for disregarding ancestral tradition/customs. In the light of the tradition which Paul had passed on to them, i.e. the Lord’s Supper, their behaviour is considered as contrary to the gospel (this will be discussed below). Second, the ‘strong’ could be considered idolatrous in terms of the wrong acts of worship. While they may hold a right view of the true God, i.e. there is



no God but one, their behaviour of attending a pagan temple and eating idol-meat before the idols is inappropriate to the worship of the true God, even though they may not intend to worship the idols. Third, the ‘strong’ could be considered idolatrous because of the cognitive error of confusing or mixing God with δαιμόνια.

Paul, however, does not approve the behaviour of the ‘strong’. For him, the behaviour of the ‘strong’ constitutes idolatry because eating at a pagan temple before the pagan idols is an act of sharing the table with δαιμόνια. He rejects such behaviour and warns that the ‘strong’ run the risk of being condemned by the true God. This whole saga or conflict over idolatry seems to boil down to the question of definitions. Paul seems to have a different view of what constitutes idolatry. To enable us to have a better understanding of Paul’s position, we will now look at some of the terms which he uses in his argument against the behaviour of the ‘strong’.

#### 6.4 The use of δαιμόνιον

Does Paul think that the consumption of idol meat is a matter of indifference? Does he, like the ‘strong’, believe that idols are nothing? In what way does he differ from the ‘strong’ in opinion? He seems to reject the practice of the ‘strong’. What are his reasons for his rejection? In 1 Cor 10.20, Paul seems to make a connection between idols and δαιμόνια. What does Paul mean when he quotes from Deut 32.17? To understand Paul’s view, the meaning of δαιμόνιον and its significance in Paul’s argument, I will first look at its use in the Septuagint. While the Septuagint does not use the term in a widespread manner, those places where the term is used are significant in that they are related to the idolatrous behaviour of Israel. An examination of this term should also lead us to Paul’s use of the term elsewhere.

#### 6.4.1 Δαιμόνιον in the Septuagint

Paul's use of the word δαιμόνιον, to be sure, is found within a quotation of Deut 32.17. In other words, Paul's understanding of the term is most likely influenced by the very passage itself. 1 Cor 10.20 reads, ἀλλ' ὅτι ἃ θύουσιν, δαιμονίοις καὶ οὐ θεῷ θύουσιν ('but that the things they sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God'). The LXX Deut 32.17 reads, ...ἔθυσαν δαιμονίοις καὶ οὐ θεῷ. In this passage, which falls within the larger context of Moses' Song, the term is used to refer to the Gods whom the Israelites have worshipped. However, in Deut 32 itself, the objects of the Israelites' idolatrous worship seem to take on various terms: they are called 'no-gods' (vv 17, 21), 'strange Gods' and 'Gods' (vv 16, 17), 'new Gods' (v 17), and 'idols' (v 21). Do all these terms mean the same thing and are they together also taken to refer to 'demons' in v 17? Does Paul make any distinction between idols and 'demons'? What is important is that by our definition in chapter two the worship of the 'no-gods', 'strange Gods', 'new Gods' and 'idols', other than the true God is idolatrous.<sup>59</sup> If idols and pagan Gods are no-gods, a view which the 'strong' in Corinth also hold, what then does the term δαιμόνια mean? The text in Deut 32 seems to suggest that the δαιμόνια are a reference to the Gods of the nations, represented by their idols. Other Septuagintal texts may shed more light.

In Ps 95.5, the psalmist refers to the Gods of the Gentiles as demons (δαιμόνια),<sup>60</sup> in contrast to Yahweh who is the creator. In Ps 90.6, the term

<sup>59</sup> Craigie 1976:382 rightly comments: 'By abandoning God to go after strange gods, the Israelites break the first commandment of their covenant with God, ...'. Although von Rad 1966:198 thinks this is a historical view that is much subordinated to theology, the Song of Moses states in explicit terms that Israelites have turned to other Gods.

<sup>60</sup> This is the translation of the Hebrew דִּמְיוֹנִים, which Anderson 1972:683 thinks is a term of contempt. Dahood 1968:358 translates it as 'rags', linking it to the terapim to denote 'old rags'. The translators of the LXX perhaps found this term to be of such contempt that they decided to translate it as 'demons'.



δαιμόνια seems to carry the idea of ‘evil spirit’ (δαιμονίου μεσημβρινοῦ), while the term μεσημβρινοῦ indicates that the psalmist has in view the realm of the spirits.<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile, Ps 105.36-38 (LXX) seems to employ the terms δαιμόνια and idols interchangeably.<sup>62</sup> The idols of v 36, though not mentioned in v 37, are again mentioned in v 38, both of which refer to the objects of the Israelites’ sacrifice of their children. Verse 37 comes in between and explains that the child sacrifice is to ‘demons’ (τοῖς δαιμονίοις).<sup>63</sup> However, since in the majority of Jewish texts, ‘idols’ are ridiculed as being dumb and stupid, lacking any power or efficacy, the δαιμόνια could well be a reference to the spirits behind, or represented by, the idols.<sup>64</sup>

The use of the term in Isaiah may be seen in three ways. In Isa 13.21, calamity is promised to Israel’s enemies. Babylon, which is the nation that takes Israel into captivity, is described as a place for wild beasts, and where ‘demons’ will make merry (δαιμόνια ἐκεῖ ὀρχήσονται).<sup>65</sup> A similar description about the nations in general

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<sup>61</sup> Anderson 1972:658 suggests that the LXX bears a witness to the interpretation of the psalm at a later time. The idea here might be that the realm of evil spirits is a realm of destruction, hence the use of the term ‘demon’ in the translation could indicate that the translators view the ‘demon’ as destructive.

<sup>62</sup> See Allen 1983:53-56 for a historical explanation of this psalm. Allen sees the psalm as a penitential prayer which recalls the sins of Israel. In this connection, vv 36-38 may be part of the wider reference or allusion to the sins of Israel in the wilderness, including that of worshipping the Baal of Peor in vv 28-31. If a connection is made between vv 36-38 and vv 28-31, then the ‘idols’ and ‘demons’ could possibly be seen to be the same by the psalmist.

<sup>63</sup> See Dahood 1970:74-75.

<sup>64</sup> Anderson 1972:746 observes that the Hebrew term דִּימוֹנִים is found only here and Deut 32.17. דִּימוֹנִים, according to Anderson, are always connected with the Akkadian 𒌦, which refers to certain subordinate spirits which have been invested with power to do good or evil. The LXX translators would have been aware of the significance of the term and their choice of δαιμόνια to translate דִּימוֹנִים suggests that they thought ‘demons’ to be some kind of subordinate spirits. Since the context of the psalm concerns evil deeds, the ‘demons’ here would rightly refer to some evil spirits.

<sup>65</sup> This is later echoed in the NT, Rev 18.2, where Babylon is similarly depicted as an erstwhile place of might which has become a ‘dwelling place of demons’ (κατοικητήριον δαιμονίων), ‘a haunt of every foul spirit’ (φυλακή παντός ὀρνέου ἀκαθάρτου), and ‘a haunt of every foul and hateful bird’ (φυλακή παντός θηρίου ἀκαθάρτου καὶ μεμισσημένου). In this passage, Babylon is negatively portrayed by equating it with a place where such ‘evil’ and ‘distasteful’ beings dwell. Thus, what is used to describe Babylon can also be said to be ‘evil’, since Babylon in the Jewish tradition is

is also given in Isa 34.14 where the wrath of God upon the nations is represented by the desolation of the Gentile lands, with all the princely glory coming to naught (v 12). Animals which are not normally very welcome are present, such as the hawk, the porcupine, the owl and the raven (v 11), the jackals and ostriches (v 13), and the hyenas (v 14). The presence of these animals indicates a land that is wild, that is, uninhabited and desolate.<sup>66</sup> It may be symbolic of a spiritual state of desolation. The description of the Gentile lands in the LXX, of δαιμόνια calling out to their fellow satyrs (ὄνοκενταύροις: small ‘demons’ that resemble tailless apes that haunt wild places), further suggests that there is a spiritual realm in which the evil spirits dwell. The mention of the animals parallels that of the ‘demonic’, thus giving the impression that the Gentile nations would be completely devastated.

The second use of the term is found in Isa 65.3 in which δαιμόνια are described as Israel’s object of worship (θυμιῶσιν ἐπὶ ταῖς πλίνθοις τοῖς δαιμονίοις).<sup>67</sup> However, these ‘demons’ are accused of not being in existence (ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν). In this second usage, the ‘demons’ appear to be viewed in a similar fashion as the ‘idols’ (cf. chapters 2 and 3 above), that is, they are hand-made, dumb and powerless blocks of wood, or silver or gold. In short, they are insignificant.

The third use of the term is in Isa 65.11, where Israel’s idolatry is manifested in the people’s setting up a table for δαιμόνια (ἐτοιμάζοντες τῷ δαιμονίῳ τράπεζαν). It is not clear whether a literal ‘table’ is meant here; nor what the ‘table’ actually looks like if a literal one is meant. It could refer to a raised platform on which

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always an ‘evil’ place. See further Watts 1985:199 who describes the conquered Babylon as ‘a virtual ghost-town’.

<sup>66</sup> Watts 1987:13 rightly points out that the line between the wild animals and the various demons, phantoms and ghosts is hard to draw. Such difficulty suggests the wildness and desolation of the place, and therefore the evil nature of those that dwell there.

<sup>67</sup> See Watts 1987:343 who observes that such worship includes the rites of pagan worship.



sacrifices are placed, such as bricks (e.g. Isa 65.3), or to a symbolic 'table' such as the mountain on which worship takes place (e.g. Isa 65.7). Whatever it is, what is important for our purpose is that the setting up of some form of 'altar' for worshipping and offering sacrifices to 'demons' is not without precedent. And Paul's description of the behaviour of the 'strong' in 1 Cor 10.21 could well be an allusion to the setting up of a table for the δαιμόνια in Isa 65.11.<sup>68</sup> Such a setting up of a table for δαιμόνια will lead to a destiny of destruction (Isa 65.12). The δαιμόνια here clearly refer to the objects of worship which are contradictory to Yahweh, the true God.

In Baruch 4.7, the author speaks of Israel's idolatry as sacrificing to 'demons and not to God'. This is a possible allusion to Deut 32.17. In v 35, the author, like Isa 13, describes the nations that exiled Israel as those places that were inhabited by 'demons' (κατοικηθήσεται ὑπὸ δαιμονίων τὸν πλείονα χρόνον). This suggests that the author has a negative understanding of δαιμόνια, and since he uses δαιμόνια in a contrasting manner to God who is good, he probably understands δαιμόνια be some kind of evil spirits. Thus, 'demons' in Baruch appear to be antithetical to God, who represents what is good (2.27), righteous (1.15; 2.6, 9; 5.9), and merciful (3.2; 4.22; 5.9), who provides salvation (4.24).

The most explicit reference to δαιμόνια as evil spirits is found in the Book of Tobit. The Book of Tobit tells the story of a woman named Sara who failed to succeed in marrying her husband because each time before she was married, her prospective husband would be killed by an evil spirit called Asmodeus (Ἄσμοδαῖος τὸ

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<sup>68</sup> In the context of Isa 65, the setting up of a table for δαιμόνια is an act that directly contradicts the worship of Yahweh, that is, it is an idolatrous act that rebelled against Yahweh and abandoned the ancestral tradition, as defined in chapter two above.

πονηρὸν δαιμόνιον, 3.8).<sup>69</sup> This happened seven times.<sup>70</sup> For Asmodeus was in love with Sara (δαιμόνιον φιλεῖ αὐτήν, 6.14). In the story, Tobit is said to pray for his son Tobias; while Sara is said to pray for deliverance; both of whose prayers are answered by God, who sends his angel Raphael to heal Sara and Tobit (3.17; 5.4). In this story, the δαιμόνιον is an evil spirit or a devil who can trouble a human person. And this is precisely what Asmodeus will do to Tobias to whom God has willed Sara to be married. But the angel Raphael instructs Tobias, who mistakes him (i.e. Raphael) to be a human person, how he may relieve himself of the demonic trouble.<sup>71</sup> A certain elaborate ritual of smoking a fish heart and liver is carefully detailed to Tobias (6.7-9, 17).<sup>72</sup> Tobias' fears of the evil spirit are allayed by the angel, who tells him to view the evil spirit as nothing (τοῦ δαιμονίου μηδένα λόγον ἔχε, 6.16). Instead, Tobias is to pray to God, who is merciful (6.17).<sup>73</sup> In the end, the evil spirit Asmodeus tries to harm Tobias, but the latter, acting on the instruction of the angel, does exactly what he has been instructed. The evil spirit flees, upon smelling the smoke from the heart and liver of the fish (8.3). This story is clearly fictional.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> See Schürer III.222-23; Zimmermann 1958:2-5; and Nowell 1999:978-85 for a summary of the story. For a short but succinct exposition, see Nickelsburg 1984:40-46.

<sup>70</sup> Zimmermann 1958:62 notes that 'seven' is probably a symbolic number which illustrates the hopelessness of Sarah's status, as he comments, 'She (Sarah) was completely at the mercy of Asmodeus'. The use of such a number to indicate Sarah's condition with the evil demon indicates the author's view of the evil of which the demon Asmodeus is capable.

<sup>71</sup> Zimmermann 1958:66 comments that Asmodeus is a 'formidable adversary' and requires an agent of God to overcome him. Such an act of sending an angel on the part of God shows that the author understands Asmodeus to be real and powerful.

<sup>72</sup> Although it is not clear whether this particular act of smoking a fish's heart and liver was a religious ritual of the time, 'smoking' itself has been known to be used for attacks of evil spirits; see Hastings, *ERE*, vol 4, 724a, 727a.

<sup>73</sup> It is interesting to read the address of Tobias to the angel Raphael, 'Αζαρία ἄδελφε, of which 'Αζαρία means 'God helps' (see Dan 1.6f). The theme of God's mercy permeates throughout the story, as Nickelsburg 1984:42 rightly points out. Such an address by Tobias shows the power of Asmodeus as Tobias clearly needs the help and mercy of God.

<sup>74</sup> For the character and genre of the Book of Tobit, see Zimmermann 1958. For a more up to date work, see Nowell 1999:978-85.



However, it does indicate the understanding of the author, and possibly the understanding of the times, regarding δαιμόνια,<sup>75</sup> which may serve as the background to Paul's understanding when he quotes Deut 32.17.<sup>76</sup> And as the above discussion shows, most of the authors of the above LXX passages seem to have been influenced by Deut 32.17, which might also suggest that their views are shared by Paul as well, when he quotes the same text to argue his point.

#### 6.4.2 Paul's use of the term δαιμόνια and related concepts

The use of the term by Paul is found only in 1 Cor 10.20-21 among the undisputed letters of Paul.<sup>77</sup> On the basis of our examination of the term's use in the LXX, we may detect Paul's understanding of δαιμόνια in his frequent mention of the unseen spirit-world, not least in 1 Cor.<sup>78</sup> In other words, since there is a general tendency towards treating the δαιμόνια as evil spirits in the LXX passages which use the term, it is possible that Paul might have viewed δαιμόνια in the same manner. And if the idea of evil spirits can be detected in Paul, then it may be possible that Paul has in mind the evil spirits when he uses the term δαιμόνια in 1 Cor 10, which he seems to suggest lie behind the idols. We will now turn first to 1 Cor itself, and then to the other letters of Paul.

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<sup>75</sup> Zimmermann 1958:27-32 rightly points out that there is nothing unconventional in the Book of Tobit. What is intended by the author seems to point to the conventional exhortations to do good, pray, depend on God, and the understandings that God is sovereign and 'demons' are evil.

<sup>76</sup> Even a cursory reading of the story shows that the author is heavily influenced by the biblical writings. On this, see Zimmermann 1958:12-15; for the sources of the plot, see Nowell 1999:979-82.

<sup>77</sup> By the undisputed letters of Paul, I mean the Epistle to the Romans, First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, the Epistle to the Galatians, the Epistle to the Philippians, the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, and the Epistle to Philemon.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Barrett 1968:236-37 where he argues that the problem with the 'strong' is that they were committing themselves to an evil subordinate power. Horsely 1998:141 holds the Deut 32.17 is a text which forms the basis of Jewish apocalyptic view of other 'Gods' or 'idols' as demonic powers opposed to God. This, Horsley argues, was the tradition in which Paul was firmly rooted.

In 1 Cor 2.4, Paul speaks about his preaching and his message as a demonstration of the spirit and of power. While he does not specify what 'spirit' (πνεῦμα) he has in mind, it is clear that he is referring to the Spirit and power of God.<sup>79</sup> Hence in 2.5, he argues that the purpose of such preaching and its message is that the faith of the Corinthians might rest on the power of God (ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ). He then sets out the argument that he still speaks wisdom, but not of 'this age' (οὐ τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου) nor of the 'rulers of this age' (τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου) (v 6). While 'this age' (ὁ αἰὼν αὐτός) could well refer to this 'world' in which the Corinthians live, and the 'rulers of this age' a reference to the political and religious leaders of this world (e.g. v 8), as Robertson-Plummer maintain,<sup>80</sup> it is very likely that Paul has in mind a double meaning, that is, the 'rulers of this age' are the spirits of the spirit world whose cause is advocated by the religious and political 'rulers of this age'.<sup>81</sup> Cullmann is right when he assumes that the 'invisible angelic powers' stand behind the earthly rulers.<sup>82</sup> But this does not mean that earthly rulers always act on behalf of the spirit world, since Paul elsewhere exhorts believers to submit to

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. Barrett 1968:66 says when Paul preached a divine power gripped his hearers and that the Spirit and power are a hendiadys (p. 65). It is the work of the Holy Spirit that Paul is referring to here. Hays 1997:36 argues that Paul's point here is that the miraculous events that accompanied his preaching were the work of God. See also Fee 1987:95, n28.

<sup>80</sup> Robertson-Plummer 1911:36-37 think that the 'rulers of this age' are primarily the rulers of the Jews, as they find the view that it is a reference to the 'spirits' incompatible with verse 8.

<sup>81</sup> Against Witherington III 1995:127 who understands ἀρχοντες τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου as the earthly rulers, and Hays 1997:44 who sees no reference in this verse and its context to the demonic powers.

<sup>82</sup> Cullmann 1951:191-93. See further Lietzmann 1931:11-12; Héring 1962:16-17; Barrett 1968:70; Conzelmann 1975:61; among others. Fee 1987:103-4, and also his nn22-24, argues strongly against such an interpretation. His reasons are not necessarily persuasive. First, there is no reason why there should be a link between 1 Cor 2.6 and Col 1.16 and Eph 6.12. It depends on whether one takes these latter epistles to be from Paul. In the light of the disputed Pauline authorship of these two epistles, any comparison with them would be presumptuous. Second, even though he finds no evidence for the use of the term for demon, there is no reason why Paul cannot mean more than just earthly rulers. Third, while Paul uses the term to refer to earthly rulers elsewhere (Rom 13.3), the overall context of 1 Cor in fact does allow for the meaning of the spirit world to be included. See Barrett 1968:69-70; and cf. Horsley 1998:58 who states that Paul 'stands in the tradition of Jewish apocalyptic in which human rulers act under the influence of supernatural demonic forces'.



earthly authorities (cf. Rom 13.1ff). What Paul is saying is that the ‘earthly rulers’ may indirectly advocate the cause of the demonic powers, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Thus, in 1 Cor 2.12, Paul explicitly points out that he himself and the Corinthians have not received the ‘spirit of the world’ (τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ κόσμου), but the ‘Spirit which is from God’ (τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ).<sup>83</sup> While it is entirely possible for Paul to have in mind one Spirit which believers have received,<sup>84</sup> it is likely that Paul wants to differentiate between those who have received his gospel and those who seek after the wisdom of the world. This indicates Paul’s belief that there are two kinds of πνεῦμα which are diametrically opposed to each other: the Spirit of God and the spirit of the world.<sup>85</sup> The Spirit of God enables believers in their understanding of God’s truths (2.10, 12-13);<sup>86</sup> but the spirit of the world is associated with folly (3.18-19). And such folly is rightly the result of the work of the ‘God of this age’ (see discussion on 2 Cor 4.4 below).

In 1 Cor 5.5, in rebuking the Corinthians for doing nothing to sanction the person who committed the act of sexual immorality, Paul announces his judgment and tells the Corinthians to remove such a person by handing him over to Satan (τῷ σατανᾷ) for the destruction of the flesh (εἰς ὄλεθρον τῆς σαρκός).<sup>87</sup> In this passage, the point Paul is making is the expulsion of the incestuous person from the

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<sup>83</sup> Hays 1997:45-47 notes that Paul in 1 Cor 2.10-13 has a simple point: ‘The hidden wisdom of God (Christ crucified) is revealed to us by the Spirit of God’.

<sup>84</sup> Adams 2000:116-17.

<sup>85</sup> Barrett 1968:75 states that Paul did believe in a ‘spiritual force opposed to God’. Against Fee 1987:113, who thinks that Paul is saying something about the Holy Spirit, and Robertson-Plummer 1911:45 who prefer this to mean ‘the spirit of human wisdom, of the world as alienated from God’.

<sup>86</sup> Thus Hays 1997:45-47; Barrett 1968:74-76; Fee 1987:109-15.

<sup>87</sup> Robertson-Plummer 1911:99 takes this to mean the destruction of the incestuous person’s ‘sinful lusts’. Cf. Barrett 1968:124-27 who argues that Satan ‘was being used as a tool in the interests of Christ and the church’. Fee 1987:208-14 has given probably the best argument, i.e. that the expulsion of the person is to exclude him from the church, which is the sphere of the Spirit, and to put the man under the domain of Satan.

community of believers.<sup>88</sup> The region into which the person is expelled would be the world where Satan dwells and rules.<sup>89</sup> Here Satan is associated with ‘destruction’, which, in the context of Paul’s argument (i.e. the purpose of such destruction is that the culprit might be saved eschatologically), is further linked to ‘sin’ and therefore to what is evil. This is further seen, for example, in 1 Cor 7.5, where Paul advises the married couples not to deprive each other of their conjugal rights except when it is for the purpose of prayer. He attributes any sexual unfaithfulness resulting from such sexual abstinence to the work of Satan. While the lack of self-control is the result of sexual abstinence, Satan is depicted as an evil being who takes advantage of a situation to ‘tempt’ believers into what is considered as ‘immoral’ (τὰς πορνείας, 1 Cor 7.2).<sup>90</sup>

Such a negative depiction of ‘Satan’ is also seen in 2 Cor 11.13-15, where Paul describes the false apostles as ‘deceitful workers’ (ἐργάται δόλιοι) who disguise themselves as Christ’s apostles (2 Cor 11.13). The false apostles’ ‘deception’ is then attributed to ‘Satan’ who, says Paul, ‘disguises himself as an angel of light’ (μετασχηματίζεται εἰς ἄγγελον φωτός, v 14).<sup>91</sup> In v 15, Paul puts the two

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<sup>88</sup> Furnish 1999:50-54 argues that Paul’s concern here is with the observance of boundaries. Thus, for Paul the incestuous man in 1 Cor 5 has drifted beyond Christian boundaries into the pagan world and therefore must be ‘numbered among the outsiders’ (1999:52). Gundry-Volf 1990:113-14 rightly observes that salvation is the goal of the punishment here.

<sup>89</sup> It is possible that a traditional understanding is in view here, as seen in John 12.31; 16.11, where Satan seems to be alluded to as the ruler of this world (ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου). Robertson-Plummer 1911:99 take this to refer to a region outside the commonwealth and covenant where Satan rules. Barrett 1968:126 notes that 1 Cor 5.5 means the exclusion of the person from the sphere of Christ’s work.

<sup>90</sup> Barrett 1968:157 notes that Satan will tempt the married partners unsatisfied sexually to express their sexual desire in fornication. Fornication is seen negatively here: an act of disobedience to God’s command to be pure, and therefore an ‘evil’ act. Thus, Satan is evil. Cf. 1 Thess 2.18, where Paul speaks about his desire to visit the Thessalonians but is hindered by Satan. Apparently, Paul’s desire to visit the Thessalonians is so that he may strengthen them in their faith (1 Thess 3.2-3); the ‘hindering’ by Satan is therefore seen as the work of the ‘evil’ one who seeks to frustrate God’s work and upset the faith of the believers, as he will say later that he fears that the ‘tempter’ (a reference to Satan) might tempt the Thessalonians into giving up their faith (1 Thess 3.5).

<sup>91</sup> Martin 1986:351 is mistaken in singling out the middle term σχῆμα and using its meaning to refer to the transformation as evil. See Barrett 1973:286 who sees the thought in this verse as connected with the deception of Eve, which is seen also in 1 Cor 11.3. Thus, Barrett comments: ‘Paul regarded the opposition to his work as of Satanic origin, that is, he considered it to be directly opposed to God’.



together, that is, the false apostles and Satan, by accusing the former of being the ‘servants’ of the latter (διδάκονοι αὐτοῦ), thus making Satan the origin of falsehood. The word μετασχηματίζω is used in Phil 3.21 to indicate the glorious body into which the human, lowly body of the believer would be transformed.<sup>92</sup> In other words, it connotes a ‘change’ from the previous appearance. The word is used here in 2 Cor 11.14 to describe the transformed appearance of Satan, thus indicating the nature of the ‘deception’ of Satan,<sup>93</sup> of which the ‘change’ or ‘transformation’ is meant to hide the true ‘nature’ of Satan.

Apart from ‘tempting’ married couples into ‘immorality’ and presenting himself as an angel of light, ‘Satan’ is also described as a ‘harasser’. In 2 Cor 12.7, Paul seems to suffer from some physical ailment which he attributes to ‘Satan’, but which is being used by God to keep him from becoming too elated over his apparent ecstatic experience. And the antidote to the physical ailment is the ‘grace’ of God.<sup>94</sup> Thus, to Paul’s mind, ‘Satan’ seems to be some spiritual being that does evil, albeit with limitations.<sup>95</sup> And this ‘evil’ is possibly what he also has in mind when he describes the eschatological judgement of God on every ‘rule and every authority and power’ (πᾶσαν ἀρχὴν καὶ πᾶσαν ἐξουσίαν καὶ δύναμιν, 1 Cor 15.24). In 1 Cor 15.25, these elements are described as the ‘enemies’ (τοὺς ἐχθρούς),<sup>96</sup> who will

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<sup>92</sup> Cf. 4 Macc 9.22 where the eldest of the Jewish youths who suffer under the torture of Antiochus is described as being as though ‘transformed’ (μετασχηματιζόμενος) by fire into immortality.

<sup>93</sup> The interesting observation to be made here is that Paul refers to the ‘masquerading’ in both instances, using μετασχηματίζειν and μετασχηματίζεται to refer to the ‘false apostles’ and ‘Satan’ respectively. The meaning is simply ‘to disguise’; see Schneider 1971:957-58.

<sup>94</sup> Martin 1986:412-16 provides a full discussion of Paul’s ‘thorn in the flesh’. Cf. Barrett 1973:314-16.

<sup>95</sup> Barrett 1973:316 notes that the ‘messenger of Satan’ was sent by God. So Satan is limited in terms of what he can do, for God is in control.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. 2 Cor 2.11, where Paul urges the Corinthians to forgive one of the Corinthians whom they have apparently punished, in order that ‘Satan’ may be kept from taking advantage over the situation. What this situation really is we are not totally certain. What is certain is that Paul does not want the

eventually be ‘crushed’ (cf. ὁ...θεὸς...συντρίψει τὸν σατανᾶν..., Rom 16.20). The above notion of ‘evil spirits’ and ‘Satan’ seems to fit the common understanding of the world of δαιμόνια.<sup>97</sup>

In 2 Cor 4.4, Paul attributes the spiritual blindness of those who do not accept his gospel to the ‘God of this age’ (ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου). The ‘God of this age’ is to Paul not the true God, but Satan/devil.<sup>98</sup> Thus the work of the ‘God of this age’ is to keep people from seeing the light of the gospel, which is the glory of Christ (τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τῆς δόξης τοῦ Χριστοῦ).<sup>99</sup> The ‘God of this age’ is therefore the antithesis of this glory,<sup>100</sup> who, by his ‘darkness’ has blinded humanity from the gospel of Christ. Darkness blinds; thus people whom the ‘God of this age’ has blinded cannot see Christ’s glory. The above discussion indicates that Paul uses the three categories, ‘rulers of this age’, the ‘God of this age’, and ‘Satan’, interchangeably because he understands them to be the same spiritual force.

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Corinthians to withhold forgiveness for too long as he seems to hold the view that it could serve as an opportunity for Satan, who has his own ‘designs’ (τὰ νοήματα).

<sup>97</sup> In Origen’s *Contra Celsum*, Celcus asks a question which might reflect the position of the ‘strong’: ‘If these idols are nothing, what harm will there be in taking part in the feast?’ (8.24). Origen’s response is that idol-meat is sacrificed to demons and that anyone eating it becomes a partaker of demons (8.30). While Celsus argues that there are many ‘demons’ from whom one receives all the natural endowments such as air, food, water, and the like, Origen’s tactic is to cast demons in a wholly negative light. Paul seems to do the same, that is, to paint idols in a negative light to show that they are evil spirits that in fact cause the ‘strong’ to breach the covenant of Christ. See Cheung 1999:229-32, 267-71. Cf. *Epistle of Barnabas* 16.7; Tertullian, *De Spectaculis* 13; Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 2.1.8-10. See Cheung (1999) who discusses in whole or in part the above early Christian authors.

<sup>98</sup> Young and Ford 1987:115-18 have interpreted this as a reference to God who blinds the minds of the unbelievers. However, the context of 2 Cor 4 indicates otherwise, and scholarly opinion favours the interpretation that the ‘God of this age’ is a reference to Satan, or devil (see Plummer 1915:114-15, Héring 1967:30, Barrett 1973:130, Martin 1986:78-79, Thrall 1994:305-8 and Witherington III 1995:386).

<sup>99</sup> Segal 1990:60-62 notes that Paul’s prophetic calling is to proclaim the face of Christ which is the glory of God. He further argues that Christ is identified with God at the believer’s baptism (based on his [Segal’s] understanding of Phil 2.6-11). This way of looking at Christ’s glory strengthens the idea that the work of the ‘God of this age’ is to thwart the work of proclaiming the gospel of salvation.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. 2 Cor 6.14-7.1, where a series of parallelism is set out: righteousness and iniquity; Christ and Belial; believer and unbeliever; the temple of God and idols; by which Paul seeks to argue for a community of believers that are separated from the world, that is, not to become ‘partners’ with unbelievers. Cf. Barrett 1973:130-32 who persuasively argues that this is a bold reference to devil/Satan.



The above understanding seems to be the most explicit in 1 Cor 8.5. The verse is read, καὶ γὰρ εἶπερ εἰσὶν λεγόμενοι θεοὶ εἴτε ἐν οὐρανῷ εἴτε ἐπὶ γῆς, ὥσπερ εἰσὶν θεοὶ πολλοὶ καὶ κύριοι πολλοί. Two points may be noted here. First, from Paul's statement, it is clear that he understands the entire cosmos as comprising two realms, namely, the realm of heaven which is the realm of the spirits, and the realm of the earth, which is the physical world.<sup>101</sup> Second, the statement of Paul suggests that he understands that there are 'Gods' and 'lords'.<sup>102</sup> Willis maintains that 8.4-6 sets forth the Corinthians' defence while v 5b, ὥσπερ εἰσὶν θεοὶ πολλοὶ καὶ κύριοι, is Paul's own qualification.<sup>103</sup> Thus, from these two points, it is not unreasonable to make the following observations. Paul's concept of the spiritual realm is that there are 'Gods' and 'lords' who are in fact 'rulers of this age', spirits which are diametrically opposed to the true God. The realm in which these 'spirits' dwell is

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<sup>101</sup> Cf. Conzelmann 1975:142-43 who interprets 'in heaven and on earth' as being within creation. Fee 1987:372-73 maintains that Paul does not think the 'Gods' exist objectively but subjectively, i.e. in the sense that they are believed in by those who worship them. He bases his argument on Paul's use of the word λεγόμενοι 'so-called': 'They are "so-called" because they do not have existence in the form their worshippers believe them to have'. However, this makes light of 1 Cor 8.5b where Paul explicitly says there are many Gods and many lords. Cf. Gal 4.8 where Paul seems to believe in the reality of the Gods which he refers to as 'beings'. Cf. Barrett 1968:192-94, 236-38 who ably argues that Paul does not think that the 'beings' are the true God but demons which are subordinate and yet powerful. Similarly Robertson-Plummer 1911:167. Cf. 1 Cor 10.20f; see below for further discussion. Thus Adams 2000:140-43 is right in observing that the 'strong' probably understand κόσμος according to standard Greek usage: order, unity, beauty, and such like, and therefore are able to find legitimation for their idolatrous behaviour since only God is good and so is his world. But Paul disagrees with such an understanding and believes that there are real spiritual powers. For a thorough treatment of κόσμος in its linguistic and historical backgrounds, see Adams 2000:41-77.

<sup>102</sup> There is unlikely any distinction between 'Gods' and 'lords' intended here. See Robertson-Plummer 1911:167 who do not see any distinction between 'Gods' and 'lords'; Barrett 1968:192 notes that the use of 'Gods' and 'lords' is in view of the double statement which follows about God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ; Conzelmann 1975:143 cautions against taking the distinction too strictly. Fee 1987:373 and Hays 1997:139 take the 'Gods' to be the traditional Graeco-Roman deities while 'lords' to be the figures venerated in mystery cults. In view of Paul's emphasis that what the pagans worship are not Gods, it seems that Conzelmann's caution is worth our attention. See also Klauck 2000:28-29 for a discussion on the Gods.

<sup>103</sup> Willis 1985a:86.



denoted by the word οὐρανός, which refers to a realm that is above the earth.<sup>104</sup>

However, these ‘spirits’ are represented on earth through physical objects erected by human beings,<sup>105</sup> even though God rules the heavens and the earth. Thus, when Paul says that the sacrifices pagans make to idols, they in fact make to ‘demons’ and not to God, he is most probably referring to the ‘evil spirits’ which the idols represent. Thus, while Paul agrees with the ‘strong’ that idols are physically nothing, he does not agree with their conclusion that they can therefore freely eat idol-meat.

### 6.5 Paul's use of εἰδωλα<sup>106</sup>

Although the term εἶδωλον is rarely used as a reference to the image of a divine person or being by the Greeks, its meaning as ‘phantom’, ‘image’, ‘form’ or ‘shadow’,<sup>107</sup> could have constituted part of the conception among Jews. Philo, for

<sup>104</sup> In *TDNT* 5.497ff, we have the Greek basic idea of οὐρανός with a double reference. This double reference is to heaven as the firmament, i.e. the arch of heaven over the earth. At the same time, it encompasses all things in an absolute sense. In LXX, the usage is meant to add vividness to what the text is saying, to make what is 'above' more concrete, and to express the transcendence of God. Although there seems to be a plurality of heavens in Judaism, the concept has never been separated from the concept of a realm above the physical earth, except in some quarters of Hellenistic Judaism (e.g. Enoch 71.5-10). But in the NT, its use with the earth (γῆ) often comes from the OT and corresponds to the LXX. Traub (*TDNT* 5.518) argues that the concept in Pauline usage means that the saving event in Jesus Christ results in God's rule over all, i.e. heaven and earth. Cf. Rom 8.38-39.

<sup>105</sup> Dio Chrysostom's mouthpiece Pheidias gives a vivid picture of how humans yearned for the Gods like children who had been separated from their parents yearned for the latter (see Dio Chrysostom *Or* 60f). This shows how humans came to venerate the Gods through worshipping the idols, which further indicates that the idols only serve to represent the Gods. Thus Klauck 2000:27 correctly concludes that the God is never absorbed into his image, nor is he fully identical to it.

<sup>106</sup> In this section, I will confine myself to Paul's view of εἰδωλον without looking at the use of the term in the LXX, as I have already demonstrated in chapter two the definitions and patterns of idolatry in the LXX. Here, it is sufficient to state that the term is used in the LXX to translate as many as eighteen Hebrew words that refer to different forms of idolatry and idols (this does not include other LXX texts outside of the Hebrew Bible). These terms are הָבֵל, גְּלוּלִים, בַּעַל, בַּמָּה, אֱלִיל, אֶלֶה, אֱלֹהֶת, אֵל, הָקֵל, וְגו' (taken from Hatch and Redpath 1998:376; see Büchsel 1964:377). Although Newton 1998:128-31 has carried out a very helpful survey of the term's pre-Christian usage, he rightly observes that the use of the term as a reference to divinity is rare (130, 131). The use of the term in the LXX seems overwhelmingly negative in all the cases when the term is used.

107 *BAGD* 221.



example, uses εἰδωλον to refer to what is unreal or deceptive.<sup>108</sup> The Jewish usage of the term is primarily pejorative, as demonstrated in chapters two and three.<sup>109</sup>

In chapter three, we have demonstrated the hostile attitude of Diaspora Jews towards idolatry and their negative description of idols. The idols are all viewed as mere blocks of wood, stupid and dumb, which constitute nothing. We have also demonstrated how such attitude fits our definitions of idolatry in chapter two. While we have seen Jewish parallels to the 'strong', as seen in chapter four above, how does Paul's position compare with the Jewish attitudes in the Diaspora? This question will require us to look into Paul's view of idols.

There are seven occurrences of the term in the undisputed letters. Out of these, it is found once in Romans, once in 2 Cor, once in 1 Thess, and the rest in 1 Cor. Of those found in 1 Cor three are in the section which concerns us, that is, 1 Cor 8-10. It is worth looking at these uses.

Rom 2.22 consists of two questions which are among a series Paul poses to Jews concerning the law.<sup>110</sup> And in this verse, Paul's second question implies that the Jews abhor idols (ὁ βδελυσσόμενος τὰ εἰδωλα ἱεροσυλεῖς, 'does the one who abhors idols rob the temples?' v 22b).<sup>111</sup> The word βδελύσσεσθαι, of which the only other occurrence in the NT is in Rev 21.8, carries the meaning of not only

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<sup>108</sup> E.g. *Conf* 69, 71, 74; *Prob* 146; *Praem* 19.

<sup>109</sup> See Büchsel 1964:377-78 who observes that the pagan Greeks 'have no comprehensive expression for what the Jews call εἰδωλον. The language of the LXX is biblical or Jewish Greek in this respect. Jewish religion has coined a new expression out of an existing term' (377).

<sup>110</sup> This is particularly explicit in v 17: εἰ δὲ σὺ 'Ιουδαῖος ἐπονομάζῃ καὶ ἐπαναπαύῃ νόμῳ καὶ καυχᾶσαι ἐν θεῷ (but if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God); and v 24 where Isa 52.5 is quoted as saying that the name of God is being blasphemed among the Gentiles 'because of you' (δι' ὑμᾶς).

<sup>111</sup> We have already seen such Jewish attitude in chapter three above. However, Barrett's (1991:54) statement that 'the Jew regards an idol with horror because it claims a devotion to which only the true God is entitled' is too simplistic, as we have shown in chapter four that Jews may not always view an idol with horror. And as the 'strong' also demonstrate, idols are not always viewed with horror.

‘abhorring’ but also ‘detesting’ something that is ‘abominable’.<sup>112</sup> The word has also been found in a papyrus which is used to refer to hatred for the Jews (*CPJ* I, no.141). Paul’s use of the word to describe the Jews’ ‘abhorrence’ of idols reflects the Jews’ attitude, and certainly his approval of this attitude. But his question whether these same Jews who abhor idols steal from the temples suggests that he equates the ‘condemnable-ness’ of the Jews with that of the idols. And it indicates not only his own view of those who steal from temples, but also his view of ‘idols’. Cranfield posits that Paul is suggesting the Jew who is ‘confident of his purity from idolatry is as a matter of fact not free from its taint’,<sup>113</sup> and that Paul is here arguing against those Jews who make use of stolen articles from idol-shrines because they think there is no longer idolatry in Israel.<sup>114</sup> Paul’s condemnation of these Jews and his use of the word βδελύσσεσθαι indicate, therefore, a pejorative attitude towards the idols.<sup>115</sup> Although this is not altogether explicit, Paul’s use of it in 1 Thess 1.9 might help shed light on this possibility.

In 1 Thess 1.9, Paul simply states that the Thessalonians have turned to God from idols (ἐπεστρέψατε πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων) to serve a ‘living and true God’ (θεῷ ζῶντι καὶ ἀληθινῷ).<sup>116</sup> While nothing is said about the

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<sup>112</sup> *BAGD* 138. Cf. Josephus, *Bell* 6.172; *Ant* 14.45. Moo 1996:163, n32 suggests that this word, i.e. βδελύσσεσθαι is used in the LXX with reference to idols. Cranfield 1976:169, n4, however, rightly cautions against such a notion. Dunn 1988:114 brings our attention to the fact that βδέλυγμα which means ‘abomination’ is often a reference to idolatry; see e.g. Isa 2.8, 20; Dan 11.31.

<sup>113</sup> Cranfield 1975:169.

<sup>114</sup> As illustrated in Strack-Billerbeck 3.111-13, cited in Cranfield 1975:169; see also his n5.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Josephus, *Ant* 4.207b. Philo, *Conf* 163, equates theft, adultery, and robbing temples. See chapter three 3.3 and 3.4 on Philo and Josephus, respectively.

<sup>116</sup> Best 1972:85-87 is of the view that 1 Thess 1.9b, 10 contain a pre-Pauline statement of the church’s faith, on the basis that several words are used which either are not normally used or are used in an unusual way. For example, he finds the words ‘turned’, ‘real’, ‘to serve’ (in relation to God rather than Jesus), ‘out of heaven’, ‘wait’ (ἀναμένειν, which is quite different from δέχεσθαι elsewhere), the use of the article in the formula ‘raised from the dead’ which he omits elsewhere (he does not provide the references), the lack of the use of the word ‘deliver’ elsewhere in an eschatological context (he always uses σώζειν). The only word that Best thinks is a favourite Pauline term is the word ‘idol’.



‘idols’, the description of the Thessalonians’ ‘turning’, involving the two words, πρὸς and ἀπὸ,<sup>117</sup> and of God as ‘living and true’, shows that the ‘idols’ are ‘non-living and untrue’. Thus, Best is right in saying that ‘(I)n contradistinction to false and non-existent idols, God is described as **real and living**’ (emphasis original).<sup>118</sup> The reverse is true; that is, in saying that they have turned to the ‘living and true’ God, Paul is saying that the idols are neither ‘living’ nor ‘true’.<sup>119</sup> What it means, therefore, is that the idols have no life; and what has no life cannot produce truth. Any claim about the truth that purportedly comes from the idols is therefore falsehood. Thus, Paul’s positive commendation of the Thessalonians indicates his negative attitude towards idols. This idea is also reflected in 2 Cor 6.16, where Paul juxtaposes the temple of God and the idols and asks what the former has to do with the latter.<sup>120</sup> Plummer does not think that Paul has in mind the opposition between God’s temple and the idols’ temple; rather it is between God’s temple, in which not even the image of God is allowed to be set up, and the images of false gods.<sup>121</sup> The point of this comparison is the term συγκατάθεσις, which, though it is not found elsewhere in the New Testament, is found in Hellenistic writers such as Philo (E.g. *Post* 175; *Mos* 2.228).

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Further, Best argues that Paul always makes the cross the content of the Christian faith, but does not even refer to the death of Jesus here. Bruce 1982:17-18 holds the same view.

<sup>117</sup> Blass-Debrunner §239 and §180 respectively. The combined use of πρὸς and ἀπὸ is significant in that an antithesis is not only made very clear but also forceful.

<sup>118</sup> Best 1972:82.

<sup>119</sup> Thus Frame 1912:87 refers to them as dead and false, ‘not being what they purport to be’.

<sup>120</sup> Martin 1986:201 says that Paul sees idolatry as suggesting ‘the element of the licentious and immoral behaviour that accompanied the sin of worshipping false deities’. Whether or not Paul has in mind a temple of idols is not clear. In the first-century Graeco-Roman world there certainly were many pagan temples. But Martin’s (1986:201-2) point is valid that Paul has applied the concept of the physical Temple in Jerusalem to the understanding of the believers as the spiritual temple of God. Thus, ‘the introduction of an “idol” causes the temple to be defiled and so rendered unworthy of God’ (202).

<sup>121</sup> Plummer 1915:208. Could this be an allusion to 2 Kgs 21.7 and 23.6 where Manasseh had put a graven image of Ashera in the temple of the Lord, which Josiah later removed and burnt? There is no evidence to suggest that Paul is alluding to this particular event. However, he certainly has in mind the believers’ status as God’s people and possibly their association with or participation in idolatry. Whether the Corinthians continued in idolatrous practices by the time Paul wrote 2 Cor is not clear.

And it means ‘union’, ‘agreement’.<sup>122</sup> The reason Paul sets out for making this point is that they, that is, the believers (including Paul himself) are the temple of the ‘living God’ (θεοῦ...ζῶντος),<sup>123</sup> suggesting again that idols are non-living things. Hence, there can be no συγκατάθεσις between the two.

In the occurrences of the term in 1 Cor, Paul seems to view idols as nothing. In 1 Cor 8.4, he agrees with the Corinthians’ knowledge that ‘an idol has no significance in the world’ (see above section 6.3 on the γνῶσις of the ‘strong’); and in 12.2, he tells the Corinthians that they were formerly led astray by ‘dumb idols’ (τὰ εἰδωλα τὰ ἄφωνα).<sup>124</sup> These statements of Paul all clearly show that he views idols as nothing, dumb and dead. Paul therefore holds similar views of idols as the Jewish authors we have discussed in chapter three. The only place where he might possibly suggest there is more to idols than what has been hitherto known is 1 Cor 10.19, Τί οὖν φημί; ὅτι εἰδωλόθυτον τί ἐστὶν ἢ ὅτι εἰδωλον τί ἐστὶν; (‘What then do I imply? That idol meat is anything, or that an idol is anything?’). However, v 20 shows that Paul’s view of idols remains unchanged, that is, idols are nothing. And it is in v 20 that Paul explicitly disagrees with the ‘strong’ over what such knowledge entails, by arguing that there is a difference between idols and the actual object of the pagan sacrifices. This understanding of the subtle distinction that Paul is making

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<sup>122</sup> BAGD 773.

<sup>123</sup> Although there is a textual variant here over the words ἡμεῖς and ναός, it is the word ζῶντος that is more relevant here.

<sup>124</sup> Thiselton 2000:911-12 ably defends a translation of ‘you used to be carried away to idols that were incapable of speech’. Similarly, Fee 1987:576-77. This is similar to 1 Thess 1.9. See, however, the implausible idea of Conzelmann 1975:205, and also his n13, that this could mean ‘demons’. See also Robertson-Plummer 1911:259-60 and Barrett 1968:278-79 who argue that with regard to the idols Paul’s point is they are dumb and have no answers to questions.



between δαιμόνια and εἰδωλα can be further seen in Paul's understanding of the Gods and lords in heaven and on earth and his use of the Deuteronomy passage.<sup>125</sup>

#### 6.6 The distinction between εἰδωλα and δαιμόνια in Paul

The above discussion indicates that Paul's view of idols follows the traditional Jewish attitude as seen in chapter three, which is basically hostile on the grounds that idols are physically worthless, dumb, and lifeless, and the worship of idols is a violation of the first two commandments and therefore a breach of the covenant with God. Paul and the 'strong' may agree share the same opinion but differ over how they should apply this knowledge. For the 'strong', it means they could do what they liked because idols were nothing. For Paul, because idols are nothing, one must not have anything to do with them.

We have also raised the possibility that Paul may have understood that there is more to idols than their physical meaninglessness. Our discussion of the various passages in 1 Cor and other Pauline letters indicates that Paul believes there are evil spirits behind the idols the pagans worship. But for Paul, there seems to be a distinction between εἰδωλα, which are nothing, and δαιμόνια, which are real spiritual forces represented by the idols. In section 6.4 above, we have seen that Paul is fully aware of the many Gods and many lords, both in heaven and on earth; and that Paul most likely understands these Gods and lords as the evil spirits to whom the pagans offer their sacrifices. The reference to many Gods and many lords ἐπὶ γῆς (and ἐν οὐρανῷ) indicates that Paul is fully aware of the plurality of pagan Gods in

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<sup>125</sup> Cf. Ep Jer, whose author encourages the Jews not to fear the pagan idols because they are no gods, by pouring scorn on the pagan idols. Throughout, the refrain that the pagan idols are *no gods* (οὐκ εἰσὶ θεοί) is repeatedly emphasised (vv 16, 23, 29, 49, 51, 56, 65, 69, 72). The author seems to draw a distinction between the idols, which he scornfully ridicules, and the 'Gods' of whom the exiled Israelites might be fearful. The author's point in the letter, therefore, seems to be to allay the fear among the people by exposing the idols of Babylon as οὐκ εἰσὶ θεοί. In other words, there is the implication that there are 'Gods' in the world. And this could well be a parallel to Paul's statement in 1 Cor 8.5 that there are many Gods and many lords.

the Graeco-Roman world, and particularly in the city of Corinth. Among these pagan Gods are cults with shrines and temples built in their name. For example, the shrine of Athena (Minerva); the shrine of Hera (Juno) near the Fountain of Glauke; various sanctuaries of Apollo (including the Peribolos of Apollo and the Temple of Apollo); the temple of Aphrodite-Tyche (Venus-Fortune); a temple of All the Gods; a temple of Heracles; a temple of Poseidon; the sanctuary of Asklepios and Aphrodite and the like.<sup>126</sup> Sawyer observes that on the ascent to the Acrocorinth, there were many small temples of foreign cults, such as the Egyptian Isis and Sarapis.<sup>127</sup> Could Paul have made a distinction between the idols of these Gods and the ‘spirits’ behind them?<sup>128</sup> We now turn to look at Paul’s quotation of the Deuteronomy passage, which will shed more light on this.

Paul’s use of the Deuteronomy passage and the original passage in the LXX bear little difference except that, in his use of the LXX passage he contemporises the Israelites of Deut 32 and applies the sense to the pagans of the Graeco-Roman world of the Corinthians.<sup>129</sup> In Deut 32.17, as we have seen in chapter 3 above, the Israelites probably thought they were worshipping the true God. And if Deut 32 is a reference to the golden calf incident, then the possibility of this idea that the Israelites thought they were worshipping the true God is further strengthened. Scholars continue to disagree over what οὐ θεῶν means. Does it mean ‘to a no-god’, as Robertson-Plummer have

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<sup>126</sup> Pausanias, in his description of Corinth (2.2.6-2.5.4), provides a very helpful list of Gods and Goddesses, which sheds light on the religiously pluralistic environment of the Corinthian church. See also Sawyer 1968:76-77. See Newton 1998:91-114 for an updated discussion of the archaeological evidence for the Corinthian cults.

<sup>127</sup> Pausanias 2.4.6. Sawyer 1968:77. See Gooch 1993:2-5 for his discussion on the archaeological findings on Demeter and Kore.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Fee 1987:473 where he takes the view that these Gods such as Sarapis and Isis are ‘demons’.

<sup>129</sup> In Deut 32.17, it is part of the Song of Moses in which Moses is recorded to recount the idolatrous acts of the Israelites in worshipping other Gods and strange Gods, whom their ancestors never worshipped. In 1 Cor 10.20, Paul uses this to apply to the pagans, since the idols represent the pagan Gods, and since it is the pagan temples which the Corinthian ‘strong’ visit and where they eat idol-meat. This does modify the LXX text of Deut 32.17. However, such an application also suggests that Paul retains the meaning of the term δαιμόνια.



argued,<sup>130</sup> or ‘not to a God’, as Grosheide has so posited,<sup>131</sup> or ‘not to God’,<sup>132</sup> which NIV, RSV and NRSV render, or ‘to that which is not God’, as REB translates it? Or is it to be rendered ‘to demons who are not God’ according to NJB? The way to resolve this exegetical difficulty is by looking at the meaning of each rendering and comparing it with the most probable meaning which the context of 1 Cor 10.14-22 allows.

Robertson-Plummer’s rendering, ‘no-god’, is made to appear like a noun that refers to an object of the sacrifices but denies it has any divinity. REB’s rendering appears similar to that of Robertson-Plummer.<sup>133</sup> Both of these renderings would almost equate the object as a mere εἰδωλον, which neither the context of Deut 32.17 nor that of 1 Cor 10.14-22 allows, as the use of the term δαιμόνια suggests more is meant.<sup>134</sup> Grosheide’s rendering seems more a statement that recognises the existence of ‘a God’, i.e. a divinity, but denies the sacrifices are to him. Such a rendering has the potential of confusion over the distinction between ‘a God’ and ‘demons’. NJB’s translation, unfortunately, is right in what it says but wrong in what it does not say. ‘Demons’ are indeed not God; and the sacrifices are indeed made to them, as Paul clearly argues. But the idea of οὐ θεῶ is not brought out at all.

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<sup>130</sup> Robertson-Plummer 1911:216 have based their position on Deut 32.21 which, in the LXX, reads αὐτοὶ παρεζήλωσάν με ἐπ’ οὐ θεῶ...καὶ γὰρ παραζηλώσω αὐτοὺς ἐπ’ οὐκ ἔθνει (‘they have made me jealous with a no-god...and I will make them jealous with a no-people’).

<sup>131</sup> Grosheide 1953:235 thinks that the οὐ θεός refers to ‘not to a God’ on the basis that Gentiles did not bring their sacrifices to the true God. However, Gentiles would not agree; and the Corinthians might still think that the pagan sacrifices were meant for the true God, as it is entirely possible that the believers themselves have thought otherwise about the Gods of the pagans.

<sup>132</sup> This makes the assumption that the worshippers and those who witness their worship think the sacrifices are meant for the true God. The rendering is therefore meant to contrast between ‘demons’ and the true God.

<sup>133</sup> Although REB’s rendering seems similar to that of NJB’s, the former emphasises the fact that the object is not God, while the latter emphasises that the objects of the sacrifices are demons with a qualification that they are not God.

<sup>134</sup> Even if the Deut 32.17 can be shown to mean no more than mere ‘to a no-God’, Paul’s idea of δαιμόνια would suggest that he has injected a new idea into an OT concept. Conzelmann 1975:172 believes that Paul is here contradicting himself: the ‘Gods’ are non-existent, but yet Paul regards them as real, that is, demons. But see Barrett 1968:237 who thinks that Paul does not believe the idols are anything in the world, but still believes in the ‘reality of an unseen spirit-world’.

The context of 1 Cor 10.14-22, particularly Paul's contrast of the table of δαίμονια with the table of the Lord, suggests the rendering 'not to God' to be more likely, of which the 'God' is a reference to the true God.<sup>135</sup> This is particularly clear in vv 21-22, where Paul argues that the 'strong' cannot be partners of 'demons' and the Lord at the same time. Further, if the 'strong' think that the object of the pagans' sacrifice is the true God, a point already made earlier, hence their free and accommodating attitude towards pagan temples and idol-meat, then it is not surprising that Paul should press the point that the object of the pagan sacrifices is 'not to God'. Such an attitude is not without parallels. In chapter four above we have seen the parallels of such an identification of the true God with other Gods in *Letter of Aristeas* as well as the conceptual overlap in both Jewish and pagan uses of Theos Hypsistos revealed by inscriptional sources. Paul's statement could well be meant to draw out the distinction between the true God and the dead and dumb idols which represent the δαίμονια. And in 1 Cor 10.14, Paul continues his warning to the 'strong' to 'flee from idolatry' (φεύγετε ἀπὸ τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας), after his explication of the danger of idolatry. This is followed by the juxtaposition of the table of the Lord and the table of δαίμονια. For Paul, the table of the Lord represents the Christian tradition which recalls the suffering of Christ for the believers (cf. 1 Cor 8.11).<sup>136</sup> Therefore, drinking the cup and eating the bread at the Lord's table is a 'sharing'

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<sup>135</sup> Pace Fee 1987:472, n47 who finds 'not to God' irrelevant as he argues that Paul does not intend to say that pagans are not sacrificing to God. Thus, Fee takes this to mean 'not to a God' or 'to demons, even to one who is no-god'. However, Fee's idea of Paul's intention is based on the assumption that the Corinthians have a neatly thought out conception of God. If the 'strong' were to think otherwise, i.e. that the pagans also worship the true God but by another name (just as pseudo-Aristeas shows us), then Paul would more likely be saying to the 'strong' that they are mistaken and that the pagans in fact sacrifice to 'demons' and not to God.

<sup>136</sup> See Mitchell 1991:254-56 who argues that Paul is appealing to cultic ties to unite (or reconcile) the divided Corinthians again.



(κοινωνία, 1 Cor 10.16) in Christ's blood and body, that is, his suffering.<sup>137</sup> Von Soden has theorised that the 'strong' (whom he refers to as Corinthian Gnostics) have the misconception that their initiation into Christ through the sacraments has gained them the spiritual security against all 'charm'.<sup>138</sup> But there is no evidence to suggest this.<sup>139</sup> The reasons for the behaviour of the 'strong' are most likely their γνῶσις<sup>140</sup> and 'freedom'. Paul's mention of the Lord's Supper need not be because he wants to counter a 'super-sacramental' view of the Lord's Supper.<sup>141</sup> What he wants to do, more likely, is to stress the status of the 'strong', i.e. they are 'partners' of the body of Christ, and therefore must be faithful to Christ. But it is with the Christian tradition of the Eucharist that Paul puts forward the argument that those Israelites who eat the sacrifices in fact become 'partners' (κοινωνοί) of the altar (1 Cor 10.18; cf. Exod 32.4-6),<sup>142</sup> a possible allusion to Isa 65.11 where the Israelites are said to have forsaken

<sup>137</sup> Robertson-Plummer 1911:212-13 forcefully argue that Paul's point is that by eating idol-meat before the pagan idols is to 'become a sharer in the Sacrificial Act, and all that that involves'. Thus, Paul is making a clear distinction between the idols which he agrees with the 'strong' are nothing (which he reiterates in 1 Cor 10.19), and the 'demons' which he believes are spiritual forces (see also Thiselton 2000:775-76).

<sup>138</sup> Von Soden 1972:257-68; similarly, Barrett 1968:220-29; Conzelmann 1975:167; Fee 1987:443; Yeo 1995:160, 176; Witherington III 1995:220; Oropeza 2000:110-11.

<sup>139</sup> The statement closest to such a suggestion is v 12, where Paul warns against those who think they stand lest they fall. But it still does not show that the 'strong' think they have secured their salvation through the sacraments. Mitchell 1991:139, 251-52 stresses that Paul is not countering such a sacramental view, because, she maintains, Paul is merely sketching out the analogy with the Corinthians.

<sup>140</sup> Gardner 1994:141-43 argues that the Corinthians probably regarded themselves as having the gifts of the Spirit, particularly γνῶσις. However, he does not discuss the aspect of ἐξουσία of the 'strong'.

<sup>141</sup> Against Oropeza 2000:109, who objects to Gardner's argument against the 'sacramental' interpretation' (see Gardner 1994:141-43) on the basis of Paul's mention of the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 10.16-22 and 11.17-34. But the mention of the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 10.16-22 could well be Paul's basis for rejecting the idolatrous behaviour of the 'strong', as he argues that he does not want the 'strong' to be partners of both the table of demons and of the Lord; whereas the detailed discussion of the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 11.17-34 has a rather different context.

<sup>142</sup> Fee 1987:470-71 takes this to be a reference to the meals prescribed in Deut 14.22-27. However, the use of the designation τὸν Ἰσραὴλ κατὰ σάρκα (Israel according to the flesh) in 1 Cor 10.18 could suggest that Paul has in mind the idolatrous Israel during the wilderness experience. And just as Fee 1987:470, n38 says that κατὰ σάρκα seems to imply that there is another Israel κατὰ πνεῦμα, the Israel κατὰ σάρκα may well be a reference to Israel that acted in the way of the flesh, that is, in idolatry.

the Lord and set up a 'table' for Fortune. In that passage, the sins of the Israelites are twofold: the forsaking of Yahweh and the setting up of a table and filling up of the cups with wine. This constitutes the Israelites' 'unfaithfulness' to Yahweh as they disregarded their ancestral tradition and turned to worship an alien cult.<sup>143</sup> The worship of the alien cult by the Israelites is described as 'preparing a table for the demon' (ἐτοιμάζοντες τῷ δαιμονίῳ τράπεζαν) and 'filling up the drink offering to Fortune' (πληροῦντες τῇ τύχῃ κέρασμα). The word τύχη is a rendering of the Hebrew  $\text{טַח}$ , which is a God's name meaning Fortune.<sup>144</sup> Another God's name,  $\text{יָמִי}$ , is found in the Hebrew but not translated in the Greek. It means a 'God of destiny'. It appears that the translators of the LXX did not see a great difference between these deities. As far as they were concerned, the table the Israelites had set up was basically set up for the 'demon', and, together with the 'filling of the cup', they both refer to 'cultic meals eaten in honor of these deities'.<sup>145</sup> Thus the Israelites in Isa 65.11 are guilty of being partners of 'demons'. And if Paul has in mind Isa 65.11 when he mentions the table of demons, then he must have regarded the eating of idol-meat by the 'strong' a 'partnership' with demons and therefore an act of unfaithfulness against Christ. The repeated use of the phrase, 'as some of them were/did', in vv 6-10 indicates that Paul views the act of eating idol-meat on the part of the 'strong' to be similar to the idolatrous acts of the Israelites in the wilderness.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> See chapter two above for our definition of idolatry. Yeo 1995:173 comments: '...the use of the Lord's Supper in the argument is meant to imply that exclusive loyalty to God (thus prohibition against idolatry) should derive from the Corinthians' κοινωνία (sharing) of God's love. In other words, idolatry is the practice of communion with demons, which is infidelity'.

<sup>144</sup> See Liddell-Scott 1940:1839. A closely related concept of τύχη is 'providence'. It is possible that the Israelites were offering to a 'God' identified as Fortune on a more cognitive level. The relation to 'Destiny' or the 'God of destiny' might suggest such a possibility.

<sup>145</sup> Watts 1987:345.

<sup>146</sup> The phrases may differ, but they all refer to what the Israelites 'did': καθὼς καὶ οἱ ἐπεθύμησαν (v 6); καθὼς τινες αὐτῶν (vv 7, 8, 9); καθάπερ τινὲς αὐτῶν (v 10). Robertson-Plummer 1911:203 argue that this phrase 'assumes that the Corinthians have done what they are here



Thus, in 1 Cor 10.21, Paul says that as ‘members of the one body’ of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 10.17), the ‘strong’ cannot be simultaneous ‘partners’ of the Lord’s table and that of the ‘demons’.<sup>147</sup> And Paul’s statement in vv 20b and 21b suggests that the ‘strong’ have participated in some form of pagan sacrifices.<sup>148</sup> Fee rightly points out that the language of the Christian meal<sup>149</sup> points to the ‘vertical dimension’ of the ‘binding covenantal relationship’ the Corinthians have with Christ.<sup>150</sup> Thus, like the ‘unfaithful’ Israelites who disregarded the ancestral tradition, the ‘strong’ have breached the covenant with Christ. Thus in v 22, Paul rhetorically asks whether the ‘strong’ are trying to ‘provoke’ the Lord to jealousy, an allusion to Deut 32.16. Thus Paul is here evoking, intertextually,<sup>151</sup> all the three passages, Deut 32, Ps 95, and Isa 65, taking elements from each and interweaving them to bring home the point that the ‘strong’, by eating idol-meat in the pagan temple are in fact committing acts of idolatry which turn them into partners with ‘demons’.<sup>152</sup> For the ‘strong’, it is their ἐξουσία

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charged not to do’. This does not explain the phrase well, as it means that prior to the writing of 1 Cor Paul had, in the same way that he is now warning them, charged them not to participate in idolatry. Fee 1987:452 puts it differently: ‘Paul does not want what happened to Israel to be repeated in their (the Corinthians’) case; the danger lies in their repetition of Israel’s sins (vv 7-10), which if persisted in will then lead to similar judgment’. Similarly Hays 1997:162. See Thiselton 2000:731-32 and Gardner 1994:150-52 for a thorough discussion.

<sup>147</sup> Cf. 2 Cor 6.16 where, building upon his argument in 1 Cor 10.21, Paul argues that the temple of God (i.e. the Corinthian church) has nothing in common with idols as the former is the living God.

<sup>148</sup> See Cheung 1999:114, 118 who implausibly hints that the ‘strong’ have brought the idol food from the pagan temple to the church for consumption during worship in the church but agrees that this is not altogether certain.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. Conzelmann 1975:174 who says that this is an allusion to ‘competition’ between the pagan meals and the Christian Lord’s Supper.

<sup>150</sup> Fee 1987:473.

<sup>151</sup> See Hays 1989, who proposed intertextuality as a model for interpreting Paul’s use of the Old Testament. He explicates the phenomenon of intertextuality as ‘the imbedding of fragments of an earlier text within a later one’ (14). Thus, when it comes to Paul, Hays sees Paul as viewing himself as a prophetic figure who proclaimed the Word of God as all the other prophets and sages had always done, but in a way that ‘reactivated past revelation under new conditions’ (14). For Hays, ‘Paul’s citations of Scripture often function...as tropes: they generate new meanings by linking the earlier text (Scripture) to the later (Paul’s discourse) in such a way as to produce unexpected correspondences, correspondences that suggest more than they assert’ (24).

<sup>152</sup> Mitchell 1991:255-56 mistakenly argues that by bringing in the question of ‘partnership with demons’, Paul is making a compromise position that allows him to urge the ‘strong’ to avoid cultic associations. Gundry-Volf 1990:129-30 rightly says that Paul is wanting the ‘strong’ to adhere to Christ

to attend pagan temples and eat idol-meat. Their 'knowledge' informs them that idols are nothing, and eating idol-meat is therefore a matter of indifference. But Paul is saying to them that it is not a matter of indifference, nor of 'freedom' to choose as they wish, but it is a matter of resisting 'temptation' (πειρασμός, 1 Cor 10.13) and therefore of one's faithfulness to the Lord Jesus.<sup>153</sup> Such idolatrous behaviour also dishonours the true God by mixing the true God with δαιμόνια. The 'strong' are therefore treading on highly dangerous grounds – they must watch out if they think they stand, lest they fall (1 Cor 10.12).

However, if the idols are not the primary concern for the 'strong', then there should be other reasons why they (the 'strong') think pagans still offer sacrifices to their idols. Just as the Israelites had gathered around their golden calves and proclaimed, 'These are your Gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt', the 'strong' could well think that even though idols are nothing, the pagans could be offering sacrifices to the true God. Thus, for the 'strong', the word εἰδωλον probably carries no pejorative meaning;<sup>154</sup> but for Paul, idols in the sense of the physical object are nothing but there are indeed Gods and lords who are 'evil spirits' represented by the idols. Therefore, when the pagans sacrifice to their idols, they are in fact sacrificing to these 'evil spirits' whom Paul calls 'demons'.

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by having κοινωνία with Christ and by refusing to have any association with demons through cultic meals.

<sup>153</sup> See Barrett 1968:229 who views Paul's words in 1 Cor 10.13 as implying that more severe trials are expected. Fee 1987:460 argues for a double function. On the one hand, Paul is reassuring the Corinthians that they would not fall in the ordinary trials of life as there is always divine aid. On the other hand, they are therefore to flee from idolatry because there is no divine aid 'when one is "testing" Christ' through idolatry. Conzelmann 1975:169 suggests the point here to be comfort for all, both the 'strong' and the 'weak', and that Paul is here referring to 'eschatological salvation'. This, however, misses the context of Paul's argument in 1 Cor 10. Hays 1997:166 rightly points out that Paul is here contrasting the 'testing' that God allows and dangers of 'testing' the Lord.

<sup>154</sup> Although Philo (*Somn* 2.19.133-35) views εἰδωλον as unreal phantoms, he draws a different conclusion, i.e. the idols are therefore dead and dumb. But the 'strong' do not express such negative views at all.



## 6.7 The danger of idolatry

Paul urges the Corinthians in 1 Cor 10.14, Διόπερ, ἀγαπητοί μου, φεύγετε ἀπὸ τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας ('Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry [or the worship of idols]'). Thiselton argues that the covenant theme links 10.1-13 and 10.14-22. The mention of the Lord's Supper and Paul's warning against becoming partners with demons lends weight to Thiselton's point. And if the covenant theme is present here, then it strengthens our case that what the 'strong' are doing in the presence of the idols is a breach of the covenant with Christ, and thus is an idolatrous sin.<sup>155</sup> For Paul, the 'strong' are 'idolatrous' by their eating in an idol's presence (1 Cor 10.21).<sup>156</sup> And there is real danger if they continue in it. This is stated throughout 8.1-11.1. For example, 8.12 states that it is in fact a 'sinning' against Christ (εἰς Χριστὸς ἁμαρτάνετε). 9.27 subtly implies that the 'strong' can become 'disqualified' if they are not careful. In 10.9 Paul tells the 'strong' not to put Christ to the test, linking it to 8.12. The inclusion of Christ in his argument suggests that Paul intends to show the 'strong' that they do have a spiritual relationship with Christ, which is, however, being tested through their idolatry. Thus, in 10.12, a warning is given to those who think they stand, as they may fall if they are not careful.<sup>157</sup> And in 10.22, there is the warning that idolatrous behaviour of the 'strong' can arouse the

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<sup>155</sup> Thiselton 2000:750. See also Yeo 1995:172, who rightly argues that 10.14-22 is a climax of 10.1-22.

<sup>156</sup> Fee 1987:441, n1 observes that the failure of many interpreters in recognising this reality is the reason why many of them have great difficulty with either vv 1-13 or vv 14-22 or both. Gardner 1994:169-70 suggests that Paul is here trying to stress the issue of worshipping the one true God. This way of looking at the attendance of the 'strong' in an idol's temple raises the issue of obedience to the first and second commandments, which defines the behaviour of the 'strong' as idolatrous. See chapter two for our definition of idolatry and the discussion of the first and second commandments. See also chapter 6.2 above for our brief overview of the idolatry of the 'strong'.

<sup>157</sup> The basic theme of falling and its cause have been the basis for scholarly works on the 'perseverance' of Christians, of which the recent more notable ones are Gundry-Volf 1990 and Oropeza 2000.

Lord's jealousy (παραζηλοῦμεν τὸν κύριον);<sup>158</sup> μὴ ἰσχυρότεροι αὐτοῦ ἔσμεν; Paul is therefore suggesting to the 'strong' that their idolatrous behaviour is a contest of strength against the Lord's.<sup>159</sup> And they will not stand because the Lord is stronger. The danger of idolatry is explicitly focused upon in 1 Cor 9.24-10.12, where Paul uses first the analogy of the (Isthmian) games, before moving on to draw the conclusion on the basis of Old Testament.

### 6.7.1 Indiscipline and disqualification

1 Cor 9.24-27 bring out this reality very forcefully. For if the 'strong' were to persist in their unscrupulous eating of idol-meat, then they are running a race for which they might lose their prize.<sup>160</sup> This is where Paul differs from the 'strong'. He can agree with the 'strong' that 'idols' as physical objects are nothing, but disagrees that the 'strong' can therefore eat idol-meat and attend pagan temples without scruples. For Paul, it is an act of idolatry because it is a partnership with δαιμόνια. Hence, the danger of the 'strong' losing their prize is real. Paul likens the Christian life to running a race (i.e. Isthmian games),<sup>161</sup> for which discipline is indispensable. In such a race, self-control (ἐγκρατεύεται, v 25)<sup>162</sup> is of utmost importance as part of the

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<sup>158</sup> Cf. Gardner 1994:171.

<sup>159</sup> See Oropeza 2000:156 who thinks that Paul probably has in mind Israel's wilderness 'testing' of Yahweh.

<sup>160</sup> Gardner 1994:106 argues that Paul's emphasis here is on the completion of the race, hence the 'prize', or qualification. In other words, if the 'strong' fail to complete the 'race' by giving up their rights to eat idol-meat, they would then forfeit their 'imperishable' prize. And Fee 1987:437 rightly says that the 'imperishable crown' is an eschatological prize. Gundry-Volf 1990:237 says Paul's use of the athletic metaphor makes the point that the 'strong' 'must let the goal determine their present behaviour'.

<sup>161</sup> According to Murphy-O'Connor 1983:14-16, the (Isthmian) games were initiated in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE but passed on to the neighbouring town of Sicyon after Corinth was sacked in 146 BCE. The (Isthmian) games were held every two years; Corinth recovered the administration of the games sometime between 7 BCE and 3 CE, after it was established as a Roman colony.

<sup>162</sup> The word ἐγκρατεύομαι carries the meanings of 'controlling oneself', 'abstaining from something'; BAGD 216. Cf. 1 Cor 7.9.



preparation for the contest.<sup>163</sup> And the ‘strong’ are aware of this. Paul wants to emphasise that discipline determines victory in the games.<sup>164</sup> The ‘strong’ must run their ‘race’ in such a way as to win the prize. But by engaging in idolatry, the ‘strong’ are treading on highly dangerous ground and can lose the race and become ‘disqualified’ (ἁδόκιμοι).<sup>165</sup> If they are ‘disciplined’, they will ‘win’ a prize (i.e. an imperishable wreath)<sup>166</sup> – the eschatological salvation. Like Paul, they should avoid ‘disqualification’ (ἁδόκιμος, v 27).<sup>167</sup> In other words, what the ‘strong’ do in the present has implications for the future.

Thus, Paul is saying that either the ‘strong’ will win or lose the race – there is no other option ‘in between’. For Paul, it is not a question of indifference, nor is it about their ‘rights’ or ‘freedom’; but it is about succumbing to temptations (πειρασμός),<sup>168</sup> and about idolatry – how they relate to ‘idols’/‘phantoms’/demons. He therefore views their behaviour as ‘unfaithful’. Further, Paul would view them as having the wrong conceptions about God. Even though they may not intend to worship the δαίμονια their involvement in the temple would have been acts of

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<sup>163</sup> Cf. Philo, *Prob* 26, and *Prov* 2.58.

<sup>164</sup> Fee 1987:433, n1; *contra* Conzelmann 1975:162, n31 who does not think there is any connection between what Paul says and the games, even though he acknowledges that the games were widespread then.

<sup>165</sup> Although Paul uses the word ἁδόκιμος to refer to himself, the context shows that he is implying to the ‘strong’ their own possible ‘disqualification’ if they do not watch how they exercise their ἐξουσία but allow it to cause others to fall and thus put a hindrance in the way of the gospel. See *BAGD* 18. Thiselton 2000:717 does not think Paul’s use of ἁδόκιμος on himself should be taken to imply eschatological rejection or loss of salvation. See, however, Gardner 1994:107 who argues otherwise.

<sup>166</sup> Barrett 1968:216-17 argues that this means the ‘share’ in the gospel, which refers to the ‘benefits’ of the gospel in 1 Cor 9.23. However, he does not explain what these benefits are. Fee 1987:437 interprets this to be the eschatological victory, which is the ‘final salvation’ (1987:459).

<sup>167</sup> The ‘prize’ is the antonym of ἁδόκιμος. Since in 1 Cor 10.5, Paul speaks about the destruction of the Israelites in the wilderness, the ‘prize’ here would most likely be referring to ‘salvation’. And in speaking of his own discipline, Barrett 1968:218 argues that Paul wants his body to be brought out of the obedience to sin into the service of God. Thus, *contra* Thiselton 2000:717, Paul seems to be saying that even his own salvation is not guaranteed by his conversion and other spiritual experiences. Gundry-Volf 1990:120-25 argues forcefully that Paul’s warning here includes both physical punishment and the loss of salvation.

<sup>168</sup> Conzelmann 1975:169 points out that this is not just a mere possibility but a reality in Corinth.

worship. In other words, some of those definitions as set out in chapter two are operative in Paul.

Thus, Paul is raising the stakes here. The 'strong' face the danger of eschatological 'destruction', despite their present spiritual 'status' of being Christians who are baptised into Christ and are partakers of the Lord's Supper.<sup>169</sup> Thus, the 'eschatological salvation' of the 'strong' depends on their 'discipline', which he further elaborates in 1 Cor 10.1-12, using the OT examples.

### 6.7.2 Disqualification of Israel and its lessons

In 1 Cor 10.1-11, Paul uses five different Old Testament examples to show the reason why God punished the Israelites. But these are preceded by the introductory statement of the status of Israel in the wilderness (vv 1-4) and the fact that God was displeased with most of them (v 5). Verses 6-11 then set out five main examples of the Israelites' idolatrous behaviour.<sup>170</sup> These are: (1) the 'craving' for evil; (2) the idolatry of Israel in the wilderness (v 7); (3) sexual immorality (v 8); (4) testing the Lord (v 9); and (5) murmuring against the Lord (v 10). The warning in vv 1-12 concerning the danger of idolatry comprises three parts. The first is the statement of Israel's status. The second is the various idolatrous acts of Israel. And the third is the summary statement of the warning of the possible fall. What is the status of Israel, how does Paul view it, and what is its relation to Paul's overall argument against the idolatry of the 'strong'?

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<sup>169</sup> But this does not necessarily mean that the 'strong' adopt a magical view of the sacraments. von Soden's (1972) theory that the 'strong' adopted a magical view of the sacraments, that is, they were protected from any harm by hostile spiritual powers, may be attractive. Fee 1980:180 and 1987:443 makes a similar point. However, given Paul's reminder to them in 1 Cor 11 to take a more serious approach to the Lord's Supper, it is not clear whether the Corinthians really have a high view of the sacraments. Further, there is no compelling evidence for the 'magical' view.

<sup>170</sup> Even though some of these acts may not appear to be directly related to idolatry, our definition in chapter 2 above does classify the five acts under idolatry. The following discussion will make clear this argument. See also Hays 1997:164 who shows that in every of the examples food is the issue.



In vv 1-5, Paul argues that the ancestors of Israel supposedly fulfilled their 'ritualistic' requirements. In v 2, he expounds the experiences of the Israelites in the wilderness in terms of the Christian rites of baptism and Eucharist.<sup>171</sup> However, as Conzelmann maintains, Paul does not seek a point-for-point correspondence, but to find a correspondence in the overall 'exodus' from Egypt to the overall Christian 'conversion' in the Corinthian church.<sup>172</sup> The Corinthians' conversion is signified by their baptism in Christ and their participation in the Lord's Supper.<sup>173</sup> In his use of explicit figurations, as Hays points out, Paul seeks to drive home the point that just as the Israelites thought they had escaped from Egypt under Moses and were therefore safe when they were not, so the 'strong' ought not to think that their 'conversion' from the 'dumb idols' (cf. 1 Cor 12.2) to Christ would grant them immunity from punishment.<sup>174</sup> This thought is conveyed in v 5, 'Ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐν τοῖς πλείοσιν αὐτῶν εὐδόκησεν ὁ θεός ('Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them'). The term ἄλλὰ is important. For it emphasises the contrasting thought that even though the Israelites had followed Moses, God could still be displeased with them.<sup>175</sup> Thus following Moses is ruled out as a guarantee of God's favour. Subsequent behaviour with regard to the Israelites' faithfulness to the covenant God was instrumental to their continued blessing from God. Paul is therefore drawing

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<sup>171</sup> Cf. Fee 1987:444 who views this as a prefiguring of the Corinthians, that is, the Old Testament examples are the 'types' of what the Corinthians (i.e. the 'strong') are experiencing. Similarly, Héring 1962:84. Conzelmann 1975:165 argues that Paul is here looking at the church (i.e. the true Israel) in the light of a transformed understanding of the Israelites' wilderness experience. Cf. Hays 1989:210, n18.

<sup>172</sup> Conzelmann 1975:165-66.

<sup>173</sup> Thus Fee 1987:443, n10 rightly and cautiously states that Paul's statement here is a mixture of 'type and 'analogy'; and by 'type', Fee means that Paul sees 'a correspondence between earlier biblical events and the present situation.

<sup>174</sup> Hays 1989:91.

<sup>175</sup> See Thiselton 2000:730 for the translation of ἄλλὰ here as an emphatic 'nevertheless'. Cf. Gardner 1994:148.

parallels between the Israelites’ experiences and the ‘presumed spiritual security’ of the ‘strong’ (based on their γνῶσις), and then deriving lessons from those experiences. Thus, in v 6, he says, ταῦτα δὲ τύποι ἡμῶν ἐγενήθησαν.<sup>176</sup> We may tabulate the above in the following:

| The Israelites’ experiences  | Paul’s interpretation   | Lesson for ‘us’   |
|--|---|---|
| ὕπὸ τὴν νεφέλην ἦσαν καὶ...διὰ τῆς θαλάσσης διήλθον (1 Cor 10.1; Exod 13.21; 14.22).                           | εἰς τὸν Μωϋσῆν ἐβαπτίσθησαν ἐν τῇ νεφέλῃ καὶ ἐν τῇ θαλάσσῃ (1 Cor 10.2).  | Like us, i.e. the Corinthians who have received the baptism in Jesus’ name, the Israelites had also been baptised, but into Moses.  |
| ...πάντες τὸ αὐτὸ πνευματικὸν βρῶμα ἔφαγον...πάντες τὸ αὐτὸ πνευματικὸν ἔπιον πόμα (1 Cor 10.3-4a; Exod 17.6). | ἔπιον γὰρ ἐκ πνευματικῆς ἀκολουθούσης πέτρας, ἡ πέτρα δὲ ἦν ὁ Χριστός (1 Cor 10.4a).  | While the Israelites appeared to be eating from the manna which came from heaven and drinking from the rock from which water flowed, the rock in fact accompanied them and it was Christ himself! We too, eat the same meal and drink the same drink.                                       |
| ‘Αλλ’ οὐκ ἐν τοῖς πλείοσιν αὐτῶν εὐδόκησεν ὁ θεός (1 Cor 10.5a).   | κατεστρώθησαν γὰρ ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ (1 Cor 10.5b). Ταῦτα δὲ τύποι ἡμῶν ἐγενήθησαν...(1 Cor 10.6a; cf. Num 11.4ff, 31-35; 14.1ff). | Still, God was not pleased with most of them and he demonstrated his displeasure with the Israelites by destroying them. Similarly, since these are written down for our instructions, we too run the risk of facing God’s wrath and ‘destruction’, if we are not faithful to his covenant. |

<sup>176</sup> Thus, Paul can say to them that if they think they know, they in fact do not really know (1 Cor 8.2). He also implies that they do not really love God, and therefore are not known by God (1 Cor 8.3). See Fee 1987:368 and Thiselton 2000:624-27 recognise a clear connection between knowledge and love. Yeo 1995:187 views Paul’s words as a correction of the knowledge of the ‘strong’. See also Willis 1985a:81.



As seen above, Paul seems to re-interpret the event of the wilderness wandering of the Israelites as a form of baptism. The idea of the people being baptised εἰς τὸν Μωϋσῆν is not mentioned in the Old Testament, nor can it be found in Jewish literature.<sup>177</sup> In trying to re-interpret the Israelites' experiences in the wilderness as examples and instructions for the 'strong' in Corinth, Paul would need to find the link that ties that two situations. The Christian formula 'into Christ' serves as a very important and useful category by which a link with the Israelites' experiences may be made. The reason is that it is the category of 'into Christ' that makes the 'conversion' of the Corinthian Christians meaningful and different. This is seen in, for example, Rom 6.3 where Paul tells the Christians at Rome that their baptism into Christ Jesus (ἐβαπτίσθημεν εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν) is equivalent to baptism into his death (εἰς τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτίσθημεν).<sup>178</sup> Since the 'strong' have cited the *Shema*, the non-reality of idols, and their ἐξουσία as their justification for eating idol-meat, as we have seen in 6.3 above, Paul's use of OT examples is most apt. For it draws the parallels between the Israelites' presumed 'salvation' and that of the 'strong', and the Israelites' punishment and the same possible danger the 'strong' face by eating idol-meat.

Thus, the Israelites' experiences are not 'kinds of sacraments'. Rather, Paul is re-interpreting them in terms of the Christian sacraments.<sup>179</sup> The important point is his use of the word πνευματικός to describe the 'food' and 'drink' of the Israelites, which may be linked to his description of the Corinthians as not being πνευματικοί

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<sup>177</sup> Cf. Barrett 1968:221 explains that 'into Moses' has no Jewish parallel and that it was presumably made up by Paul on the basis of the Christian formula, 'into Christ'. Similarly, Hering 1962:86.

<sup>178</sup> Although εἰς τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν is different from ἐν Χριστῷ, the former certainly makes the latter possible. And it is in this sense that the Corinthians' baptism 'into Christ' enables them to be 'in Christ'.

<sup>179</sup> See our discussion on p. 271 above, particularly n141.

but ψυχικοί and σαρκικοί (1 Cor 2.14; 3.1-4).<sup>180</sup> For if some of the Corinthians have claimed to be πνευματικοί (cf. 1 Cor 14.37), then Paul's use of the word precisely points to the reality that even if they appear to be spiritual by virtue of their supposed participation in 'spiritual' acts, they are not thereby free from God's wrath. And when they, as partakers of the table of the Lord, also become partakers of the table of 'demons', they become precisely like the Israelites in the wilderness who become idolatrous and immoral.

Paul further says that the 'rock' from which water flowed was Christ,<sup>181</sup> thus giving a new spiritual understanding of the faithful God who provided the water through Christ.<sup>182</sup>

A few key points concerning the function of 1 Cor 8-10 suggest that the issue of idolatry governs Paul's entire argument throughout the section, and thus his identification of the 'rock' as Christ, and vice versa is meant to make his parallels work. For example, in 8.1, Paul begins with περὶ δὲ τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων; in 9.1-23, he puts up a defence of his apostolic authority and sets himself as an example to the 'strong'; in 9.24-10.13, he then warns the 'strong' against idolatry, from which he urges them to flee in 10.14; and in 10.15ff, he continues his argument and points out the incompatibility of the Lord's table and the table of δαιμόνια. In other words, the issue throughout is idolatry, and Paul's use of the various examples is governed by this overarching issue. However, while Paul's view of idolatry is similar to those of the

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<sup>180</sup> Although 1 Cor 3.1-4 is related to division in the church, 1 Cor 9, which we will discuss in the next chapter, is precisely about Paul's defence of his apostolic authority, which suggests that both chapters are related. Thus, it is possible that some of the 'strong' in 1 Cor 8-10 are among those whom Paul accuses of being of the flesh in 1 Cor 3.

<sup>181</sup> Cf. Thiselton 2000:727-30. On this as the pre-existent Christ, see Lietzmann 1931:44-45, Conzelmann 1975:166-67 and Fee 1987:449. Others such as Hanson (1959:79 [cited in Willis 1985a:138, n65]), Robertson-Plummer (1911:201) view the rock as the literal Christ. Barrett 1968:222 sees this identification as a parallel to the Corinthians' experience.

<sup>182</sup> Gardner 1994:148. Thiselton 2000:730. Cf. Hays 1989:91.



Diaspora authors discussed in chapter three above, his concerns and questions take on a different stance in the light of Christ. For Paul, 'Christ' is the one with whom the Corinthians have entered into a covenant (cf. 1 Cor 11.25).<sup>183</sup> And by identifying the 'rock' with Christ, Paul is stretching his language in order to show the parallels between the Israelites in the wilderness and the 'strong'. This allows him to establish the framework for determining what should be the proper behaviour for the 'strong', i.e. the OT examples of idolatry.<sup>184</sup> Thus, he can show that the Israelites' unfaithfulness to Yahweh parallels the unfaithfulness of the 'strong' to Christ.<sup>185</sup>

Further, Paul considers their idolatrous eating before the presence of the idols as 'partnership with demons' (1 Cor 10.20-21),<sup>186</sup> whether they intend it or not. In chapter 2.1.1, I have set out one of the definitions of idolatry as 'wrong kinds of worship', not only in terms of actions, but also intentions. In the case of the 'strong', they may not intend to be partners with 'demons', but their action renders them as such, at least to Paul. Another definition of idolatry is that of mixing God with demons. And by being partners with 'demons', the 'strong' are also idolatrous by this definition of mixing God with 'demons'. Their action, moreover, renders them 'unfaithful'. Like the Israelites, the 'strong' have no guarantee of freedom from punishment for their idolatrous behaviour.

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<sup>183</sup> Thus, any act or behaviour that violates the covenant with Christ constitutes idolatry, just as unfaithfulness to the covenant with Yahweh renders the Israelites idolatrous, as the definitions of idolatry in chapter two show.

<sup>184</sup> Hays 1997:159-60. See also Hays 1989:92 who argues from intertextuality that the metaphor of the story of the Israelites in the wilderness creates a framework within which Paul judges the 'strong' and shows them what is the proper ethical response to their idolatrous behaviour.

<sup>185</sup> See Oropeza 2000:155-57, who connects Paul's caution against testing Christ with the question about provoking the Lord to jealousy in 10.22. While there is a possible link between the two, Paul clearly uses two very different words, i.e. ἐκπειράζω and παραζηλώω. It would be more correct to say that the former leads to the latter. That is to say, the behaviour of the 'strong' in eating idol-meat is an act of testing Christ which, if it is not stopped, will lead to the provocation of the Lord's 'zeal'.

<sup>186</sup> Robertson-Plummer 1911:217 unnecessarily conclude that the article suggests 'the demons' are regarded as a *society*. Rather, Fee 1987:472-73 rightly states that it is simply idolatry that involves the worship of demons. Barrett 1968:237 draws a difference between the personal relation and the eating.

### 6.7.3 The ‘strong’ crave for evil

1 Cor 10.6 spells out Paul’s view of the OT events: they are written down for our instruction (Ταῦτα δὲ τύποι ἡμῶν ἐγενήθησαν). But what kind of instruction, and what is the purpose of the instruction? Paul says it is for the purpose that believers may not ‘crave evil’ (εἰς τὸ μὴ εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἐπιθυμητὰς κακῶν). There are at least two issues involved here. First is the word τύποι. It means ‘types’, or, as some translations have it, ‘examples’.<sup>187</sup> Fee argues that Paul probably intends a meaning between ‘these things have been made our examples’ and ‘these things have happened as types of us’.<sup>188</sup> The important point, however, is that Paul seems to be saying that the Israelites shared similar ‘spiritual’ experiences as the ‘strong’, and vice versa.<sup>189</sup> By inference, their fall or destruction would most likely happen to the ‘strong’ if the latter also do what they (i.e. the Israelites) did. And Paul is precisely concerned to make sure that what had happened to the Israelites never happens to the ‘strong’. Hence, this leads to the second issue, which is the word ἡμῶν. Although the nature of the genitive is difficult to determine,<sup>190</sup> the genitive in the clause τύποι ἡμῶν indicates that it is ‘us’ for whom the τύποι are intended.<sup>191</sup> Further, the

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<sup>187</sup> Cf. Gardner 1994:112-15, who prefers ‘typology’ to refer to ‘an *attitude* or approach to Scripture than to any particular *application* of Scripture’ (italics original). After examining the use of the term ‘midrash’, Gardner chooses the phrase ‘typological midrash’ to describe 1 Cor 10.1-13.

<sup>188</sup> Fee 1987:452.

<sup>189</sup> It is clear that Paul views believers in Christ, whether they are Gentiles or Jews, as part of the new people of God through the new covenant in Christ. For example, in Rom 11.17-24, Paul points out that Gentile believers are in fact branches grafted on to Israel. Hays 1989:96-97 is right that the division between Jews and Gentiles is removed to the extent that Paul sees in the church a ‘fundamental continuity’ with Israel and its story. This would mean the story of Israel has a place in the ethical life of the new people of God.

<sup>190</sup> Fee 1987:451, n7; cf. Robertson-Plummer 1911:203; Barrett 1968:223-24 says the use of the word ἡμῶν indicates that Paul is including himself in the warning.

<sup>191</sup> See Conzelmann 1975:167 who translates this as ‘examples for us’.



genitive ἡμῶν also links the Israelites' experiences to the situation in Corinth.<sup>192</sup> By using the genitive ἡμῶν, Paul creates an inseparable relation between what happened to Israel in the wilderness and what could possibly happen to the 'strong' in the present. There are five Old Testament examples.<sup>193</sup>

The first, 10.6, is a possible reference to Num 11.4-34 which details the Israelites' cravings for meat. Paul describes them as people who crave for 'evil' (ἐπιθυμητὰς κακῶν).<sup>194</sup> The Israelites did not accept what God had given them but 'craved' for meat and the abundant fish in Egypt. This parallels the Corinthian situation: the eating of idol-meat by the 'strong' may also be a craving after evil. And Paul could well view the eating of idol-meat by the 'strong' as an indication of their dissatisfaction with what they have (non-idolatrous food) and are (status without the freedom to freely eat idol-meat); and so view any such dissatisfaction with what God has given to be a form of 'rebellion'.<sup>195</sup> The second thing Paul might have in mind is the fact that the 'craving' of the Israelites suggests their desire for their former way of life in Egypt. When Paul uses this example of Israel as a way to warn the 'strong', it is highly possible that he is suggesting that by freely eating idol-meat and thus committing the sin of idolatry, the 'strong' are expressing their desire for their former

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<sup>192</sup> This further proves that Paul is here 'calling the shots', i.e. he is the authoritative apostle, the father of the Corinthians in Christ (1 Cor 4.15b), who decides the framework for what constitutes idolatry, and how the framework is to be interpreted. On the authority of Paul, see chapter seven below.

<sup>193</sup> Willis 1985:143 and Fee 1987:453 see four examples. See, however, Héring 1962:90f; and particularly, Meeks 1995:129, who illustrates more convincingly that there are five examples.

<sup>194</sup> Cf. Barrett 1968:224; Hays 1997:162-63. Fee 1987:452, n9 notes that the word ἐπιθυμία could have positive meanings, but is pejorative in this case and the two occurrences in the LXX (Num 11.34; Prov 1.22). Cf. Thiselton 2000:733. See also the discussion of this word by Willis (1985:143-46). Cf. Num 11.4, καὶ ὁ ἐπίμικτος ὁ ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐπεθύμησαν ἐπιθυμίας, which is most likely behind Paul's thought (Meeks 1995:129).

<sup>195</sup> Num 11.15 shows that Moses wished to die rather than continue leading the people. The kind of 'cravings' among the Israelites represented by their 'cries' are not a simple complaint. It is possible that they might even border on 'rebellion' against Moses and stage a 'return' to Egypt. Cf. Num 14.3, where the people were wanting to return to Egypt as a result of the uncertainties ahead.

way of life.<sup>196</sup> And if the ‘strong’ were to persist in eating idol-meat, then they are betraying God by disregarding their covenant with God, the covenant expressed in the sacraments of the church. As we have discussed in chapter 2.1 above, such acts are clearly idolatrous.

A second and more explicit example is found in v 7 which cites the LXX text of Exod 32.6 verbatim. It reads, ἐκάθισεν ὁ λαὸς φαγεῖν καὶ πεῖν καὶ ἀνέστησαν παίζειν (‘The people sat down to eat and to drink and rose up to play’). Scholars disagree over the meaning of the citation. Wayne Meeks, for example, argues that this is a midrash which Paul inserts into a homily (i.e. 10.1-13), and that the word παίζειν here is meant to include the list of all the five sins.<sup>197</sup> Fee argues that the exact citation gives the content of the ‘evil things’ mentioned in v 6,<sup>198</sup> and is intentional so as to point out to the ‘strong’ that the Israelites ‘ate in the presence of the golden calf’.<sup>199</sup> Philo views the golden calf incident as an imitation of the Egyptian animal worship.<sup>200</sup> The LXX, however, explains this as an attempt by the Israelites to define for themselves their own religious belief when they declared, οὗτοι οἱ θεοί σου, Ἰσραηλ, οἵτινες ἀνεβίβασάν σε ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου (‘these are

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<sup>196</sup> By this, I am not suggesting that the ‘strong’ are either Gentiles, or Jews. What is important is that whether one is a Jew or a Gentile, it is possible for a Christian to desire the former way of life. In the case of idolatry, the former way of life for a Jew could well be conceptual idolatry (see chapters 2.2, 4.3 and 4.4), although it could also involve actual idol-worship or temple attendance (cf. chapter 5.4). For a Gentile, it could of course be a return to actual idol worship. What is important for our purpose is that the ‘strong’, the ‘weak’ and Paul have all had Jewish influence (see chapter 1.3.1 to 1.3.3, and 1.3.6).

<sup>197</sup> Meeks 1995:124-36. Cf. Fee 1987:454, n20 who views this as a ‘dubious’ suggestion. Barrett 1968:225 and Conzelmann 1975:167 rightly link the citation to idolatry. Cf. Hurd 1983:143, who argues that Paul’s condemnation of idolatry in 10.1-22 is hypothetical as he (Paul) has not heard of anything idolatrous in Corinth. This is trivialising the matter to which Paul has painstakingly devoted three chapters for discussion.

<sup>198</sup> Fee 1987:454. Thus, Fee views vv 6-13 as comprising four, rather than five, sins.

<sup>199</sup> Fee 1987:454. See also Yeo 1995:170. Cf. Conzelmann 1975:167, n33.

<sup>200</sup> *Mos* 2.162; *Spec* 3.125.



your Gods, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt', Exod 32.4).<sup>201</sup> It is, of course, entirely reasonable for Philo to suggest that this is an imitation of their former land. The important point about the citation is the fact that it seems to be the climax of the idolatrous acts of Israel. Philo's description of the people's behaviour as 'revelling and carousing the livelong night, and unwary of the future', and as being 'wedded to their pleasant vices' suggests an understanding of the event as widespread rebellious behaviour resulting from the worship of the calf. Although this could involve not only idolatrous worship of the golden calf, but also sexual play, as the word *παίζειν* in the context of Exod 32 might suggest<sup>202</sup> – and as Fee argues this is further borne out by the various descriptions of the Israelites in Exod 32.25 as 'breaking loose' and 'running wild' – it is not altogether certain since Exod 32 is relatively quiet about the sexual play.<sup>203</sup> The point of Exod 32 is meant as an explicit demonstration of the wrath of God against the people who worship the golden calf (cf. Exod 32.35). Paul therefore quotes it to demonstrate the displeasure of God with idolatry.<sup>204</sup>

The third OT example is the immorality of the Israelites in the wilderness (v 8). This verse is often regarded as a reference to Num 25.1-18. The connection of idolatry in v 7 to sexual immorality in v 8 may well reflect Paul's intention to draw the parallel between the Israelites' idolatrous and sexually immoral behaviour and that of the

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<sup>201</sup> The difference is subtle, but the point is that the golden calf is proclaimed as '*your* Gods', not the Gods of the Egyptians.

<sup>202</sup> See Thiselton's discussion of 1 Cor 10.7 (2000:734-37) and his translation of *παίζειν* as 'virtual orgy'. Cf. Schrage 1995:398.

<sup>203</sup> Fee 1987:454-55 views that this 'certainly carries overtones of sexual play'. Cf. Meeks 1995:131-32 who demonstrates that the word means 'to joke, mock, make fun of'. And on 132, n22 Meeks further shows that the word as used by Philo means 'dance'. Thus, the situation could be a pure riotous celebration of deliverance from Egypt. Further, in Exod 32.31, Moses is recorded to have confessed to God the sin of the Israelites as that of making for themselves Gods of gold. No hint of sexual play is made in that confession.

<sup>204</sup> Hays 1989:94 comments: '...because Jews as well as Gentiles stand under God's just sentence of universal condemnation; there is no distinction. Because there is no distinction, the golden calf story becomes a parable of the human condition apart from the gospel, a condition of self-destructive idolatry'.

Corinthians, whom Paul rebukes for their sexual licence in 1 Cor 5.1-5, 10-11; and 6.9-10, 12-20 (apart from their idolatry in our current discussion). The question is whether Paul, in warning against idolatry here, also intends a warning against sexual immorality. And if so, why? Does it imply that sexual immorality leads to idolatry, or idolatry leads to sexual immorality? If 1 Cor 8-10 is about the issue of idolatry, why does Paul mention sexual immorality unless it has to do with idolatry? In the case of Num 25, the two issues are inseparable. In his commentary on Num 25, Josephus expands on the story and describes the unfortunate event as resulting from a strategy of Balaam which he advised king Balak of Midian to adopt (*Ant* 4.126ff). As we have discussed in chapter 3.4.2 above, the strategy was to use the Midianite women to tempt the Israelite youths, till they became 'overmastered by their passions' (*Ant* 4.130); the women should then withdraw from them and require them to abandon their ancestral laws and their God and demand that they worship the Gods of the Midianites and Moabites. In other words, Josephus sees a link between sexual immorality and idolatry. And this could be because in Num 25.1-3 the Midianite women are recorded to have invited the Israelite youths to join them in the worship of their Gods (ἐκάλεσαν αὐτοὺς ἐπὶ ταῖς θυσίαις τῶν εἰδώλων αὐτῶν..., Num 25.2). The link between sexual immorality and idolatry is very clearly demonstrated by Halbertal and Margalit. Marriage as a metaphor, as we have seen in chapter two above, helps to explain the conception of the relationship between Israel's God and her. The metaphor suggests that Israel is the wife of Yahweh. Any idolatry is therefore a sexual sin.<sup>205</sup> That there is sexual immorality in the church in Corinth is clear (cf. 1 Cor 5.1ff). Fee is of the opinion that the feasting in the temple in Corinth might at times also involve sexual play. He adduces four reasons for the possibility:

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<sup>205</sup> Halbertal-Margalit 1992:11-20. See chapter 2.2 above.



(1) Num 25 alluded to here links together sexual play and the eating of sacrificial food before the Baal of Peor; (2) 1 Cor 10.7, which alludes to Exod 32.6, also joins idolatry with sexual play;<sup>206</sup> (3) in 1 Cor 6.12-20, Paul re-applies the concept of the 'temple' in 3.16-17 to the Christian who has visited prostitutes; this could be an allusion to the connection of sexual immorality with pagan temples; and (4) every other mention of idol food in the NT is accompanied by a reference to sexual immorality. Of the four reasons, the first has validity. However, Paul's mention of sexual immorality could be because he thinks it leads to idolatry.<sup>207</sup> But that does not necessarily mean that temple prostitution is the issue in these three chapters of the epistle.<sup>208</sup> The lack of any mention by Paul throughout 1 Cor 8-10 except here shows that feasting involving sexual play may not be present at all.<sup>209</sup> The second reason is less persuasive, as explained in n203. The third is at most remotely plausible (as an argument). Still, it need not mean that feasting in the temple involves sexual play.<sup>210</sup> It would be quite uncharacteristic of Paul to be silent in these chapters until now, and to only mention it by way of allusion to an OT example. The fourth reason, while it may suggest such an understanding, does not lend weight to the theory that the feasting in a Corinthian pagan temple involves sexual play. Fee cites two texts, namely, Acts 15.29 and Rev 2.14, 20. In the case of Acts, it is the Apostolic Decree that is in view. However, being the Apostolic Decree, it is only natural for the apostles to include sexual

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<sup>206</sup> In this case, Fee takes the word 'play' (παίζειν) as connoting 'sexual play' (1987:454-55); see n202 above.

<sup>207</sup> *Contra* Robertson-Plummer 1911:204 who do not think that immoral intercourse preceded the Moabite women's invitation. Cf. Hays 1997:163-64.

<sup>208</sup> Gardner 1994:151.

<sup>209</sup> Cf. Josephus's *Ant* 18.65-80, where Josephus recounts the story of how Paulina was deceived into sexual intercourse with Mundus, under the pretext that the sexual intercourse was to be with the God Anubis. Although the activity took place in a temple, it is quite different from the idolatry in 1 Cor 8-10. The former was a straightforward deception; the latter is about idolatrous behaviour in terms of eating idol-meat and engaging in the worship of demons.

<sup>210</sup> Against Thiselton 2000:738-39, whose argument is based on various archaeological findings of temple prostitution; and Yeo 1995:107-9 who argues on similar basis.

immorality in their list of forbidden things, particularly so in the Graeco-Roman world where sexual immorality is rampant. But that does not mean the Corinthians attend pagan temple feasting that is followed by or involves sexual play.<sup>211</sup> The cases of Rev 2.14 and 2.15 are a specific reference to Num 25 and Ahab's idolatry through Jezebel in 1 and 2 Kgs. Although the former explicitly mentions sexual immorality, it is what leads to idolatry, not the other way round. And in the case of Ahab and Jezebel sexual immorality is not specifically mentioned in 1 Kgs and 2 Kgs. And it is only one case about which little information is given or known. What is telling is that in 1 Cor 5.11 Paul seems to view those who are sexually immoral and the idolaters to be separate groups. This is seen in the use of the word ἢ, which is a 'disjunctive' conjunction.<sup>212</sup> The most satisfactory explanation of this OT allusion is thus that Paul is telling the Corinthians not to be like the Israelites in their sexual immorality because sexual liaison with pagans can lead to idolatry, which was the case in Num 25.<sup>213</sup>

The fourth OT example is couched in an interesting manner: μηδὲ ἐκπειράζωμεν τὸν Χριστόν, καθὼς τινες αὐτῶν ἐπείρασαν...('let us not put Christ to the test, just as some of them tested...', v 9). Some manuscripts do not have Χριστόν but κύριον.<sup>214</sup> Others have θεόν instead of either Χριστόν or κύριον.<sup>215</sup>

<sup>211</sup> See Hurd 1983:253 who posits that sexual sin here could be used figuratively to mean idolatry, but concludes, quite implausibly, that Paul attempted to enforce the decree (260).

<sup>212</sup> Cf. Blass-Debrunner §446.

<sup>213</sup> Cf. Halbertal-Margalit 1992:23-25 where they rightly point out that there are two levels: (1) people worship idols in order to be sexually promiscuous; and (2) the initial attachment to idols because of the desire to be sexually promiscuous eventually leads to actual belief in the idols. While it could be possible that some of the 'strong' might have visited the pagan temples and eaten idol-meat because of their desire for sexual services, no evidence from the text of 1 Cor 8-10 suggests this. Paul is unlikely to be so reticent on this had this been the case.

<sup>214</sup> Ⱳ B C P 33. 104. 326. 365. 1175. 2464 *pc* sy<sup>hmg</sup>. Robertson-Plummer 1911:205-6 prefer τὸν κύριον.

<sup>215</sup> A 81 *pc*.



But the reading Χριστόν has good textual support.<sup>216</sup> The fact that Paul has identified the ‘rock’ in v 4 with Christ and warns the ‘strong’ not to provoke the Lord (τὸν κύριον) to jealousy (10.22) suggests that he is using these terms interchangeably to refer to the same object of the offence of idolatry committed by the ‘strong’.<sup>217</sup> What is important is Paul’s description of the Israelites: (καθώς) τινες αὐτῶν ἐπείρασαν... . Although it is not clear to what OT text Paul is alluding, it is most probably Num 21.4-7 where the specific mention of ‘snakes’ is made.<sup>218</sup> The Num 21 incident is cited probably because there the people complained and murmured against Moses for the lack of the kind of food they had while they were in Egypt. This harks back to the ‘craving for evil’ in v 6. It again relates to food, and is probably why Paul views it as a testing of the Lord. The word ἐκπειράζωμεν or its cognate does not appear in the LXX Num 21, but does in Ps 78.18 (LXX Ps 77.18). It is possible that Paul could have been influenced by the Psalm.<sup>219</sup> And his reason for urging the Corinthians not to ‘put Christ to the test’ is that to his mind, the Israelites did exactly the same, that is, testing Christ, and a huge number of them died. And by implication, they would equally face ‘destruction’. What does Paul mean by ‘testing’ Christ? In what way do the ‘strong’ put Christ to the test? In the Num 21 incident, the people rebelled against Moses and against God. Paul is not here making an allegorical

<sup>216</sup> P<sup>46</sup> D F G Ψ 1739. 1881 M latt sy co; Ir<sup>lat</sup> Or<sup>1739mg</sup>. Barrett 1968:225 and Fee 1987:457, and also his n34 argue that the original is most certainly τὸν Χριστόν. See also Conzelmann 1975:164; Schrage 1995:400-401. See further Thiselton 2000:740.

<sup>217</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 8.6, where Paul seems to view the one Lord as the same Jesus Christ (εἷς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός).

<sup>218</sup> Willis 1985a:151 does not think that Paul has any specific Old Testament text in mind. However, Fee 1987:456, n31 rightly refutes Willis’s point; cf. Conzelmann 1975:168. Barrett 1968:225 thinks that Ps 78.18 is a summary of Num 21.4ff.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. Fee 1987:456-57 who argues that vv 20-21 show that the challenge of the ‘strong’ to Paul’s prohibition against cultic meals is tantamount to ‘putting Christ to the test’. Conzelmann 1975:168 argues that the warning is ‘purposely couched in general terms’; this point is taken up by Willis 1985:152, who briefly surveys a range of views and concludes that Paul is here influenced by rhetorical style and ‘perhaps spurred on by recalling the example of Israel in the wilderness’.

interpretation, which is confirmed by the lack of an interpretation of the ‘snakes’ in 1 Cor 10.9.<sup>220</sup> What Paul is telling the ‘strong’ is that by insisting on their right to eat idol-meat and persisting in such behaviour they are in fact ‘testing’ Christ. Barrett argues that what Paul has in mind is that the ‘strong’ are trying and testing the Lord by ‘seeing “how far they could go” in idolatry’.<sup>221</sup> Robertson-Plummer think that Paul does not have any specific thing in mind other than the ‘general frailty and faultiness’ of the Corinthians.<sup>222</sup> But there seems to be a pattern, i.e. Paul has a specific purpose in mind when he cites or alludes to the various OT examples. And Paul did not citing these examples at random, but he probably selected them with careful consideration, to ensure that they fit his purpose. What seems clear is that Paul views the participation of the ‘strong’ in the pagan cultic meals as ‘putting’ Christ to the ‘test’.<sup>223</sup>

The final OT example is in v 10. It is recognised among scholars that the verse could be an allusion to either Num 14.1-38 or Num 16.41.<sup>224</sup> The former is about the people’s ‘grumbling’ against Moses after they heard about the reports of the ten spies. It is interesting that the people’s grumbling is described, among other things, as ‘testing’ the Lord (ἐπείρασάν με..., Num 14.22). The latter passage is about the people’s rebellion against Moses over the killing of Korah and his company. In both cases, there is no mention of a destroyer. Which story is Paul alluding to in v 10? Conzelmann does not think there is any clear distinction between ‘grumbling’ in v 10

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<sup>220</sup> See Barrett 1968:226.

<sup>221</sup> Barrett 1968:225-26. But Barrett also concedes that it is reasonable to say that there is ‘an irritable refusal’ on the part of both the Israelites and the Corinthians to accept the conditions which God has laid down for them. Cf. Yeo 1995:170-71 who views ‘testing Christ’ as the ‘vulgar display of pride in their participation in the cultic meal...’. Cf. Newton 1998:329.

<sup>222</sup> Robertson-Plummer 1911:205. Cf. Conzelmann 1975:168; and Willis 1985:152.

<sup>223</sup> Hays 1997:165.

<sup>224</sup> See Hays 1997:165. Thiselton 2000:742, who also cites Hays on this point.



and 'tempting' in the previous verse.<sup>225</sup> Barrett theorises that Paul is driven by the momentum of the OT material and that there is no evidence that 'grumbling' is a particular failing of the Corinthians.<sup>226</sup> Robertson-Plummer and Fee, however, see the failing of the Corinthians in their murmuring against Paul.<sup>227</sup> Robertson-Plummer go a step further by suggesting that Paul is warning against those who might be murmuring against him for his punishment of the incestuous man in 1 Cor 5 and for his severe rebukes in 1 Cor.<sup>228</sup> But why would Paul speak against the incestuous man in 1 Cor 5 and only defend his proposed punishment of the man here in 1 Cor 10, with only a verse that is not altogether explicit? And there is no reason for Paul to be so veiled in his warning against such Corinthians, if he could be so strong in speaking up against the incestuous man in 1 Cor 5. It therefore has to mean otherwise. Hurd has argued that 10.1-22 is 'a second and somewhat stronger attempt' by Paul to persuade the 'strong' not to eat idol-meat.<sup>229</sup> And if Paul is writing to make clarifications on what he had written or instructed earlier concerning idol-meat, and since 1 Cor 8.1 suggests that the Corinthians had raised the matter in their letter to him, then it is possible that he has encountered some criticism of his position on idolatry, and very possibly his apostleship. In 1 Cor 9, as we will argue in the next chapter, Paul defends his apostolic authority and sets himself as an example to the 'strong'. This would suggest that the 'grumbling' in 10.10 may be related to their criticism of Paul's apostolic authority and

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<sup>225</sup> Conzelmann 1975:168.

<sup>226</sup> Barrett 1968:226. Cf. Willis 1985a:152-53 who finds it impossible to determine who is being referred to as the 'destroyer', even though its similar expressions can be found in such texts as 2 Sam 24.16; 1 Chr 21.15; Exod 12.23; Wis 18.20-25. He concludes that 'Just as no concrete Old Testament passage is being used, so too it is possible that no specific occasion at Corinth is being corrected. There is no reason to think Paul is addressing the grumbling (past or expected) of the strong except in a most general way'.

<sup>227</sup> Robertson-Plummer 1911:206; Fee 1987:458 says that it is very likely that the Corinthians' 'grumbling' against Paul probably also involves 'grumbling' against God. And this, he says, is why Paul includes this Old Testament example as a warning of the coming judgment.

<sup>228</sup> Robertson-Plummer 1911:206. See Willis 1985a:153, n133 for his criticism of this position.

<sup>229</sup> Hurd 1983:142.

the judgment they pronounce against him.<sup>230</sup> As a result, he is now telling them that he remains the apostle with authority, and that he is an example to them. And if Paul thinks he is an imitator of Christ (1 Cor 11.1), then any criticism against him would to him be a criticism against Christ. This would similarly constitute ‘putting Christ to the test’ and ‘murmuring’ against Christ. It is also possible that the ‘strong’ have ‘grumbled’ over the prospects of losing business clientele or risking their social networks if they do not attend pagan cultic meals.<sup>231</sup> And by alluding to the ‘grumbling’ of the Israelites, Paul may have in mind such possible ‘grumbling’ of the ‘strong’.<sup>232</sup>

The danger of such murmuring is that of destruction. While there is no mention of the ‘destroyer’ (ὁ ὀλοθρευτής) in the Numbers passages alluded to above in the LXX,<sup>233</sup> Paul certainly believes in such an agent,<sup>234</sup> and very possibly understands the ‘destroyer’ to be an agent of God who is sent out to execute God’s punishment. This is indicated in v 22, where Paul rhetorically asks whether the ‘strong’ are provoking the Lord to jealousy. The question of ‘destruction’ in the Numbers passages is the physical destruction of the complainants, so that they would not enter into the promised land. In the Corinthians’ case, Paul seems to be referring to an eschatological destruction, that is, the loss of one’s salvation. This is seen in v 11, where Paul summarises the Israelites’ examples by setting forth the purpose for

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<sup>230</sup> Thus the second person plural imperative γογγύζετε might well be deliberate, that is, to exclude himself. See Fee 1987:457, nn36-37.

<sup>231</sup> This has been a hypothesis of Chow (1992), especially 83-166, and Clarke (1993). However, Meggitt (1998) has viewed otherwise, even though his counter-argument is not without problems. See chapter 1.3 for our survey of the various scholars.

<sup>232</sup> Fee 1987:457-58; and Hays 1997:165.

<sup>233</sup> One other possible passage is Num 17.1-11 where the Israelites are warned against complaining through the sprouting staff of Aaron.

<sup>234</sup> Robertson-Plummer 1911:206, ‘The Apostle assumes that there was such an agent, as in the slaying of the firstborn (τὸν ὀλεθρεύοντα, Exod xii.23), and in the plague that punished David (...), and in the destruction of the Assyrians (...); Barrett 1968:226. Cf. Fee 1987:457, n38.



which these events were recorded: πρὸς νουθεσίαν ἡμῶν ('for our warning'). The word πρὸς indicates the purpose. And in the next clause εἰς οὓς τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων κατήντηκεν ('on whom the ends of the ages have arrived'), Paul sets his argument in an eschatological perspective, that is, the Israelites' wilderness behaviour and its subsequent destruction have been written down for the present generation (ταῦτα δὲ τυπικῶς συνέβαινεν ἐκείνοις, ...), so that they would be warned and so behave in a way that does not provoke God to jealousy (cf. 10.22). And in the case of the Corinthians, the prospects they face are eschatological because the ends of the ages have arrived on them.<sup>235</sup>

Paul's use of the various Old Testament examples reveals a pattern, which may be described in the following. By heaping up all the OT examples, Paul shows that the Israelites faced destruction because their idolatrous behaviour had aroused the wrath of God. This may be tabulated as follows:

| What Israel were and did (1 Cor 10.1-10)           | The result of the Israelites' behaviour   |
|--|---|
| Our ancestors 'enjoyed salvation' (vv 1-4);        | God was not pleased with most of them and they were struck down in the desert (v 5);                    |
| They craved evil (καθὼς κἀκεῖνοι ἐπεθύμησαν, v 6); | God's anger was aroused against them and he sent a plague among them which killed many (cf. Num 11.34); |
| They worshipped the golden calf (v 7);             | The Lord was angry with them and sent a plague among them (cf. Exod 32.35);                             |
| They engaged in sexual immorality (v 8a);          | Twenty three thousand fell in a single day (v 8b; cf. Num 25);  |

<sup>235</sup> The exact nuance is not clear. See Robertson-Plummer 1911:207 who interpret 'ages' as the successive periods of human history and the sum-total of its end has come to us. Cf. Barrett 1968:227 who posits that Paul believes he and the Corinthians are living in the 'last days' of world history, before the coming of the messianic age. Fee 1987:459 offers a view closer to that of Barrett that the present 'age' is the 'new age' begun by Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection. Hence, the new people of God are the people of the 'End' times. Cf. Wright 1992:447.

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| They tested Christ (v 9a); | They were destroyed by snakes (v 9b);         |
| They grumbled (v 10a);     | They were destroyed by the destroyer (v 10b). |

What the above table clearly shows is that in every case, death is the result. Even where Paul does not mention death as the penalty, their OT references would explicitly state it. That such a result or penalty seems to be in Paul's mind is explicit in v 12, which reads, ὥστε ὁ δοκῶν ἐστάναι βλέπω μὴ πέσῃ ('So then, let the one who thinks he/she is standing watch out lest he/she fall').<sup>236</sup> This warning summarises the story of Israel in the wilderness and serves as a direct application of the Israelites' experiences to the situation of the Corinthians. It seems that the 'strong' think that they are spiritually secure, and they therefore do not have to fear any consequences of their behaviour. They think (the source of their thought is clearly their 'knowledge' or theology) idols are nothing and that there is only one God the Father and one Lord Jesus Christ. However, Paul is now telling them to watch out. For the Israelites had fallen in the desert, even though they seemed to be doing well. The 'strong' therefore will fall, if they persist in their idolatry. What they face at present is in fact a testing of their faithfulness to God. The solution to or the way out of the current problem is by enslaving oneself to the gospel of Jesus Christ, a theme which will be discussed in the next chapter. The 'strong' will do well by giving up their rights to freely and unscrupulously eat idol-meat in the pagan temples. Verse 13 is therefore addressed to both the 'strong' and the 'weak'. To the 'strong', visits to the pagan temples and eating idol-meat before the pagan Gods constitute a partnership

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<sup>236</sup> Gardner 1994:152-53, argues that Paul is here speaking in covenant language and that Paul's use of the term ἰσχυροὶ meant that he believed the 'strong' thought they really 'had complete covenant security'. See also Gundry-Volf 1990:120-30 for a discussion of verse 12. Gundry-Volf argues that the 'fall' refers to the loss of the appearance of salvation. However, 1 Cor 8-10 consistently shows that the 'strong' have salvation, and as 10.9 suggests the 'strong' in fact had Christ and tested him.



with ‘demons’. It is an act of ‘unfaithfulness’ to the true God; and it dishonours the true God by confusing or mixing God with other Gods/demons. Further, since the ‘strong’ have been baptised into Christ Jesus and are participants in the Lord’s Supper, by becoming ‘partners’ with ‘demons’, they in fact break the covenant with God through Jesus Christ, through whom all things and the ‘strong’ come into existence (cf. 1 Cor 8.6b). They therefore are treading on highly dangerous ground. The address to the ‘weak’ is that what they face, that is, their struggle with their ‘damaged conscience’ is a test from which God will provide a way out.<sup>237</sup> In other words, God will provide a ‘way out’ to both the ‘weak’ and the ‘strong’.<sup>238</sup> The important point for both groups is the exhortation in v 14: φεύγετε ἀπὸ τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας (‘flee from idolatry’).<sup>239</sup> Both the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’ must resist idolatry by fleeing from it;<sup>240</sup> failing which they will face God’s divine punishment.

Verse 22 explains what this divine punishment is all about. By engaging in idolatrous behaviour, Paul argues, the ‘strong’ run the risk of incurring the jealousy or zeal (ζῆλος) of God. The word παραζηλώω means ‘provoke to jealousy’.<sup>241</sup> It refers to actions that arouse God’s zeal (ζῆλος). In the previous chapter (5.4.1 and 5.4.2), we saw that the zeal (ζῆλος) for the Law legitimated the violent act of killing, since the Law served as the final ‘court of appeal’ for the Diaspora Jews. We also saw Philo’s support for violent action as a legitimate punishment against those who

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<sup>237</sup> Gundry-Volf 1990:128-29.

<sup>238</sup> Conzelmann 1975:169 takes this as the reference to the eschatological manifestation and liberation, that is, the one eschatological salvation. However, v 14 makes this interpretation unlikely.

<sup>239</sup> Barrett 1968:91, ‘...God will never allow it to become impossible for him to resist. He (the Christian) must resist, and he must not put his trust in false securities; ...’ Cf. Willis 1985a:157-59; and Fee 1987:460-63.

<sup>240</sup> Fee 1987:464 thinks that ‘the way out’ does not include the ‘headlong pursuit of idolatry’; Robertson-Plummer 1911:211, however, take this ‘flight’ as the sure ἐκβασις. Cf. Barrett 1968:230.

<sup>241</sup> BAGD 616. It is not referring to the general idea of being provoked to anger.

violated the Law (*Spec Leg* 1.54-55). Paul's appeal to God's 'zeal' might well be to remind the Corinthian Christians that even though the Law is no longer a 'final court of appeal' for a Diaspora community like the Corinthian church, God's 'zeal' for the faithfulness of his 'new people' can still mean that he will mete out the 'death' penalty by withholding from the Corinthians the eschatological salvation.<sup>242</sup> And if the 'strong' want a trial of 'strength', then let them beware that the Lord is stronger (1 Cor 10.22). Thus, by setting out the Israelites' wilderness experiences of idolatry and subsequent destruction by God, Paul brings before the 'strong' the danger of idolatry.

The danger of the final 'disqualification' and God's destruction constitutes two aspects. On the one hand, the idolatrous behaviour of the 'strong' is 'sinning' against Christ when they cause the 'weak' to stumble by 'sharing' in the table of δαιμόνια. By sinning against Christ, the 'strong' are putting a hindrance in the way of the gospel, which has implications for their eschatological salvation. By 'sharing' in the table of δαιμόνια they have betrayed God by breaking and disregarding the new covenant in Christ; they have dishonoured the true God by mixing him with other Gods/δαιμόνια. They therefore incur the wrath or arouse the 'zeal' of God. On the other hand, the Israelites' own idolatry and subsequent destruction are an indication that God's jealousy, which was provoked by the Israelites, can still be provoked and he can still mete out the same justice to the idolatrous Corinthians: destruction. This 'destruction' is now seen or interpreted by Paul within an eschatological perspective. Thus, the framework for defining and interpreting idolatry is the OT examples, not the γνῶσις of the 'strong'.

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<sup>242</sup> Cf. Barrett 1968:228 who comments, 'Moment by moment, the Christian life is lived by faith only, without any human guarantee. As the Israelites were lured by the Moabite women into fornication, idolatry, and so into destruction, so the idolatry, which apparently the Corinthians, secure in their sacramental life, thought they could safely trifle with, could lead them into fornication and destruction'.



## 6.8 Summary and conclusion

The function of this chapter has been to examine the differences of views between Paul and the ‘strong’. We have looked at the slogans of the ‘strong’ and concluded that the ‘strong’ hold the view that ‘idols are nothing’ and that there is only ‘one God’; this knowledge was modified by their Christian belief as seen in their confession (cf. 6.3.3 above). Their γνώσις then gives rise to their claim to ἐξουσία which forms the basis for their behaviour of attending pagan temples and eating idol-meat there. Conceptually, their thought on the ‘one God’ parallels the conceptual overlap concerning the true God found in *Letter of Aristeas* (chapter 4.3) and Artapanus (chapter 4.5). Their attendance at pagan temples parallels the examples seen in chapter 4.6.

We also looked at Paul’s view of δαιμόνια and his use of the concept elsewhere. We then moved on to look at his position on idolatry. We have examined the use of the term δαιμόνια in the Septuagint and other Pauline epistles. The overall indication of these texts is that there are Gods and lords in heaven and on earth, and these deities are probably understood to be similar to spiritual beings in the spirit realm. The Book of Tobit provides the most explicit illustration of this hypothesis. Further, we have also seen that Paul’s use of the term is not found anywhere else in his epistles. However, he does reflect an understanding of the spirit world through his reference to Satan, the realms of the flesh and the spirit, and his suggestion that the ‘strong’ are in fact entering into ‘partnership’ with δαιμόνια when they eat idol-meat in the presence of the pagan Gods. He can agree with the ‘strong’ over the doctrine of the ‘one God’ and the fact that ‘idols are nothing’, but he differs from the ‘strong’ over their application of such knowledge. While Paul may hold a belief in the existence of δαιμόνια he seems to make a distinction between idols (εἰδώλα) and ‘demons’

(δαίμονια). We have argued that Paul's view of idols follows the traditional Jewish position on idols. For him, idols are dead, without life, and insignificant – they are nothing! But because of the fact that the idols in fact represent the Gods or evil spirits behind the idols, there are dangers in eating idol-meat in the pagan temple or before the pagan Gods. Paul therefore sets out the danger of idolatry by showing that their idolatrous behaviour, when it causes fellow believers to fall, is tantamount to 'sinning' against Christ because they have by their behaviour put a hindrance in the way of the gospel. What this means is that Paul is now setting before the 'strong' a new paradigm, which is Christ. Simultaneously, Paul also intertextually alludes to the Israelites' idolatrous examples and shows the 'strong' that the Israelites were punished for their idolatrous behaviour, even though they appeared to be doing well. The 'strong' therefore have no guarantee against God's just punishment, if they persist in idolatrous behaviour. Their baptism and participation in the Lord's Supper do not exclude them from God's jealousy, and therefore punishment. Thus, Paul establishes the OT examples as the framework for defining and interpreting the idolatrous behaviour of the 'strong'.

Several definitions of idolatry appear to be operative in Paul's thought: (1) worship of other Gods/alien cult through 'unfaithfulness' to the true God and breach of the covenant; (2) dishonouring the true God through the cognitive error of mixing or confusing God with other Gods/δαίμονια; wrong kinds of worship/intention (by eating in an idol's presence).

What this chapter shows is that Paul, the 'strong' and the 'weak' do agree on some areas of belief, but they also differ over how they apply their knowledge. All three parties clearly agree that there is 'one God' and idols are nothing in the world. This particular area of agreement parallels chapters two and three, where we saw the



widespread condemnation of idolatry in both the LXX and some Diaspora Jews. Throughout, the first two commandments appear prominent. The pattern in the LXX reveals the subtle differentiation between misrepresenting Yahweh and the worship of alien cults. Whereas the Diaspora Jews examined in chapter three reveals that very strict definitions are adopted for condemning idols and idol-makers. Thus, Paul and the 'weak' clearly parallel those examples found in chapters two and three, although Paul goes further in his belief that δαιμόνια are real. The 'strong' differ from the two in that while they believe in 'one God' and that 'idols are nothing', they consider their action harmless because all the idols are nothing. There is only 'one God' and they are 'free' in Christ. Thus, they clearly do not adopt those definitions operating in Paul and the 'weak'. Instead, they parallel such Diaspora Jews like Pseudo-Aristeas, Artapanus, and the like. Further, their non-condemning attitude might reflect a possible awareness of the LXX ban on reviling other people's Gods in Exod 22.27.

These three parties show that the definitions set out in chapter two do not always operate as a package. And different Jews can adopt different definitions of idolatry. The above raises the question of who is to decide what is the right or appropriate behaviour with regard to idolatry. In other words, it is a question of authority. The other question Paul's argument raises is that of 'freedom' in Christ. How should the 'strong' exercise their right (ἐξουσία) since they are 'free' in Christ.<sup>243</sup> 1 Cor 9 is set between 1 Cor 8 and 10 for this important purpose: Paul's defence of his apostolic authority so as to set himself as the authoritative example to the 'strong'. This is the subject of the next chapter.

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<sup>243</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 10.23, where Paul seems to echo the repeated use of πάντα ἐξέστιν by the 'strong'. This same claim is also seen in 6.12, πάντα μοι ἐξέστιν...

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## PAUL'S APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY AND EXAMPLE

## 7.1 Introduction

In chapter six, we have looked at Paul's view of idolatry and his position on the behaviour of the 'strong' with regard to idol-meat. We have also demonstrated how the definitions of idolatry set up in chapter two apply to the two positions. Our analysis shows that Paul adopts a strict 'modified' Jewish stance on idolatry: idolatry can lead to the loss of one's eschatological salvation. But the same cannot be said about the 'strong', whose knowledge serves as the basis for their 'freedom' to attend pagan temples, eat idol-meat, and even engage in idolatrous rituals. And while the 'strong' appeal to the Jewish *Shema*, Paul appeals to 're-interpreted' biblical history as the framework for judging such a conflict. Having compared both Paul's position on idolatry and that of the 'strong', one matter remains: what then is the function of 1 Cor 9? Is Paul's authority in any way related to what he is arguing in 1 Cor 8 and 10? This calls for an examination of Paul's authority, which is the primary issue of 1 Cor 9.

If Paul's authority is an issue in 1 Cor 9, does it then suggest that the battle over idolatry hinges on who has the final 'say' on what constitutes idolatry? And if the definitions of idolatry depend on who makes the final decision, does 1 Cor 9 not also serve as a way in which Paul seeks to re-affirm his apostolic authority? In other words, is 1 Cor 9 a defence of Paul's authority as an apostle? But is Paul's apostolic authority being challenged in Corinth?<sup>1</sup> This will require an examination of not only 1 Cor 9, but also 1 Cor 1-4. In 1 Cor 11.1, Paul urges the Corinthians to be imitators of him. What does 1 Cor 9 have to say about this? In other words, is Paul presenting

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<sup>1</sup> As the criticism of or challenge to Paul's authority is an issue in 1 Cor, such a challenge could serve as a foundation for later or further challenge to Paul's authority. However, although it could be valuable to look at 2 Cor 10-13 to see how this might be the case, I will not look at this question as 2 Cor 10-13 probably represents a later, and most likely, different development as a result of the false apostles' attack on Paul.



himself as an example to the ‘strong’? And if so, what sort of example is he trying to set for the ‘strong’?

Although the unity of 1 Cor 8-10 has posed a challenge, once the question of the function of 1 Cor 9 is settled, its place in 1 Cor 8-10 would become apparent. It is sufficient at this juncture to say that the scholarly view which takes 1 Cor 9 as a digression or excursus<sup>2</sup> is now less accepted and that recent scholarship tends to accept the unity of these chapters.<sup>3</sup>

## 7.2 Is 1 Cor 9 Paul’s defence of his apostolic authority?

There are basically two views on 1 Cor 9. The first regards 1 Cor 9 as Paul’s defence of his apostolic authority (henceforth ‘defence’). The second argues that Paul is setting himself as an example to the ‘strong’ to give up their rights to eat idol-meat, by showing that he has himself given up his rights to material support (henceforth ‘example’).<sup>4</sup>

Willis has proposed that in 1 Cor 9.1-14 Paul is not arguing for his ‘rights’, but *from* it, to set himself as an example to the Corinthians.<sup>5</sup> Citing Weiss, Willis argues that verses 1 and 2 are too brief for an actual defence.<sup>6</sup> Since the rhetorical questions

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<sup>2</sup> E.g. Weiss 1910:xlili, 231; Robertson-Plummer 1914:xxiv; Barrett 1968:219; Héring 1962:xiii-xiv; and Schmithals 1971:93. Schmithals splits 1 Cor 9 up into two with 9.1-23 belonging to Epistle B, while 9.24-27 belongs to Epistle A.

<sup>3</sup> See for example the arguments for the unity of these chapters by Hurd 1965:131-42; Conzelmann 1975:137; and Fee 1987:357-63. Cf. Willis 1985b:33-48 who bases his argument about the function of 1 Cor 9 on the unity of chapters 8-10; and Mitchell 1991:249f who takes 1 Cor 9 as a digression in terms of it making a comparison or amplifying a given point in the argument, but prefers to term it ‘an exemplary argument’. However, not all recent scholars have accepted the unity of these chapters; cf. Yeo 1995:73-83 who represents recent scholarship which continues to prefer the partition theory. Yeo has tried to develop his own by suggesting that there are letters A, B, C, D, E, and F. For him, 1 Cor 9.24-10.22 belongs to letter B; 1 Cor 8.1-13, 9.19-13, 10.23-11.1 belong to letter C, while 1 Cor 9.1-18 belongs to letter E. The rest of the epistle is variously contained in these letters.

<sup>4</sup> Few scholars hold the view that both purposes are present in 1 Cor 9; cf. Martin 1990:83 who accepts that 1 Cor 9 is both a defence and an example, but takes the position that it is a fictitious defence against fictitious opponents. Horrell 1996:205 is probably the only modern scholar who takes both purposes seriously. See further below on the double purpose.

<sup>5</sup> Willis 1985b:40. Willis’ work, clearly, provided support to Mitchell’s more elaborated hypothesis.

<sup>6</sup> Willis 1985b:34; Weiss 1910:233.

in these verses assume a positive response, and since Paul has stated that the Corinthians are the seal of his apostleship, the ἀπολογία cannot be a defence.<sup>7</sup>

Further, Willis takes the participle τοῖς ἀνακρίνουσιν in 1 Cor 9.3 to be future, so that the statement is rendered ‘my defence to those who *would* examine me’. Thus, ‘Paul is *anticipating* criticism rather than *answering* a previous complaint’. Willis argues that Paul’s rights have already been strongly established so that he is able to make something of his renunciation of them. 1 Cor 9.4-14 are not meant to establish Paul’s right to support, but to remind his readers of the established fact of his authority.<sup>8</sup> They are therefore not a defence of his authority but meant to allow him to show that he has given up his rights and so set himself as an example to the Corinthians.<sup>9</sup>

Although Willis is right that in 1 Cor 9.9-23 Paul is setting himself as an example to the Corinthians, he seems to suggest at several points that Paul is establishing his rights so as to show that he has renounced them.<sup>10</sup> But why should Paul establish his rights if they are not called into question?<sup>11</sup> Further, Willis’ treatment of the two words, ἀπολογία and ἀνακρίνω, is inadequate in that he does not take into account the larger context of the letter as a whole. And Fee’s main counter arguments to Willis are noteworthy: (1) the crisis of Paul’s authority could lie behind much of the letter (e.g. 4.1-5, 5-6, 14.36-37), which is suggested by 1 Cor 1-

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<sup>7</sup> Willis 1985b:34.

<sup>8</sup> Willis 1985b:35.

<sup>9</sup> This is somewhat similar, though not exactly identical, to Mitchell’s argument that Paul calls his argument a ‘defence’ in order to justify using himself as an example for the Corinthians (see below).

<sup>10</sup> For example, ‘Paul has established his rights so strongly so that ...’ (35), and towards the end of the essay, ‘...Paul establishes at length an ἐξουσία which he will not use,...’ (40). Thus, Horrell 1996:204 understands Willis to be saying that ‘Paul establishes his rights (ἐξουσία) as an apostle in order to emphasise the fact that he has given them up, so as not to place any hindrance (ἐγκοπή) in the way of the gospel’.

<sup>11</sup> Barrett 1968:200 observes, ‘It is also true that Paul would hardly have spent so long on the question of apostolic rights if his own apostolic status had not been questioned in Corinth’.



4;<sup>12</sup> (2) contrary to Willis's argument that 1 Cor 9.1-2 show that Paul's authority is not being questioned, ἀλλά γε ὑμῖν in fact points in the opposite direction; and (3) although Paul states that the Corinthians are the seal of his apostleship, Willis's argument is insensitive to the problem of 1.12, or indeed 4.1-21, or 2 Cor as a whole.<sup>13</sup>

Willis's view is taken up by Mitchell who, in her book, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, argues that attempts to see 1 Cor 9 as true defence had failed.<sup>14</sup> For her, 1 Cor 9 constitutes a 'mock defense speech' in which Paul presents himself as the 'example of the proper non-divisive, conciliatory behavior' for the Corinthians to follow.<sup>15</sup> She argues that the term ἀπολογία in 9.3 has received a somewhat mistaken forensic focus, whose advocates have failed to analyse 1 Cor 9 as a true defence against real charges.<sup>16</sup> The only possible charge which anyone reading 1 Cor 9 can reconstruct is 'an historically implausible one: *that Paul did not take the Corinthians' money*' (emphasis original).<sup>17</sup> This is because she views this reconstruction to be 'scarcely possible' and that even if it was historically feasible, the argument of 1 Cor 9 does not constitute an 'appropriate rhetorical defense' against such a charge. Mitchell concludes that in 1 Cor 9 Paul calls his rhetorical response a 'defence' in order to justify his use of himself as an example to the Corinthians.<sup>18</sup> The double purpose advocated by some scholars, i.e. 1 Cor 9 as both a defence and Paul's example to the Corinthians, is dubbed the 'dubious "kill two birds with one stone"' by

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<sup>12</sup> So Fee 1987:393.

<sup>13</sup> Fee 1987:394, n10. Cf. Conzelmann 1975:152-53 who implausibly argues that the form of expression in 1 Cor 9.3 shows that in 1 Cor 9 Paul is defending himself against opponents from outside the Corinthian community.

<sup>14</sup> Mitchell 1991:244, n330.

<sup>15</sup> Mitchell 1991:130. Her position is being followed by Witherington III 1995:203.

<sup>16</sup> Mitchell 1991:244.

<sup>17</sup> Mitchell 1991:246

<sup>18</sup> Mitchell 1991:246.

her.<sup>19</sup> In a lengthy footnote,<sup>20</sup> she argues that her own attempts to analyse 1 Cor 9 as a true defence have yielded no convincing proof in that the ‘charge and issue of the case tend to disappear’.<sup>21</sup> She outlines three possibilities: (1) that Paul did not take the Corinthians’ money; (2) that Paul is not an apostle; and (3) that it is a piece of forensic rhetoric.

On the first, which is a charge, she argues that Paul would seem to admit to the charged act, based on 1 Cor 9.12 and 15, but dispute that it is illegal. But in 1 Cor 9.4-11, 13-14, Paul seems to be arguing the opposite, i.e. that even if he did take the money, it would have been legal. And at the end of verse 15, it can only be concluded that if Paul had indeed taken the Corinthians’ money, it would have been perfectly legitimate and therefore no defence would be required since he had the ἐξουσία to do it.<sup>22</sup> This line of reasoning is not necessarily persuasive. For Paul’s apostolic authority could well have been questioned because the Corinthians find his manual labour to be reflective of his negative attitude towards accepting material support. And Paul’s insistence on his rights to material support would serve to counter the Corinthians’ perception of his attitude. Thus, Paul may be saying that because he personally believes that, as an apostle, he is entitled to material support, the questioning of his apostolic authority by the Corinthians is groundless. The only difference in his case is that he is not claiming that right.

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<sup>19</sup> Mitchell 1991:244.

<sup>20</sup> Mitchell 1991:244, n330.

<sup>21</sup> Mitchell 1991:245.

<sup>22</sup> 1 Cor 9 can neither be the ‘proof of a conjectural issue’ nor a way in which Paul tries to defend himself against a charge by shifting responsibility for his act of not taking the Corinthians’ money to the reason that he acted from ἀνάγκη (Mitchell 1991:245).



On the second charge, Mitchell argues that none of the expected arguments are present in 1 Cor 9.<sup>23</sup> On the contrary, the proofs of Paul's apostolate are 'presented bluntly and explicitly as common principles in 1 Cor 9.1-3'. Paul's apostleship is the foundation upon which he builds his exemplary argument, not the goal of his argument.<sup>24</sup> But her argument can run both ways. It could be equally argued that Paul is presenting, bluntly and explicitly, his apostleship in 1 Cor 9.1-3 precisely because it has been challenged; and moves on in 9.4ff to the issue which is currently causing the Corinthians to doubt him. Further, the 'expected arguments' in 2 Cor 11-12.13 could possibly have developed from the already tense relationship between Paul and the Corinthians when 1 Cor was written.

On the third possibility, Mitchell sees no evidence for a forensic rhetoric but that the points in Paul's argument in 1 Cor 9.19-27 are all hortatory in character and cannot be viewed as Paul's defence. Instead, they point more to the fact that Paul is there using his own personal behaviour as an example to the Corinthians. Mitchell's final counter argument is that there are no comparable examples in ancient literature in which a self-defence speech also functions as an appeal to one's own example. Paul calls his exemplary argument a 'defence' because he knows the risk involved in using himself as the example for the Corinthians' imitation.<sup>25</sup>

However, Paul appears to be quite capable of inventing his own arguments and it is entirely possible for him to include both the defence of his apostleship and his apostolic example for the 'strong'. After all, if he is seeking to set his own lifestyle as

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<sup>23</sup> She compares such 'expected arguments' to those found in 2 Cor 11-12.13 in a parenthesis.

<sup>24</sup> Nor is 1 Cor 9 a defence against the charge that Paul is being inconsistent, for, to Mitchell's mind, Paul's free admission is no defence at all. However, Mitchell seems to be saying that Paul is admitting to the charge that he is being inconsistent, which would make 1 Cor 9 a poor defence. The problem with this view is that Mitchell has yet to establish that there is a charge of inconsistency.

<sup>25</sup> Mitchell 1991:246-47. Mitchell sees such use of oneself as an example for imitation paralleled in antiquity such as Isoc. *Or* 15.8 (1991:246, n335).

an example, he would certainly need to ensure that his apostolic authority remains recognised by the Corinthians. And, as noted above, since much of the letter appears to reflect disagreement between Paul and the Corinthians, it is not impossible that some might have called into question his authority as an apostle.<sup>26</sup> This can be seen in the party division in chapters 1-4 where the Corinthians attach themselves to different leaders. Those who call themselves followers of a leader other than Paul would certainly have viewed Paul as less authoritative than their own leader, if not without authority altogether.

A slightly different view is held by Martin who argues that 1 Cor 9 is a poor defence, if it is defence at all.<sup>27</sup> For he finds reading 1 Cor 9 as a defence makes it difficult to fit in with the issue of idol-meat in chapters 8 and 10. Rather, it functions basically as an example, not a defence of Paul's apostleship, and is a digression in the form of a defence.<sup>28</sup> Using the metaphor of slavery, Martin argues that Paul is introducing an alternative way of looking at his work, i.e. he is a manual labourer who works under compulsion and unwillingly and therefore does not expect any wages because Christ has given him the trust of a steward.<sup>29</sup> It is Paul himself who raised the subject of his refusal of material support; since he knows that his refusal would be unacceptable to the Corinthians, he puts the chapter as a defence. In other words, he is defending himself proleptically against possible accusations against him.<sup>30</sup> Thus, in 1 Cor 9 Paul is putting up a 'fictitious', 'rhetorical', defence of himself for refusing to live like the other apostles and for rejecting the church's material support. By

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<sup>26</sup> Thus, Fee 1987:362 posits that one of the four points the Corinthians have made in their letter to Paul includes the question whether Paul has the 'proper apostolic authority' to decide on the issue of idol-meat.

<sup>27</sup> Martin 1990:77.

<sup>28</sup> Martin 1990:77.

<sup>29</sup> Martin 1990:72.

<sup>30</sup> Martin 1990:78.



demonstrating his own status as one who has given up his rights to material support and as a leader who works as a manual labourer, Paul is showing that 'conventional status indicators are overturned in Christian form of leadership'.<sup>31</sup> For Martin, 1 Cor 9 is both a defence and an example, but the defence is a fictitious one. The opponents are themselves fictitious, created for Paul's own rhetorical purposes.<sup>32</sup> Such a theory does not take into account the vigour of Paul's rhetorical questions, as Fee has noted, in verses 1-12 where one rhetorical question after another are being issued, with a total of 16 in all.<sup>33</sup> Further, the tone of Paul's argument is too vigorous for Martin's fictitious theory to be possible. And Chow's thesis is valid that the Corinthians could possibly have been offended by Paul's refusal to accept material support from them, as they view the reception of material support as one of the marks of a true apostle, hence their questioning of Paul's apostleship.<sup>34</sup> Therefore Paul's defence would be real.

We will now turn to re-consider the evidence in 1 Cor 9. In 9.1, Paul poses several questions: 'Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? These questions all begin with οὐκ or οὐχί, which shows that Paul expects the answers to be in the affirmative,<sup>35</sup> which indicates his own belief that he is 'free', an 'apostle', that he has indeed seen the risen Lord, and that the existence of the Corinthian Christian community is the result of his work. But why should Paul be asking these questions if there is no challenge to his

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<sup>31</sup> Martin 1990:80.

<sup>32</sup> Martin 1990:83.

<sup>33</sup> Fee 1987:392, n1.

<sup>34</sup> Chow 1992:107-10; Chow's thesis suggests that the opponents are real and therefore Paul's defence is equally real. However, it is not necessary for us to accept that those Corinthians who have been offended by Paul are rich and powerful patrons in Corinth.

<sup>35</sup> This does not mean that the Corinthians would necessarily respond in the positive, i.e. Paul could be rhetorically manipulating them into a 'yes' response. And this is where Willis 1985b:34 misunderstands the function of the word οὐ, which merely tells us that the question expects a positive answer, but does not tell us that the respondent believes the answer to be so.

‘freedom’, ‘apostleship’, the claim that he has seen the risen Lord, and even his ministry in Corinth? In 1 Cor 8.13, Paul has stated that he would never eat meat again if food is a reason for a fellow Christian to stumble. Later, in 1 Cor 9.19, he says that he is willing to allow himself to be a slave to all, even though he is ‘free’ with regard to all. This might suggest that he has practised this principle of not eating meat before, a practice which has possibly caused some Corinthians to question his ‘freedom’, which also has implications for his ‘apostleship’ since he has taken up manual labour, an act which makes him appear less than free, as an apostle should be free from earning his own living. In his *Social Context of Paul's Ministry*, R. F. Hock identifies four possible means of support which a philosopher in Paul's day could draw on. They are charging fees, entering a household of the socially able and influential, begging, and working.<sup>36</sup> Of these, Paul has clearly adopted one, that is, working. The Corinthians, as we have seen, are divided under different personalities whom they seem to be proud of, claiming, ‘I am of Peter’, ‘I am of Apollos’, and the like.<sup>37</sup> And if they take pride in their leaders, they would likely consider the acceptance of their support by their leaders to be an acceptance of them (cf. 2 Cor 11.7-11). Being their apostle, Paul not only refuses financial support from the Corinthians, but also takes on manual labour, an act which might give the impression that the Corinthians cannot afford to support their apostle.<sup>38</sup> Marshall says that the Corinthians’ offer of support to Paul is a gesture of friendship; and when Paul rejects it he virtually rejects their friendship.<sup>39</sup> Holmberg says ‘it is difficult for the Corinthians not to draw the

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<sup>36</sup> Hock 1980:52-59.

<sup>37</sup> 1 Cor 4.6, ἵνα μὴ εἰς ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἐνὸς φυσιοῦσθε κατὰ τοῦ ἑτέρου.

<sup>38</sup> Martin 1990:70; Horrell 1996:214-15.

<sup>39</sup> Marshall 1987:165-258; cf. Chow 1992:108-9. However, Marshall and Chow's identification of the Corinthians with the rich and powerful patrons is not necessary, as there is no evidence to suggest this. Further, the recent work of Meggitt (1998) has convincingly put forward the theory that almost all of the



conclusion that they were less respected and loved by Paul'.<sup>40</sup> Thus, Paul's behaviour constitutes an offence to the Corinthians. Further, the understanding of the Corinthians concerning apostles is that they do not take up manual labour but depend on others, particularly the church, for their living. When Paul fails to do both, that is, accepting financial support and not working, it is only natural that the Corinthians begin to question his apostolic authority; that is, he does not measure up to the standards of an apostle. Paul's statement that he and Barnabas are entitled not to work for a living serves as an argument against such a perception of his apostolic authority. In 1 Cor 4.9-13, Paul speaks about God exhibiting the apostles as the last of all. All the weaknesses and social lowliness mentioned seem to be the results of Paul's manual labour mentioned in v 12. As Horrell rightly observes, '(T)his is the only place where Paul specifically mentions "that his work is actually manual labour"...'.<sup>41</sup> And this is further corroborated by what he says in 1 Thess 2.9 that he worked night and day in order not to be a burden to the believers.<sup>42</sup> But to the Corinthians, an apostle was supposed to be 'free' from manual labour and should depend on the church for support. Thus, Paul begins 1 Cor 9 with questions about his status.<sup>43</sup> But could this be a 'mock defence', or a 'fictitious defence', as Mitchell and Martin respectively would call it? If we take the view that Paul's authority is not being questioned but the 'defence' is a 'mock' or 'fictitious' defence, we would have to ask why Paul should be so specific in his rhetorical questions. Why does Paul think that his authority might be questioned, if

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people in first-century Roman empire were abjectly poor. This has effectively reduced the force of the theory of patronage.

<sup>40</sup> Holmberg 1978:95. Holmberg also states that Paul's reluctance to receive support from the Corinthian church led to deeper mistrust which eventually broke out in open conflict (e.g. 2 Cor 10-13).

<sup>41</sup> Horrell 1996:203. See also further discussion in Thiselton 2000:363-64.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Holmberg 1978:89-93.

<sup>43</sup> Barrett 1968:199-200 points out that what Paul says in 8.13 might invite the Corinthians to question his authority as an apostle, particularly when 'spiritual liberty' was their catchword. Although this makes the defence appear more like an anticipatory one, Barrett is of the opinion that Paul's own status as an apostle had been questioned.

what he has done in 1 Cor 8 is only to suggest to the Corinthians, when they eat idol-meat, to consider those whose conscience is weak? Why does he not pose questions or make statements along the line of love, such as he has done in 1 Cor 13? Barrett describes the style of Paul as 'counter-attacks in the vigorous debating style of the diatribe'.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the questions suggest this; the larger context of the letter proves it very likely an actual questioning of Paul's apostolic authority is present. Since being an eye-witness of the earthly Jesus is one of the criteria of an apostle,<sup>45</sup> the question, 'have I not seen Jesus our Lord?' becomes necessary. The specificity of the questions in fact betrays the possibility that the opponents of Paul have cast doubts on his apostleship by questioning his claim of having seen the Lord. And Paul has gone a step further by arguing that the Corinthians themselves are a proof of his apostolic work. 'Are you not my work in the Lord?' is rhetorically posed since Paul knows there is only one answer, and that is also the only answer the Corinthians can give.<sup>46</sup> And the double answer in verse 2 makes these questions even more crucial. And such questions would be redundant if his apostolic authority has not been questioned.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Barrett 1968:200; cf. Epictetus iii.22.38 where freedom is the characteristic theme of the wandering Cynic preacher who asks, 'Am I not free from sorrow? Am I not free from fear? Am I not free?'

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Acts 1.21-22; Bruce 1986:50 comments that the two essential qualifications of an apostle are being the companion of the Lord during his earthly ministry and being an eye-witness of his resurrection. See, however, Best 1995:14-16 who demonstrates that the definition of an apostle is unclear. Dunn 1998:571 observes that Paul began insisting on his being an apostle from Galatians onwards, but does not explain why he has only done so after Galatians and not before. But cf. Héring 1962:75. Cf. 1 Cor 15.1-10 which is crucial for Paul's understanding of his own apostleship.

<sup>46</sup> Earlier, Paul points out that he is the founding apostle in the sense that he planted (ἐγὼ ἐφύτευσα, 1 Cor 3.6), laid the foundation (θεμέλιον ἔθηκα, 1 Cor 3.10) for the Corinthian church, and became the Corinthians' father through the preaching of the gospel (ἐν γὰρ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ἐγὼ ὑμᾶς ἐγέννησα, 1 Cor 4.15).

<sup>47</sup> Dunn 1998:571 has rightly pointed out that whether the Jerusalem apostles recognise Paul's claim that his commissioning experience is equivalent to having seen the Lord is a question we cannot fully answer, and it does seem probable that Paul's claim may not convince all the leaders. This has already shown up in a rather subtle way in Gal 2.11-12, where Peter, whom Paul understood to have been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised (2.9), appeared in a mixed, though predominantly Gentile church founded by Paul.



Verse 2 further indicates that Paul's authority is being questioned. Mitchell and others, beyond saying that Paul is simply calling his argument a defence in order to justify using himself as an example for the Corinthians, have not adequately dealt with this particular statement: εἰ ἄλλοις οὐκ εἰμὶ ἀπόστολος. For we get the impression that there are some who do not accept Paul's apostleship, hence Paul's immediate following statement, ἀλλὰ γε ὑμῖν εἰμι (but to you I am).<sup>48</sup> And the further statement that the Corinthians are the seal (ἡ σφραγίς) of his apostleship in the Lord would be equally strange and unnecessary, if Paul's apostolic authority has not been questioned. The rephrasing of the statement that the Corinthians are his work in the Lord in 9.2 not only reflects Paul's emphasis on his apostolic work among the Corinthians; but more importantly, it suggests that those who question Paul's authority also call into question his work. Hence, the stronger emphasis from 'yes, you are my work in the Lord' to 'you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord' (cf. 2 Cor 10.12-18). In other words, while not everyone who witnessed the resurrection of the Lord was an apostle,<sup>49</sup> Paul's apostleship is confirmed by the existence of the Corinthian Christian community itself.<sup>50</sup> In both 9.1b and 2b, Paul uses the phrase ἐν κυρίῳ, which suggests that he regards his ministry to the Corinthians as the result not only of his having seen the risen Lord but also his being commissioned by him (cf. 1 Cor 15.8-10). In 1 Cor 1.1, Paul emphasises that he is called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus

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<sup>48</sup> On the face of the verse, it is possible that these people or opponents might have come from outside the Corinthian community; however, it is entirely possible that Paul is referring to some among the Corinthians who cast doubts on his apostleship, whom he therefore calls 'others' (ἄλλοι). The former would suggest that these opponents are leaders from Jerusalem, an unlikely scenario as there is a complete lack of such hostility against them as is evidenced in Galatians; the latter would mean that Paul is addressing some, not all, the Corinthians in the epistle. As there is no evidence to suggest that the 'others' come from outside the Corinthian community, it is more likely that Paul has in mind some of the Corinthians, i.e. they are ἄλλοι compared to you.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 15.6; see also Best 1995:15-16 who points out that not everyone who carried out missionary work would have been called an apostle.

<sup>50</sup> Thus, Héring 1962:75-76 is right when he points out that if others wished to contest Paul's apostolic authority, 'there was the missionary work accomplished at Corinth by Paul'.

(ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ).<sup>51</sup> The τὸ ἔργον μου (literally ‘my work’) in verse 1b is thus the work of an apostle of Christ Jesus. The use of ἐν κυρίῳ is carefully and deliberately made in order to show that the work of preaching to and building up the Corinthians is a testimony to Paul’s apostleship.<sup>52</sup>

Further, Paul categorically states in verse 3 that he is making his defence (ἀπολογία) against those who judge him (τοῖς ἀνακρίνουσίν με). There are three words that we need to examine: ἀπολογία, τοῖς ἀνακρίνουσίν, and αὕτη. The first can simply refer to a speech of defence one gives in response to one’s opponents (cf. Josephus, *C Ap* 2.147; Acts 22.1); or it can be a forensic term which denotes a courtroom style of debate in which one puts up a defence against one’s accusers (cf. Josephus, *War* 1.621); or it can at times refer to one’s eagerness in defending oneself (cf. 2 Cor 7.11; Phil 1.7, 11).<sup>53</sup> Philo uses the term in largely the same sense as a ‘real defence’ against accusations or in the sense of a plea against charges brought against a person.<sup>54</sup> All the above uses never refer to a ‘mock’ defence or a ‘fictitious defence’. They may differ in degree such as an ἀπολογία may be in the form of a plea against a charge. And there is no reason for Paul to use the term to mean otherwise.

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<sup>51</sup> Out of the seven undisputed letters of Paul, Paul claims to be an apostle in only four of these, namely, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians. This suggests that the claim may be related to the possibility of his apostleship being questioned. Indeed, apart from Romans, the other three letters have all had this particular element. The mention of his apostleship in Romans may be considered ‘understandable’ since the Christians there in all probability did not know him personally, with perhaps the exception of a few (Rom 16), if chapter 16 may be taken as a clue to the people who personally knew Paul. Cf. Best 1995:19-23.

<sup>52</sup> The ‘seal’ (σφραγίς), i.e. the Corinthians themselves, authenticates his apostleship. Conzelmann 1975:152, n11 says the ‘seal’ means it is a ‘legally valid attestation’; Barrett 1968:201 comments: ‘It is a visible token of something that already exists; thus the Corinthian church does not make Paul an apostle, and his apostleship does not depend on it..., but its existence is a visible sign of his apostleship’.

<sup>53</sup> BAGD 1979:96.

<sup>54</sup> E.g. *Leg* 3.65, 66, 68, 75; *Agr* 92; *Ios* 52, 80, 222; *Mos* 1.286, 303; *Spec* 2.95; 3.142; 4.24; *Virt* 197; *Flacc* 7, 126; *Legat* 38, 67, 350.



The second term further lends weight to the view that Paul's defence is against real opposition. The phrase τοῖς ἀνακρίνουσιν may be a description of those who question Paul's authority. Willis has misunderstood ἀνακρίνουσιν as a future participle. But ἀνακρίνουσιν is rightly understood as a present, active participle. Thus, Fee rightly points out, Willis' position is without grammatical and contextual support.<sup>55</sup> And the context further suggests that Paul's opponents have called into question his apostolic authority precisely because he has failed to accept material support from the Corinthians, as may be seen not only in 1 Cor 4.12, but also in 9.12b and 9.15a.. They therefore constitute 'those who examine' or 'judge' him.<sup>56</sup> The 'judges' of Paul's apostolic office would naturally look at other aspects of Paul's teaching and practice. The issue of Paul's manual labour (thus his refusal to accept material support), his position on idol-meat, the issue of who has the authority to decide what constitutes 'right' or 'appropriate' Christian behaviour with regard to idol-meat, and such like would have formed parts of the background of the Corinthians' judgment of him.

The third word to be examined is αὕτη. What does 'this' (αὕτη) refer to? Does it refer to what precedes (i.e. vv 1-2), or to what follows (i.e. vv 3-27)? Robertson and Plummer argue that αὕτη refers to what precedes as they state, 'That I have seen the Risen Lord, and that you are such a Church as you are – there you have my defence when people ask me for evidence of my Apostleship'.<sup>57</sup> Conzelmann, Fee

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<sup>55</sup> Fee 1987:401, n24.

<sup>56</sup> This has antecedent in 1 Cor 4.3 where Paul says that he is being judged (using the same term ἀνακρίνω) by the Corinthians and possibly their assembly of opposing leaders (ἀνθρωπίνης ἡμέρας). 'Ἀνθρωπίνης ἡμέρας has been noted by scholars, e.g. Barrett 1968:101 and Fee 1987:161, to refer to the Corinthians trying to set up a court to mimic the Day of the Lord's judgment. This will be examined in greater detail on p. 326 below.

<sup>57</sup> Robertson-Plummer 1911:179.

and Collins argue that the word order favours the latter.<sup>58</sup> Barrett recognises that either way is possible.<sup>59</sup>

The placement of αὐτή at the end of the sentence, i.e. ‘my defence...is this’, rather than at the beginning, i.e. ‘this is...my defence...’, shows that vv 1-2 serve as Paul’s statements of his identity as an apostle by way of questions; and vv 3ff elaborate his statements in vv 1-2. In other words, αὐτή need not be a reference to either what precedes or what follows, but it should be seen as a reference to Paul’s overall defence which extends all the way to verse 18. It appears that Paul is trying to show that while he holds the same concept as his critics with regard to what constitutes an apostle in the area of material support, he does not hold the same conviction with regard to its practice. A long and sustained piece of rhetorical defence here clearly suggests that Paul has a ‘real attack’ in view. And the questions Paul puts forward in vv 4-6 seem to be different from those in vv 7-18. The questions in vv 4-6 classify the rights under three main headings: the rights to food and drink; the rights to a believing wife; and the rights not to work. The defence then goes on to show that Paul himself has these rights, particularly the rights to material support.<sup>60</sup>

Apart from the evidence in 1 Cor 9.1-6, we may find evidence elsewhere in the letter which shows that Paul’s authority in Corinth is being questioned.

### 7.3 Evidence from 1 Cor 1-4

There are verbal links between 1 Cor 9 and 1 Cor 1-4 which point to the possible thematic links between the passages in question, and therefore to the question

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<sup>58</sup> Conzelmann 1975:152, n13; Fee 1987:401; Collins 1999:335. Conzelmann further cites 2 Cor 1.12 as evidence for his argument.

<sup>59</sup> Barrett 1968:202.

<sup>60</sup> The principles of marriage have been set out in 1 Cor 7 and Paul does not need to elaborate on them again here. Further, the problem the Corinthians have with Paul is really that of his manual labour and not accepting material support from them.



of Paul's authority in Corinth. In 1 Cor 9.1 Paul begins with several questions which are followed by the argument that the Corinthians are the work of his apostolic labours in the Lord. This work (τὸ ἔργον, 3.14) is repeated in 9.2, which is further linked to the subject of work in 3.9-15, where Paul speaks about the work in architectural terms. It is the work of the builder (3.13). The builders are co-workers of God (θεοῦ...συνεργοί, 3.9) who include the Corinthians. And it is here that Paul says he is the skilled master builder (σοφὸς ἀρχιτέκτων) who laid a foundation (θεμέλιον ἔθηκα) (3.10). Now in 1 Cor 9.1b-2, he says that the Corinthians are his work (τὸ ἔργον) in the Lord.

In 1 Cor 9.3, Paul speaks about making his defence against those who judge him (τοῖς ἀνακρίνουσιν). This is linked back to 4.3 where the judgment against him by the Corinthians is described as a small thing. In both instances, the word ἀνακρίνω is used to describe his critics' action, thus clearly linking the two passages.

Paul questions whether he should not have the right to food and drink (φαγεῖν καὶ πεῖν) in 1 Cor 9.4; and yet the lack of food and drink seems to be part of what gospel preaching involves in 1 Cor 4.11, where he says that he and his companions go hungry and thirsty (πεινῶμεν καὶ διψῶμεν). Although the words are not the same, the link is clear.

A similar connection in contrast can be seen between 1 Cor 9.6ff and 4.12. The former speaks about the right to refrain from working for a living, i.e. doing manual labour; the latter speaks about weariness from such manual labour. In both, the word ἐργάζομαι is used to refer to this manual labour. And the context of 4.12 suggests he knows it is a 'shameful' matter in the eyes of the Corinthians.

The next verbal link can be seen in the matter of spiritual food. Paul argues that he has sown spiritual good among the Corinthians (εἰ ἡμεῖς ὑμῖν τὰ πνευματικὰ ἐσπείραμεν,..., 9.11). This is seen earlier in 1 Cor 3.6: Paul ‘planted’ (ἐφύτευσα) and Apollos ‘watered’. The ‘sowing’ of 9.11 closely parallels the ‘planting’ of 3.6.<sup>61</sup>

In 1 Cor 9.15, Paul mentions his ground for boasting, i.e. proclaiming the gospel without cost. The word used here is καυχημά, whose verb καυχάομαι, in two different forms,<sup>62</sup> is used in 1 Cor 1.29, 31b. Although 1 Cor 1.31b is a quotation from Jer 9.23-24, the use of the word in both passages suggests that Paul thinks he is applying the Jeremiah quotation to himself in 9.15. Most likely Paul believes that his boasting is not about his own achievement, but what he has done for the sake of the gospel (1 Cor 9.12). Thus, his boasting would be considered a boasting ‘in the Lord’ (ἐν κυρίῳ).<sup>63</sup>

The even more important verbal link between 1 Cor 9 and 1 Cor 1-4 is that of proclaiming the gospel. In 9.16-18, Paul further elaborates the nature of his proclamation of the gospel. For Paul, proclaiming the gospel is an ‘obligation’ (ἀνάγκη), a commission entrusted to him (οἰκονομίαν πεπίστευμαι, ‘I am entrusted with administration’, 1 Cor 9.17). This ‘administration’ is a clear reference to the proclamation of the gospel in 9.16, which echoes the οἰκονόμοι of 4.1-2 (cf. 1.17 which states the purpose of Paul’s commissioning). The same proclamation is further said to have its reward (μισθός) from proclaiming the gospel without charge.

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Fee 1987:125, 409 who rightly refers the ‘spiritual good’ to the gospel, which is both ‘milk’ and ‘solid food’.

<sup>62</sup> ‘Ο καυχώμενος ἐν κυρίῳ καυχάσθω (1 Cor 1.31).

<sup>63</sup> Cf. 2 Cor 10.17 where the Jeremiah quotation is used in a context similar to that of 1 Cor 9.1-2.



The idea of the reception of a 'reward' for 'work' done has been mentioned in 3.8,<sup>64</sup> although the μισθός in 3.8 is less specific than that in 9.18. But the issue of 'reward' in both passages links the passages together and possibly even points to a parallel between the works of Paul and his fellow workers, and those of his opponents (hence the hint in 3.12-15 that there are those who do shoddy work which will eventually be destroyed by God's eschatological fire), and the 'rewards' that accompany the works.

One final link may be seen between 9.23 and 4.10. In 9.23, Paul says that he is all things to all people 'for the sake of the gospel' (διὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον). In 4.10, he speaks of himself and his fellow workers as fools 'for the sake of Christ' (διὰ Χριστόν), in a clear reference to their physical hardship experienced during the preaching of the gospel. It appears that the context of 9.23 and that of 4.10 do cohere. Certainly, in refusing material support and by taking up manual labour 'for the sake of Christ', Paul faces many uncertainties, including those of hunger and thirst, not to mention physical dangers (4.11-13). And in his efforts to be 'all things' to 'all people', he similarly faces problems, including the implications for his own apostolic authority. But in both instances, he claims he has done it all for the sake of Christ, who is the content of his gospel (1 Cor 2.2).<sup>65</sup>

The verbal links demonstrated above between 1 Cor 9 and 1 Cor 1-4 justify our search for evidence in 1 Cor 1-4 that may suggest that Paul's authority is being challenged in Corinth. If indeed 1 Cor 1-4 can confirm such a challenge to Paul's

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<sup>64</sup> τὸ ἔργον has been mentioned in 9.1-2; and again in 3.14 to refer to the work of building the Corinthian church. See p. 321 above.

<sup>65</sup> Fee 1987:432 says that Paul is not referring to the content of the gospel, but to the 'progress' of the gospel. By this, he means the 'progress' of the preaching of the gospel, which for Paul is none other than the preaching of Jesus Christ. It is difficult to see how the use of the 'gospel' here in 9.23 is a reference to the gospel's 'progress' without reference to its 'content'.

authority, then it is likely that Paul's argument in 1 Cor 9 may be a genuine defence of his authority.

What evidence is there in 1 Cor 1-4 which shows that Paul's authority in the Corinthian church is being questioned? To begin with, the first sign of problems within the Corinthian church is that of party division in relation to certain personalities, which can be seen in Paul appealing to the Corinthians (παρακαλῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς...,) to be 'united in the same mind and the same purpose' (1 Cor 1.10). The division appears deep as various members of the church pledge themselves to different personalities such as Cephas, Apollos, Paul, and even 'Christ' (1.12; 3.4). What do we make of these slogans? While it is not clear whether the slogans refer to four specific parties, it is implicit that not all the Corinthians accept Paul as their apostle, since some of them recognise such figures as Cephas and Apollos as their preferred leaders.<sup>66</sup> There is no clear reason given for such party division. What is certain is that there are quarrels among the Corinthians.<sup>67</sup> Paul mentions some possible causes: the attractions of the baptisers to their own following (1.14-17); the issue of 'wisdom' (σοφία, 1.18-11); and the boast about the perceived greatness of the leaders (3.21-22). Munck argues that there are no factions in the Corinthian church. To him, Paul intends 1 Cor 11.19, in which the word for factions, αἵρεσις, appears to be taken eschatologically, in the sense that factions are afflictions meant to bring out the genuine Christians.<sup>68</sup> Munck views αἵρεσις and σχίσμα differently, without explaining why Paul uses the two

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<sup>66</sup> Cf. Munck 1959:135-67 who argues that there are no factions in Corinth and that Paul is describing the situation in Corinth as arising from 'bickerings'. Dahl 1967:313 argues that the slogans do not mean that there are four parties, but that Paul is more probably addressing the Corinthian church as a whole in chs 1-4; he therefore thinks 'it is not possible to take any one section to refer to any one of the "parties"', but agrees with Baur's hypothesis that 1 Cor 1-4 is an 'apologetic section' in which Paul seeks to justify his apostolic ministry (317), although he does not agree with Baur's entire thesis that Paul is countering Judaizers in Corinth.

<sup>67</sup> Dahl 1967:318.

<sup>68</sup> Munck 1959:136-37.



words almost interchangeably. For in 1 Cor 11.18, Paul says that he hears about divisions among the Corinthians, and then goes on to elaborate in 11.19 that there must be 'factions' among the Corinthians (δεῖ γὰρ καὶ αἰρέσεις ἐν ὑμῖν...). In other words, it is possible that for Paul the two words mean basically the same thing: divisions in the church!<sup>69</sup> And if αἵρεσις and σχίσμα are used interchangeably, then the bickerings which Munck says are what Paul is combating, not factions, would be the results of both αἵρεσις and σχίσμα,<sup>70</sup> since he thinks that these Corinthian church members exclude the others. Perhaps, this is what Welborn calls 'church politics', a conclusion he has reached on the basis that Paul's description of the situation in Corinth is given in terms similar to those used to 'characterize conflicts within city-states by Greco-Roman historians'.<sup>71</sup> This may help to suggest that such party division involves the possibility of Paul's apostolic authority being questioned.

Dahl rightly points out that the unity in Christ and the quarrels in Corinth are related to the function of the apostles and Christian leaders, and the esteem in which they are being held.<sup>72</sup> Further, the theme of Paul and his relations to the church, according to Dahl, 'comes in at all important points of transition'. On the basis of these observations, Dahl argues that Paul is always pointing to the 'special ministry' entrusted to him, arguing that he is not to be judged by any human court, and having his own ministry and suffering in mind even when he is contrasting the predicaments

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<sup>69</sup> Munck's overall argument is that the Corinthians misunderstood Christianity as wisdom, as a result of their Greek background. They therefore see their leaders as teachers of wisdom, like the rhetors and the sophists. They therefore think that they are wise because of their acceptance of the Christian leaders' teaching. This becomes their ground for boasting.

<sup>70</sup> Munck 1959:139, 'Paul therefore describes the conditions that he is combating not as factions but as bickerings, arising because the individual church members profess as their teacher Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or Christ, and exclude the others'.

<sup>71</sup> Welborn 1987:86; see, particularly, his discussion on the slogans in 1 Cor 1.12 where he argues from ancient sources that the kind of party divisions within the Corinthian church are in fact the counterpart of the factious behaviour in the political realm of Graeco-Roman world (90-93).

<sup>72</sup> Dahl 1967:320.

of the apostles with the rich and the wise in Corinth. He says that all this leads up to Paul's conclusion that he is the Corinthians' father in Christ Jesus through the gospel (4.15). Dahl concludes,

It would be unfair to take preparation for this statement to be the main function of everything that has been said; yet, one aim of what Paul has to say about the strife at Corinth, about wisdom and foolishness, and about the function of Christian leaders, is to *re-establish his authority as apostle and spiritual father of the church at Corinth*.<sup>73</sup> (emphasis mine)

Dahl's observations are helpful. For in Paul's statements about the divisions at Corinth, he seems to be trying to show three basic facts: (1) what he is sent to do; (2) how he is supposed to carry out his job; and (3) his status in relation to the Corinthians as a result of (1) and (2). The parties, according to Paul, pledge allegiance to various leaders. In 1 Cor 1.17-25, Paul points out that he is sent to do just one thing: the proclamation of the gospel. And he further argues in 2.1-5 that he is to carry out his proclamation, not according to superiority of word or of wisdom (οὐ καθ' ὑπεροχὴν ἢ σοφίας, 2.1), nor with persuasive words of wisdom (ἐν πειθοῖς σοφίας λόγοις, 2.4), but in weakness, fear, and trembling (ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ καὶ ἐν φόβῳ καὶ ἐν τρόμῳ πολλῷ, 2.3), with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power (ἀποδείξει πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως, 2.4). The first two points suggest that Paul's status as the founding apostle is in jeopardy because the Corinthians are making the ability to articulate words of wisdom one of the criteria for recognising a leader. Thus, Paul's status seems to be undermined because he does not speak in superior words or wisdom. The fact that Paul devotes a relatively lengthy section within chs 1-4 to his style of proclaiming the gospel suggests that the public preaching of the Christ-event is

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<sup>73</sup> Dahl 1967:321.



not only the central activity of his work,<sup>74</sup> but also the main target of criticism by some of the Corinthians.<sup>75</sup> But how does the question of Paul's style of public speaking relate to the kind of defence Paul puts up in 1 Cor 9? What can be said is that 1 Cor 1-4 demonstrate that Paul's authority is being questioned on one ground; while in 1 Cor 9, his defence shows that the ground on which his authority is being questioned in chs 1-4 is not just one. 1 Cor 9 shows that the material support offered by the Corinthians which Paul rejects is yet another ground for some of the Corinthians' questioning of Paul's authority. And Dahl is right to say that the party slogans 'are all to be understood as declarations of independence from Paul'.<sup>76</sup> It is sufficient at this point to posit that the party politics in the Corinthian church suggests that Paul's authority is not altogether firm. Other signs also point to that hypothesis.

Another possible piece of evidence which points to Paul's authority being questioned is Paul's insistence on his role as the founder of the Corinthian church. In 1 Cor 3.6, 10; 4.15, Paul seems to imply that the Corinthians are not giving due recognition to the fact that he was the one who 'planted', that he was the one who 'laid' the foundation of the Corinthian church, that he became their 'father' in Christ Jesus through the gospel. In short, these words of Paul suggest that the Corinthians are questioning his apostolic authority among them. It is certain that Paul does not think Apollos poses a threat to his position as the founding apostle since he views himself and Apollos as co-workers of God (1 Cor 3.9) through whom the Corinthians have come to faith (1 Cor 3.5). What Paul is arguing against is the divisions within the

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<sup>74</sup> See Litfin 1994:151-52 who states that 'Paul's ministry was singularly focused upon his role as a public speaker'. He cites the verbs which dominate Paul's references to his ministry, namely, εὐαγγελίζω, κηρύσσω, καταγγέλλω, λαλέω, παρακαλέω, and μαρτυρέω. His detailed listing of these verbs in the Corinthian correspondence alone amount to 24. See 1994:152, n14.

<sup>75</sup> Two references may shed light on this point: the first is 2 Cor 10.10 where Paul's opponents criticise his speech as 'contemptible' (ὁ λόγος ἐξουθενημένος); the second is 2 Cor 11.6 where Paul admits that he is untrained in speech (ἰδιώτης τῷ λόγῳ); cf. Litfin 1994:154, n16 and 155.

<sup>76</sup> Dahl 1967:322; cf. Litfin 1994:183-85.

Corinthian church. Litfin is right that there are only two groups: those who align themselves with Paul; and those who align themselves with others against Paul.<sup>77</sup> He further argues that Paul's concern with the disunity in the body of Christ resulting from the 'personality centered factions' is what drives him to be as 'critical of those who aligned themselves with Christ and with himself as he was of the others'.<sup>78</sup> However, he does not take into account the possibility that Paul could have been more pleased had all the Corinthians declared themselves as 'children of Paul', or as 'belonging to Paul'. For Paul very quickly moves to state his own status as the one who 'planted', and emphasise his role as the 'skilled master builder' (σοφὸς ἀρχιτέκτων, 3.10). Fee interprets this verse as Paul's reference to his 'apostolic task of building churches', and that in laying the foundation of Jesus Christ and him crucified, he is the truly 'wise' (σοφός) master-builder whose work is in contrast to the 'wise' in Corinth who build the church of God with perishable materials.<sup>79</sup> This means that while Paul is careful to reflect his belief that he and the other workers are equal, he also wants the Corinthians to note his contributions as the founder of the church and therefore accept his authority. Paul also seems to imply that when his apostolic authority is in jeopardy as a result of someone else's work, that person's work is probably made up of perishable materials and will not last the eschatological fire of God (1 Cor 3.13). 1 Cor 3.16-17 further show this possibility. For Paul is the one who has laid the indispensable foundation; anyone who tries to build must do so only on the foundation which he has laid.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Litfin 1994:184.

<sup>78</sup> Litfin 1994:181; cf. Barrett 1968:86-87 who points out that Paul is aware that someone else may build upon his foundation. See 1 Cor 4.15 where Paul argues that he 'became their father' in Christ through the gospel (more on this later).

<sup>79</sup> Fee 1987:137-38.

<sup>80</sup> Dahl 1967:327.



1 Cor 4.15 serves as yet another piece of supporting evidence which points to the fact that Paul's authority is being questioned in Corinth. Paul does not forbid the Corinthians from having παιδαγωγοί; what is important is that they only have one 'father' in Christ. The παιδαγωγοί<sup>81</sup> are meant to assist the Corinthians in their understanding of Christian behaviour,<sup>82</sup> but the one whom the Corinthians are to imitate ultimately remains Paul. Thus, we see Paul's use of the word οὖν (therefore), immediately following his emphasis on being their 'father' (4.16), in the appeal to the Corinthians to 'be imitators' of him (μιμηταί μου γίνεσθε). Why does Paul mention or emphasise his founding role to the Corinthians, and why does he say ἐγὼ ὑμᾶς ἐγέννησα, when in 3.6-10 he has already made quite clear that he is the master-builder? It appears rather superfluous for him to repeat this. There are three possible reasons.

First, the Corinthians are behaving in a way which Paul disapproves. This has already been seen in the fact that they are divided and that there are quarrels in the church. The second reason is that the Corinthians have begun to recognise the leadership of other people at the expense of Paul, calling Paul's apostolic authority into question. The third reason lies in the possibility that the Corinthians have somehow 'devalued' Paul's status as their founding father and therefore no longer follow his ways. Thus, in 4.17, Paul says he is sending Timothy to the Corinthians to 'remind' (ἀναμνήσει, 'will remind') them his ways in Christ Jesus (ταῖς ὁδοῦς μου ταῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ).

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<sup>81</sup> The preceding word μυρίους, meaning 'ten thousand', cannot be literal. It should mean 'innumerable, countless', as Fee 1987:185, n16 rightly renders it. Cf. BAGD 529.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Barrett 1968:115 who suggests that the 'tutors' might teach the Corinthians 'wisdom'. Fee 1987:185 explains that παιδαγωγός as a 'guardian' was an ordinary but trusted slave to whom a father handed his children (usually sons) to be overseen by the slave.

Paul thinks he has to bring the Corinthians back to the 'ways in Christ Jesus'. But to do that he would have to have the authority to instruct and teach them; which further means that in order to restore his status as the authoritative founding apostle of the Corinthian church, Paul has to show that he is *the* one through whom the existence of the Corinthian church is made possible.<sup>83</sup> Thus, he argues that the Corinthians do not have many fathers (οὐ πολλοὺς πατέρας, 4.15) and that he was the one who 'begot' them. And the way he 'begot' the Corinthians is different from the 'wise' at Corinth. He 'begot' them ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου.<sup>84</sup> Thus the lack of recognition among the Corinthians of Paul's status as the founding father shows that his authority is being questioned.

In addition to the above, 1 Cor 4.1-5 also suggest that Paul is being 'judged' by the Corinthians. In v 1, he states how the apostles are to be viewed: servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries (οὕτως ἡμᾶς...ὡς ὑπηρέτας Χριστοῦ καὶ οἰκονόμους μυστηρίων θεοῦ).<sup>85</sup> This could be because the Corinthians do not regard the apostles as such. Conzelmann says that by this Paul 'demands an *objective* judgment of the readers'.<sup>86</sup> That is to say, the Corinthians should judge the apostles as servants of God, without letting their relationship with the apostles colour their

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<sup>83</sup> Dahl 1967:329 states that re-establishing his apostolic authority, as founder and spiritual father of the Corinthian church as a whole, is necessary for Paul before he could go on to answer the questions raised by the Corinthians.

<sup>84</sup> He is therefore deliberate when he refers to Timothy as his 'beloved and faithful child in the Lord' (τέκνον ἀγαπητὸν καὶ πιστὸν ἐν κυρίῳ, 4.17), as if to point out to them that they are not the only ones to whom he has become 'father in Christ Jesus', there are others. And Fee 1987:185 says that Paul's unique relationship to the Corinthians gives him 'a special authority over and responsibility toward them'.

<sup>85</sup> The use of ἡμᾶς instead of μέ should be seen in connection with 3.22-23 where Paul says he belongs to the Corinthians and the Corinthians belong to Christ and Christ to God. Paul is the one who 'planted', i.e. the one who preached the gospel to the Corinthians, thereby bringing into existence the Corinthian church. Thus, while the use of ἡμᾶς includes other apostles, Paul is primarily referring to himself. Thus, in v 3, Paul very quickly moves back to the singular ἐγώ and says that he is a victim of the Corinthians' judgement.

<sup>86</sup> Conzelmann 1975:83.



judgment. Fee is probably right that Paul is telling the Corinthians that the apostles are servants of Christ and are therefore accountable to God alone.<sup>87</sup> The corollary is that the Corinthians are in no position to judge Paul, as Paul explicitly states in vv 2-5.

What Paul is therefore saying is that they carry the authority of Christ, and therefore of God, to do their work. What is required (ζητεῖται)<sup>88</sup> of them is faithfulness (i.e.

πιστός τις εὐρεθῇ, 4.2). The Corinthians have questioned Paul's apostolic authority because they do not regard him as 'wise' in speech, nor fully recognise his founding contributions, nor his status as their 'father' in Christ. Further, they probably regard Paul's manual labour demeaning of an apostle (cf. 1 Cor 4.9-13), and his refusal to accept material support from them a sign that he is not an apostle. As mentioned earlier, in 1 Cor 4.9-13, Paul explicitly says he has grown weary from the work of his hands, and again here in 1 Cor 9 that he has given up his rights to material support.

But the criterion which Paul is setting up here is faithfulness, which he meets by preaching the gospel and teaching the Corinthians (and other churches!) the 'ways in Christ Jesus'. Thus, it is the Lord who judges him (1 Cor 4.4). This is an important principle for Paul, which to his mind is either not known to the Corinthians or is deliberately ignored by them.<sup>89</sup> The words ἀνακρίνω and κρίνω, which appear three times and once respectively in these short five verses, and the attention on Paul

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<sup>87</sup> Fee 1987:158.

<sup>88</sup> ζητεῖται is supported by B Ψ 0289 M latt sy co, and is preferred over ζητεῖτε as the context seems to support the reading, even though the latter has relatively significant support from several manuscripts: P<sup>46</sup> κ( ) A C D F G P 6. 33. 104. 365. 1505. 1739. 1881. 2464 *al.* Fee 1987:157 and Barrett 1968:101 think ζητεῖτε is probably secondary. Héring 1962:27 thinks that there is no reason against ζητεῖτε provided it is used as an imperative. His translation of 4.2 as 'Hence, moreover, seek nothing else of administrators than that they are faithful', though quite literal, does not seem appropriate to the context.

<sup>89</sup> Fee 1987:160 prefers a narrower meaning of 'faithfulness' here which he takes to mean 'absolute fidelity to the gospel as he received it and preached it'. The overall context of 1 Corinthians indicates a much broader meaning.

himself, all suggest that the issue involves some form of judgement meted out against Paul. What is the judgement which the Corinthians have made against Paul?

The word ἀνακρίνω can have several meanings. Liddell and Scott provide three categories of meaning. The first involves the meaning of *examine closely; investigate; and inquire*. The second means the examination of magistrates to determine their qualifications; the examination by magistrates of persons involved in a suit; and the general meaning of *examine*. The last means *wrangle* one with another.<sup>90</sup>

Paul's reference to a 'human court' (ἀνθρωπίνη ἡμέρα) in v 3 and the mention of 'before the time' (πρὸ καιροῦ) in v 5 suggest that the Corinthians have set themselves up like a grand jury against Paul, as if they were acting on the eschatological 'Day' of God.<sup>91</sup> Hence Paul says 'it is the Lord who judges me' and tells the Corinthians not to pronounce judgement before the 'Day' of the Lord. For the judgement of God on the 'Day' of the coming of the Lord is what counts. It is here that Paul sets the 'human day' against 'the Lord's Day' and so exposes the comparative insignificance of the former.<sup>92</sup> Because the judgement of God would expose the 'purposes of the heart' (ταῖς βουλαῖς τῶν καρδιῶν), Paul may be issuing a thinly veiled threat to the Corinthians that the 'purposes' of their heart will eventually be exposed.<sup>93</sup> At that time, each one will receive whatever reward or punishment from God (ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ) on the basis of one's 'deeds' and 'purposes of

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<sup>90</sup> Liddell-Scott 1940:109; cf. BAGD 56.

<sup>91</sup> The phrase πρὸ καιροῦ which means 'before the time' is defined by ἕως ἃν ἔλθῃ ὁ κύριος (until the Lord comes), thus referring to the eschatological 'judgement Day' of the Lord. Cf. Fee 1987:163, nn30-31; see also BAGD 334.

<sup>92</sup> It is unlikely that the 'judgement' of the Corinthians means little or nothing to Paul. The fact that he mentions it here and again in 9.3, and the fact that he is trying to defend himself as the founding apostle of the Corinthian church, show that the 'judgement' does mean something to him.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 3.13-15 where a close parallel has been set up in which Paul uses the metaphor of testing materials by fire to describe the eschatological judgement of God.



heart'. These are not simple explanations of the eschatological judgement day of God. They are serious arguments set within a larger context of a tense relationship between Paul and the Corinthians in which his apostolic authority is being questioned.

A final piece of evidence in 1 Cor 1-4 that shows that Paul's authority is being questioned at Corinth is found in 1 Cor 4.16ff. In this section, Paul urges the Corinthians to be imitators of him (μιμηταὶ μου γίνεσθε, 4.16). This follows his argument that he is their 'father' in Christ Jesus through the preaching of the gospel (4.15).<sup>94</sup> But if the Corinthians were to be Paul's imitators, it means they would need to know what about Paul they are to imitate. To make the Corinthians' imitating possible, Paul sends them Timothy who will 'remind' (ἀναμνήσει) them of his 'ways in Christ Jesus' (ταῖς ὁδοῦς μου ταῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ).<sup>95</sup> The ways of Paul are what he teaches in every church (4.17). This leads to a more fundamental question. Why should the Corinthians imitate Paul's ways? There are basically two answers: (1) Paul is their 'father' in Christ Jesus; and (2) Paul's ways are the ways in Christ Jesus. 'Paul's ways in Christ Jesus' precisely model those of the earthly Jesus, as Paul sets out in 4.9-13. He is therefore able to lay claim to his apostolic authority by appealing to his lifestyle. Yet, this could be the very reason why the Corinthians cannot accept Paul's apostolic authority: manual labour and the refusal of material support. They do not regard apostleship from Paul's perspective, i.e. an apostle is a

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<sup>94</sup> See the discussion on pp. 329 above.

<sup>95</sup> Chow 1992:98 compares the sending of Timothy to the Corinthians and the sending to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 2.17-3.13) and the Philippians (Phil 2.19-24) and observes that both the Thessalonians and the Philippians seem quite positive about Paul and vice versa. Further, the language of warmth and such like, which is present in 1 Thess 2.17-3.13, is absent from 1 Cor 4.14-21. Another observation also points to the fact that Paul and the Corinthians are having problems. Unlike the Thessalonian and Philippian passages, in 1 Cor 4.14-21, Paul actually explains the sending of Timothy. And in 1 Cor 16.10-11, he seems to be concerned about Timothy's reception. The explanation in 1 Cor 4.14-21, coupled with 16.10-11, suggests that if the Corinthians are 'examining' and questioning Paul's authority, they may pose a challenging threat to Timothy and even possibly despise him; see Fee 1987:188-89.

servant of God (4.1). Their criteria differ from those which issue from what Paul considers to be God's perspective.<sup>96</sup> The simple twin-answer points to yet another fundamental reason: Paul must carry the authority in order to be imitated! But why should Paul send someone to remind the Corinthians of his ways in Christ Jesus if they have not abandoned those ways? And why would they abandon what they have been taught if they have not also come to doubt, or question, Paul's apostolic authority? In other words, the question here has to do with conflicts between Paul and the Corinthians, and the conflicts are, as Meeks puts it, 'directly *about* authority; they are questions about who makes decisions and who has to obey, and why'.<sup>97</sup>

The issue of Paul's authority also has to do with his absence from Corinth. In 1 Cor 4.18, Paul says that some, thinking that he is not coming to Corinth, have become arrogant (ἐφυσιώθησαν). Verse 19 indicates that the 'arrogance' is directly related to the questioning of 'Paul's ways in Christ Jesus', resulting in some Corinthians' abandonment of those 'ways'. Barrett explains that when Paul was present at Corinth, he was able to keep a close watch on the Corinthians' behaviour, preventing some of them from running wild. But after he left them, the freedom of the Corinthians became licence and they became so used to 'pleasing themselves without restraint that they overlooked the possibility of his return'.<sup>98</sup> Thus, Paul warns that if God wills it, he will come and find out what is behind these 'arrogant people', i.e. their power (ἡ δύναμις, 4.19). What Paul is suggesting is that these people who question his authority are only capable in their 'speech' (ἐν λόγῳ, 4.19), whereas the kingdom of

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<sup>96</sup> Cf. Fee 1987:186-87; see also Litfin 1994:226-33.

<sup>97</sup> Meeks 1983:117.

<sup>98</sup> Barrett 1968:117. Fee 1987:190 says that Paul's failure to return to Corinth after some years, his lack of wisdom and eloquence combine to give the gospel and himself a poor showing. This therefore leads to the Corinthians' attitude towards him.



God is not dependent upon 'word', but on 'power' (ἐν δύνάμει, 4.20).<sup>99</sup> And that is why he is not interested in the content of their 'speech' (4.19), but only in their 'power'. Thus, the power-challenge here is who has the δύναμις to determine how people behave in Corinth. And the questions in verse 21 show that Paul may have to resort to something more drastic in order to safeguard his authority. If the Corinthians change their attitudes and accept Paul's ways in Christ, then the consequence would be 'love'; the alternative is 'discipline', i.e. the 'stick'.

Although the above statements of Paul in 1 Cor 1-4 may not individually reveal that Paul's apostolic authority is being questioned at Corinth, taken as a whole, they strongly suggest that Paul's apostolic authority is not altogether a settled issue. The party divisions indicate that not all Corinthians are loyal to Paul; some have probably given his status as an apostle less recognition than Paul would have liked it to be. His arguments that he is the one who 'planted', the 'skilled master-builder' who laid the foundation, point to the same suggestion that his apostolic position is less than firm. Some of the Corinthians have probably looked to other leaders, instead of Paul. This has implications for Paul and his preaching. The grounds for calling into question Paul's authority are various: his inability to speak 'wisdom', his manual labour, his lifestyle, and his refusal to accept material support (cf. 1 Cor 9). Paul, however, argues that the Corinthians have perceived apostles wrongly, i.e. from a worldly perspective. God's perspective is that they are servants and only God can judge them. Further, Paul's ways are the ways in Christ Jesus which he has taught in every church, including the Corinthian church. As their founding father, he wants them to model their lives after his. He will visit them to execute disciplinary action against those who

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<sup>99</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 2.4-5: 'My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God'.

are 'arrogant', but will display love should they alter their attitudes and behaviour. Thus, Paul's authority as an apostle at Corinth is very much under challenge.

#### 7.4 The double purpose of 1 Cor 9: authority and example

In section 7.2, we have argued that 1 Cor 9 constitutes Paul's defence of his authority,<sup>100</sup> and in section 7.3, we have demonstrated the links between 1 Cor 9 and 1 Cor 1-4, and shown from 1 Cor 1-4 that Paul's authority is being questioned in Corinth. How does Paul defend his authority in 1 Cor 9? Further, 9.19-23 indicate that Paul is willing to become a slave to others for the sake of the gospel. This raises the question as to why Paul should enslave himself to others, when he has just sought to re-establish or defend his authority in 9.1-18. If we examine closely, it would become clear that Paul has a double purpose in 1 Cor 9: defence of his apostolic authority and example to the 'strong' on idolatrous behaviour. The example includes the place of discipline in the giving up of such rights and its eschatological benefits (1 Cor 9.24-27). And it is directly related to the whole issue of the idolatrous behaviour of the 'strong'.

In 1 Cor 9.1-18, Paul re-establishes his authority by putting forward 17 questions, some of which ask the same thing but are couched differently. By looking at the questions, it is possible for us to know what answers Paul is expecting. And by looking at these answers, it is possible to see what the Corinthians would probably have understood Paul to be saying, i.e. the defence of his authority. The first few verses show that Paul believes that he is not only an apostle, but a 'free apostle', in the sense that he is free to accept or to reject the support to which he is entitled. The importance of ἐξουσία, following 1 Cor 8.9, is played out in Paul's argument throughout. Being 'free', being an 'apostle', and having seen the Lord are all one and

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<sup>100</sup> See pp. 313-19 above for a more detailed treatment of 1 Cor 9.1-5. Since these verses have already been discussed there, no further elaboration is needed here, save for a short summary.



the same thing for Paul.<sup>101</sup> For it was precisely during his seeing the Lord that he was commissioned to preach to the Gentiles (Gal 1.11-12, 15; cf. 1 Cor 15.8-10), that he became an apostle who has been set 'free' by the very gospel he was persecuting and for which he is now working.

Being an apostle and 'free' means that Paul can lay claim to those material things to which he is entitled: food and drink (9.4), a wife (9.5), freedom from work (9.6), and rewards from spiritual work (9.7-12a). These entitlements are summarised in verses 13-14 with a further 'injunction', or 'charge', or 'command' of the Lord (ὁ κύριος διέταξεν...). The setting out of Paul's entitlements involves three stages: (1) illustrations from everyday life analogy (9.4-11); (2) argument from scripture, the cultic tradition, a command of the Lord (9.13-14); and (3) Paul's actual practice and his reasons – the giving up of his 'right' (9.12b, 15-23).

The first stage involves Paul's own view that he is entitled to basic food and drink, and a believing wife. The question of food and drink is directly related to the eating of meat in chapter 8. For in 1 Cor 8.13, Paul says that he will never eat meat if it causes fellow Christians to fall. The giving up of this particular right therefore has to do with the decision not to cause anyone to fall in 8.13. And it highlights the nature of 'freedom' and 'right', i.e. freedom and right are intertwined in the sense that Paul has ἐξουσία to be 'free' (ἐλεύθερος), and has the 'freedom' to choose how his ἐξουσία is to be exercised. This idea of having the 'right' to food and drink therefore anticipates what he is going to say in 9.19-23.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Malherbe 1994:239.

<sup>102</sup> Fee 1987:402 thinks this analysis is difficult to sustain. For he argues that 8.1-13 is not just about eating idol food, but about eating it in idol temples. Besides, other passages such as 9.19-23, 10.29b-30, and 10.31, show that Paul does not always abstain from such food. He is correct in arguing that Paul has a right to the support of 'food and drink' from the Corinthians. However, Paul has refused such support and is therefore being judged. Thus, the 'food and drink' here has to do with not only his right to the Corinthians' material support, but also his giving up of the support and his reasons for it, which

The entitlement to a believing wife, however, is problematic. It is possible that Paul's unmarried status (cf. 1 Cor 7.8) has been judged by the Corinthians to be an indication of the lack of authenticity of his apostleship,<sup>103</sup> on the basis that most other apostles<sup>104</sup> are accompanied by their spouses.<sup>105</sup> The reference to the other apostles indicates that the Corinthians have compared Paul to them.<sup>106</sup> Thus, the mention of the company of a wife becomes necessary in Paul's effort in establishing his apostolic authority.

The right to basic necessities is expanded in two further questions with two different metaphors, one military and the other agricultural (v 7). Both are meant to elicit a negative answer. The point of the questions is that whatever one may be, a soldier, or a farmer, or a shepherd, one expects to be sustained by one's 'produce' or 'flock', it is one's right.<sup>107</sup> This particular argument takes us back to verses 1-2 where he says that they (the Corinthians) are his 'work in the Lord' and 'the seal of his apostleship'. In other words, like the people in the various examples, Paul is entitled to the 'produce' of his 'work'.<sup>108</sup> This same point is raised again in verses 11-12. This

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Paul has already briefly mentioned in 8.13. Those passages Fee cites in fact precisely argue that Paul will do whatever he has to do in order to advance the gospel, including abstaining from idol-meat. Cf. Barrett 1968:202; Conzelmann 1975:153.

<sup>103</sup> Fee 1987:403.

<sup>104</sup> οἱ λοιποὶ ἀπόστολοι (the rest of the apostles) could be a reference to the twelve. However, from 1 Cor 15, we know Paul has a broader definition of an apostle.

<sup>105</sup> Barrett 1968:203 points out that it is not only an apostolic theory but also an apostolic practice that apostles have the right to have their wives maintained by the communities in which they work. Cf. Conzelmann 1975:153 who asks whether we should add 'at the expense of the community' to ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα περιάγειν, although he does not discuss the issue.

<sup>106</sup> Fee 1987:403, 'Even his fellow tentmakers are a married couple (Acts 18.3). How is it, the Corinthians wonder, given what all others do, that he and his companions are not accompanied by wives? Does this also say something about the authenticity of his apostleship?'

<sup>107</sup> Fee 1987:405; Barrett 1968:204-5 makes these statements: '...A soldier on service expects to be maintained; why not an apostle?...A vinedresser expects to be nourished from that on which he bestows his labour; why not an apostle?...A herdsman reaps advantage from the flock he cares for; why not an apostle?...'.

<sup>108</sup> Fee 1987:405, 'He (Paul) should expect to be sustained from his 'produce' or 'flock' – the church that owes its existence to him'.



indicates to the Corinthians that even though Paul refuses their material support he is in fact entitled to it. Thus, he sets aside their questioning of his authority on the basis of his refusal of material support.

This argument of Paul does not rest on mere rhetoric; for he goes on to say that he is not resting his case on human reasoning, a possibly sarcastic reference to his critics' dependence on human authority derived from 'wise speech'. This is the second stage of the three-stage argument: moving from everyday life analogies to a more authoritative basis. Paul's case rests on 'written' authority (ἐν γὰρ τῷ Μωϋσέως νόμῳ γέγραπται..., 1 Cor 9.9).<sup>109</sup> His concept of the right of apostles to basic material support comes from his understanding of scripture, which constitutes an appeal to God's authority, since the Law is none other than the Word of God. This is a powerful use of the Jewish source of authority, particularly if the 'strong' have had Jewish influence, as we have shown in chapter six. The citation is from Deut 25.4, οὐ κημώσεις βοῦν ἀλοῶντα (do not muzzle an ox while it is treading [in the field], 1 Cor 9.9).<sup>110</sup> The powerful argument from this particular citation is that Paul seems to be suggesting that by calling into question his apostolic authority, the Corinthians may in fact be trying to apply a muzzle on him, that is, to control him.<sup>111</sup> Yet Paul's argument is precisely that like the labouring ox, he is not to be 'muzzled', for he is entitled to the 'grain'. Presumably, if a law has been laid down to 'protect' animals,<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> The series of questions from v 9 all the way to v 12a assume on the part of the Corinthians a knowledge of the scripture, which strongly suggests the Jewish background of some of the Corinthians. This further strengthens our case that the Corinthians have in one way or the other been influenced by Jewish culture, in whatever form.

<sup>110</sup> This is a slightly different quotation from the LXX which reads: Οὐ φημώσεις βοῦν ἀλοῶντα. Both κημώω and φημώω basically mean quite the same thing, i.e. to put a 'muzzle' on the animal.

<sup>111</sup> Horrell 1996:215 rightly argues that Paul refuses the Corinthians' material support so as not to be obligated to them.

<sup>112</sup> The command not to muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain has to be taken to serve as a 'protection' of the animal from being deprived, rather than as a 'reward', since for an ox to eat from the

certainly human labourers ought to be even more protected, indeed, rewarded.<sup>113</sup> The verse, therefore, serves as Paul's basis for insisting that just as those who labour physically receive physical rewards, those who labour for spiritual reasons ought to reap even more physical rewards (1 Cor 9.11-12a). And by comparing himself to others who have laid claim on the Corinthians (εἰ ἄλλοι τῆς ὑμῶν ἐξουσίας μετέχουσιν),<sup>114</sup> Paul appears to be saying that if others who did not found the Corinthian church could receive support from them, then as the founding apostle he has an even greater right to their support (οὐ μᾶλλον ἡμεῖς;) (9.12a)!<sup>115</sup> The difference is that Paul has not made use of this apostolic right. Thus verse 12b shows Paul's understanding of his choice to decline material support and to resort to manual labour. For him, the gospel is everything, i.e. it determines all his actions.<sup>116</sup>

In 1 Cor 9.13, Paul moves to the example from the cultic tradition. Those who are employed at the temple as well as those who serve at the altar both get their food from the temple and the altar, respectively. It is possible that they are an allusion to Lev 6.16 and Deut 18.1, where Aaron and his sons, and the levitical priests are instructed to eat from what has been sacrificed, as they are the Lord's 'workers'.

Hence, Deut 18.2 says that the levitical priests will have no inheritance because the

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grain while treading it appears to be a convenience. By re-interpreting the command and applying to himself, Paul effectively alters the concept of 'protection' of the command to that of 'reward'.

<sup>113</sup> Héring 1962:78 views this as a Rabbinic argument *a minori ad maius*, from lesser to greater. Weiss 1910:237, 'Wie Pflüger und Drescher arbeiten müssen auf Hoffnung, auf Lohn und Anteil an der Ernte, so ist auch P. als Missionar angewiesen auf einen Lohn seiner Arbeit'. Certainly, the logic Paul is operating on is similar to that of the Synoptic tradition, '...are you not of more value than they (i.e. birds of the air)?' (Matt 6.26).

<sup>114</sup> Who exactly these ἄλλοι are is uncertain. Héring 1962:78 suggests that the way Paul speaks of the Judaizing apostles in 2 Cor 11.20 makes the ἄλλοι appear to refer to the apostles and evangelists from Judaea, although he also concedes that there is no way of confirming this. Fee 1987:409-10 thinks it more likely refers to Apollos and Peter. It is possible that Paul has in mind those he mentions in 9.5.

<sup>115</sup> BAGD 514, on τῆς ὑμῶν ἐξουσίας μετέχουσιν: enjoy authority over you. Thus, Paul's 'right' to the Corinthians' support is directly related to his apostolic authority over them.

<sup>116</sup> Fee 1987:410-11; Thiselton 2000:691 argues that ἐγκοπτή suggests 'avoiding roughening the path for the gospel'. See further Barrett 1968:207.



Lord is their ‘inheritance’ (LXX: κληρος, ‘allotment of land’; the Hebrew יהוה נחלתו, literally means ‘the Lord is their possession’). Although Fee argues that the background is unimportant as both Jewish as well as pagan temples would have had the same principle,<sup>117</sup> the Jewish background of the ‘strong’, particularly their knowledge that idols are nothing in the world and that there is no God but one, is likely to remind them of the scripture.<sup>118</sup> Moreover, since Paul has just mentioned Deut 25.4, it is probable that he has in mind the general principles of the *Torah* on this matter. This is further confirmed by 9.14 where he says, ‘In the same way, the Lord commanded...’ (οὕτως καὶ ὁ κύριος διέταξεν...). It seems unlikely that Paul would allow any possible link between the Synoptic tradition and the pagan temples, and it seems equally unlikely that he would allow such an implication, since he is relatively hostile to idolatry, as we have shown in the previous chapter. If this constitutes yet another reminder of the general principles of the *Torah*, then Paul has ably led his readers to the point where he has the scriptural backing and the cultic tradition to prove that he has the right to the Corinthians’ support.

We move to consider the next most precise of Paul’s arguments, namely, the command of the Lord. For Paul, his right to material support is not based simply on day-to-day analogies, nor only on the principles of the Jewish scripture; more importantly, it is a command of the Lord. Paul is most likely referring to Matt 10.10 and Luke 10.7 where Jesus is said to have taught the disciples two basic principles when preaching: (1) remain in the house that welcomes them, eating and drinking from

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<sup>117</sup> Fee 1987:412, n82. Barrett 1968:207-8 notes that the customs were widespread in antiquity. But it would be trivialising Paul’s argument if, having argued from Deut 25.4 Paul should now turn to an analogy whose background is unimportant. The background, contrary to Fee, is important because the pagan practice would be considered rather irrelevant to Paul’s right as an apostle. Whereas the Jewish scripture is more directly related and relevant to the belief of Paul and the knowledge of the ‘strong’.

<sup>118</sup> Héring 1962:79 observes that there may be a parallelism between the priesthood of the Old Covenant and the ministry of the apostles. He further observes that the same analogy is attested in Rom 15.16. In any case, the phrase οὐκ οἶδατε suggests that the Corinthians are aware of this cultic tradition.

what the household has provided, with the reasoning that the labourers are worthy of their wages;<sup>119</sup> and (2) do not move from house to house. Of these, Paul seems to be making use of the point concerning the labourers' worthiness for wages and interpreting it as a command of the Lord. There are two implications which follow Paul's re-interpretation of this instruction: (1) the apostle has a right to live by the material support of the Corinthians; and (2) since Paul has given up the right to the Corinthians' support, his refusal to accept support would constitute an act of disobedience to the Lord's command. While (1) helps to affirm Paul's right, (2) creates a problem. Murphy-O'Connor asks by what authority Paul re-classified an obligation into a right, and argues that Paul's practice is that he did not consider Jesus' precepts binding all the time, but only as guidelines to be applied critically.<sup>120</sup> Similarly, Witherington takes this as Paul's thinking that such a rule is not binding because it was given for his benefit, not as something he has to do to be a true apostle.<sup>121</sup> Fee argues that this word of Jesus is not a 'command' but a proverb which Jesus applied to his instruction to the 72 when he sent them out to preach; and it is meant for the missionaries' benefits.<sup>122</sup> Paul views it as a 'command' of the Lord 'because it has the net effect of the tradition',<sup>123</sup> i.e. the overall effect of the tradition. And Paul intends to impress upon his readers that his right to their material support is an undisputed fact enshrined in the Lord's command.<sup>124</sup> The Corinthians know best

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<sup>119</sup> The same is also mentioned in 1 Tim 5.18 where Deut 25.4 is also part of the teaching on how those who labour in preaching and teaching ought to be treated.

<sup>120</sup> Murphy-O'Connor 1979:87.

<sup>121</sup> Witherington III 1995:210.

<sup>122</sup> Fee 1987:413, see also his n96.

<sup>123</sup> Fee 1987:413; Barrett 1968:208 states that Paul seldom quotes Jesus' words, but does so here in order to build up a particularly strong case for a practice he himself does not apply.

<sup>124</sup> Fee 1987:413, n91 notes the use of the word καταγγέλλω instead of εὐαγγελίζομαι to be rare. It is possible that Paul meant it to be a word play, where εὐαγγέλιον and καταγγέλλω both share the cognate of ἄγγελος, so as to emphasise the nature of the 'preaching'.



whether Paul is a ‘proclaimer’ of the gospel; and they know best whether Paul ought to live by the gospel.

Paul moves into the third stage with an obvious question now facing him: if he has so vigorously argued for his apostolic authority and thus his right to material support, why does he refuse the very support to which he has a right? In vv 12b and 15, Paul says he has not used the right for the reason that he does not want to put any hindrance (ἐγκοπή) in the way of the gospel. The giving up of his right is something in which he can glory; it is his boast (καύχημα) which he will not give up. Thus, his reason and purpose in refusing material support are precisely to fulfil his apostolic function of proclaiming the gospel. Scholars have adduced various options for explaining Paul’s refusal of material support.

Käsemann argues that Paul’s reward is in preaching the gospel without financial reimbursement; this accounts for his refusal of material support, for it would mean losing his boast and his reward. Further, Käsemann says that the ἀνάγκη in 9.16 acts on Paul with ‘a force like that of a destiny’ so that he is not a free agent; however, he is blessed in his action.<sup>125</sup> Scholars have adduced several reasons for Paul’s refusal of financial support, which serve to explain the meaning of the term ἐγκοπή. First, if Paul were to insist on accepting financial support, then the poor among the Gentiles might hesitate about accepting the gospel, since the resulting financial support would become a hindrance.<sup>126</sup> This, however, is not the case as Paul did accept support from the Macedonians even though he knew they had experienced

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<sup>125</sup> Käsemann 1969:233. The point is further emphasised: ‘Its burden is, that he who loves can and must renounce his rights, however well-founded they may be, if he is to go on really loving and serving effectively’.

<sup>126</sup> Barrett 1968:207; Holmberg 1978:92; similarly Murphy-O’Connor 1979:88 adduces the same reason for Paul’s refusal of financial support.

extreme poverty (cf. 2 Cor 8.2).<sup>127</sup> Similarly, Theissen's and Marshall's argument that Paul tries to make the pioneering mission as effective as possible during the initial stage by not becoming a financial burden is weak,<sup>128</sup> since Paul in 2 Cor 11.9 and 12.14 says that he would never burden the Corinthians at any time. Second, by refusing financial support, Barrett argues, Paul is trying to avoid the misunderstanding that he preaches the gospel for gain, which may also jeopardise the collection mentioned in 16.1.<sup>129</sup> This is possible but unlikely since the two seem to be quite different matters, although they are about money.<sup>130</sup> The third reason has been given by Holmberg and others, that is, Paul would accept financial support from a church only after he has left it.<sup>131</sup> This does not explain Paul's decision not to accept financial support, as he has already left Corinth at the time of writing 1 Corinthians. And the same problem remains an issue even in 2 Cor, when Paul has long left Corinth. A fourth explanation is that Paul's behaviour is meant to model the love and self-sacrifice of Jesus,<sup>132</sup> a possible reason as Paul later calls upon the Corinthians to be 'imitators' of him as he is an 'imitator' of Christ (1 Cor 11.1; cf. 4.16). In other words, by refusing material support, Paul is doing two things. On the one hand, he wishes to imitate Jesus' love and self-sacrifice; on the other hand, he wishes that others too might imitate his attitude and behaviour, the absence of which (a result of his accepting

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<sup>127</sup> Thus, the argument of Dungan 1971:15 that Paul's policy is not to be a burden to the poorer churches does not hold water either.

<sup>128</sup> Theissen 1982:40; and Marshall 1987:176.

<sup>129</sup> Barrett 1968:207; Holmberg 1978:93 further says that the ingrained mistrust in the non-Jewish world of sophists who lived at the expense of others is another possible reason for the common practice that the missionaries work for their own living.

<sup>130</sup> If Paul can succeed in arguing for his right to financial support and in showing and persuading the Corinthians that his giving up of the right serves as an example to them, it might even help the collection, that is, like Paul who gives up his right to material support, the Corinthians ought also to demonstrate the sacrificial attitude of Christ, which Paul imitates, by giving generously and sacrificially for the needy Jerusalem church (cf. 2 Cor 9.6-7).

<sup>131</sup> Holmberg 1978:94; Murphy-O'Connor 1979:88.

<sup>132</sup> Barrett 1968:207; Holmberg 1978:93.



support) would serve as a hindrance to the gospel, that is, the kind of ethical behaviour that should rightly issue from one's acceptance of the gospel would be thwarted! This concept of not putting a hindrance to the gospel by imitating Christ is elaborated later in vv 19ff, where, by making a link between giving up one's right and the proclamation of the gospel, Paul seeks to demonstrate how the 'strong' behave with regard to idol-meat has implications for whether the gospel is advanced or hampered (cf. 1 Cor 8.10-12). Thus, in vv 15b-18 Paul spells out the rationale behind his giving up of his right, and so sets himself as an example to the 'strong'.

In v 12b, Paul states that he would 'endure' (στέγομεν) anything (πάντα) rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel. In v 15b, this refusal to put an obstacle is couched differently, that is, he has established his apostolic rights, not in order to claim them, but to show that he has given them up. And it is described as his ground for boasting (τὸ καύχημα μου οὐδεὶς κενώσει),<sup>133</sup> which he would not surrender. The abrupt break that comes after the clause καλὸν γάρ μοι μάλλον ἀποθανεῖν ἢ is difficult to explain. Fee rightly says that it is not certain as to how Paul would have intended the sentence to end; but goes on to say that the broken clause has its own power and that Paul probably intended the interrupting sentence.<sup>134</sup> Conzelmann argues that Paul's boast lies precisely in his renunciation of his rights, whose sense is plain in the verses that follow.<sup>135</sup> But he does not explain why, in one moment, Paul says his renunciation is ground for boasting, and in another, seems to contradict himself by saying that if he preaches the gospel it is not a boast for him

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<sup>133</sup> οὐδεὶς κενώσει has impressive support: P<sup>46</sup> κ\* B D<sup>c</sup> 33. 1739. 1881 pc b; Tert Ambst Pel. Other readings are ἵνα τις κενώσει and οὐθεὶς μὴ κενώσει, both of which have weaker support compared to the reading οὐδεὶς κενώσει. See also Thiselton 2002:693.

<sup>134</sup> Fee 1987:417; Barrett 1968:208 thinks this is characteristically Pauline as he cites other Pauline passages.

<sup>135</sup> Conzelmann 1975:157.

(ἐὰν γὰρ εὐαγγελίζωμαι, οὐκ ἔστιν μοι καύχημα·, 9.16a). His view that the sentence breaks down unless we read ἦ as ἦ, ‘truly’, may have some merit.<sup>136</sup> In other words, the sentence would have read, ‘For it is good for me rather to die; truly no one shall empty me of my boast’. This means in the first part of the clause, Paul rejects the notion of the previous clause that he might be setting out his rights in order to claim them. And in the second part, he argues that no one, indeed no Corinthian, will be able to convince him to change his mind about refusing support. For this is his boast.

The seemingly contradictory clause in 9.16a is in fact exactly what Paul is saying: preaching the gospel is not his boast, but the preaching *for free*! The reason is that he is called and commissioned to preach the gospel;<sup>137</sup> and he has chosen to fulfil his calling and commission for free.

This is the point of v 17. Paul’s use of the words ἐκὼν and ἄκων indicates that he understands ‘reward’ (μισθός) as the result of a voluntary act. Thus, if his preaching of the gospel was ‘willing’ (ἐκὼν), he would receive a ‘reward’ (μισθὸν ἔχω); if not, then what he is doing is a ‘stewardship’ entrusted to him (οἰκονομίαν πεπίστευμαι). This point is further developed by Martin who analyses 1 Cor 9 on the basis of the concept of slavery in the context of moral philosophy and concludes that when Paul uses ἐκὼν, ἄκων and ἀνάγκη, he is implying that he is a slave of Christ – free people act willingly, but slaves act unwillingly.<sup>138</sup> Martin then argues

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<sup>136</sup> Conzelmann 1975:156, n6; 157, n22.

<sup>137</sup> Käsemann 1969:228 rightly says that the ‘compulsion’ arises out of Paul’s commission to preach the gospel. Conzelmann 1975:157, ‘He has not chosen his own calling. He was called and accordingly stands under constraint’.

<sup>138</sup> Martin 1990:74-76. Cf. Malherbe 1994:238-51 who analyses Paul’s language in the light of Cynics’ and Stoics’ concepts of determinism and free will. On Paul’s argument, Malherbe states: ‘Although he has necessity laid upon him to preach the gospel, he does so willingly and has a reward. Were he to preach unwillingly, he would nevertheless have to preach, for he has been entrusted with an οἰκονομία’.



that Paul's action would produce two kinds of reaction. One reaction would be from the educated, trained people who were familiar with the moral philosophical discourse, which is one of shock as they would view Paul's admission that he is preaching under 'compulsion' as an indication that he is not a free, wise and true philosopher. The other reaction would be from the ordinary people unfamiliar with the moral philosophical discourse and would therefore view Paul's language positively, as having a high status-by-association form of slavery, i.e. slave of Christ.<sup>139</sup> This argument, though attractive, is not without problems. For example, how does one decide if the Corinthian church is made up of these two classes of people?<sup>140</sup> Further, it is not clear whether the Corinthians are aware of and intellectually, though perhaps less consciously, applying such moral philosophical discourse. In 1 Cor 9, Paul is simply establishing his apostolic authority and setting himself as an example to the 'strong',<sup>141</sup> by showing that he has voluntarily given up his 'right' to support; because he believes his involuntary preaching has no reward. Thus, Barrett's point that because Paul is a slave hired out by God to do his (God's) work, he cannot lay claim to pay,<sup>142</sup> seems a more plausible interpretation of Paul's 'involuntary' preaching.<sup>143</sup> Since Paul preaches under a 'necessity', and 'involuntarily', as a slave of God, he has no 'reward'. The question that arises, then, is 'what is Paul's reward?' (v 18), the answer of which paves the way for Paul's further exemplary argument.

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<sup>139</sup> Martin 1990:76-77, 117-18.

<sup>140</sup> Meggitt 1998:102-7 rightly calls into question such division of the Corinthians along social lines.

<sup>141</sup> Horrell 1996:206 observes that the key words 'right' (ἐξουσία) and 'offence' (πρόσκομμα, 8.9; ἔγκοπτή, 9.12), and the related words (ἀπρόσκοπος, 10.32; and κερδαίνω, 9.19-23) show that the example is meant for the 'strong'.

<sup>142</sup> Fee 1987:419-20, and also his n33 where he points out that the contrast between ἐκὼν and ἄκων is a clear reference to 'free' and 'slave'.

<sup>143</sup> Barrett 1968:209-10.

In 1 Cor 9.18 Paul paradoxically says that his ‘reward’ for preaching the gospel is to preach it without ‘reward’. It explains why Paul so vigorously argues for and defends his apostolic authority. For he wants to demonstrate to the ‘strong’ that he has given it up for the sake of the gospel. In Phil 1.18, Paul indicates that he rejoices over the preaching of the gospel regardless of the preacher’s intent. And in 1 Cor 2.2, he insists that he ‘wants to know nothing among you (the Corinthians) except Jesus Christ and him crucified’. Thus, he gives the reason that he does not wish the exercise of his right to be an ἐγκοπή to the gospel. Fee, therefore, correctly argues that Paul’s ‘pay’ and ‘boast’ refer to the same reality, i.e. ‘preaching the gospel without accepting support so as to put no hindrance before the gospel’.<sup>144</sup> As mentioned earlier, Paul’s preaching is involuntary; but his giving up of the right to material support is voluntary and, therefore, is something about which he can boast. But since his involuntary preaching means that he has no ‘reward’, he finds his ‘reward’ in his preaching without ‘charge’, i.e. without accepting material support.<sup>145</sup> This serves as his example to the ‘strong’, i.e. that even though Paul is an apostle of Jesus Christ, the founding father of the Corinthian church, and therefore has the right to the material support of the church, he has given up his right; the ‘strong’ therefore ought also to give up their right to freely eat idol-meat. The corollary is that the ‘strong’, too, can find their ‘reward’ in such sacrificial behaviour. The next section is probably the most crucial in Paul’s overall argument in 1 Cor 9, where he sets out the most important principle which guides his practice of refusing material support and of taking up manual labour.

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<sup>144</sup> Fee 1987:421.

<sup>145</sup> Barrett 1968:210 comments: ‘...the preaching without charge (...) is itself the reward, because it means that he is putting no stumbling-block in the way of the gospel (verse 12), and thus has a better chance of seeing the Gospel flourish than would otherwise be possible’. Cf. Käsemann 1968:223; Héring 1962:81.



Although 1 Cor 9.19-23 appears to be a new section, it in fact continues from what precedes.<sup>146</sup> In this section, Paul paints various scenarios in which he willingly gives up his right by becoming like those to whom he preaches. In v 19, Paul picks up the theme of 9.1 again: 'Ελεύθερος γὰρ ὢν ἐκ πάντων ... (For though I am free from all...). In 9.1, the 'freedom' (ἐλευθερία) which Paul speaks about is that of his being 'free' as an apostle, to either accept or refuse material support to which he has a right. In 9.19, Paul refers to another aspect of this 'freedom', i.e. 'freedom' in respect of others. In other words, he *is* free from how others think he should behave. Yet, he enslaved himself to all (παᾶσιν ἑμαυτὸν ἐδούλωσα). This is where the paradox of Paul's argument comes in. On the one hand, he is insistent on his freedom and authority; on the other hand, he seems to allow the status of others to decide how he should behave. But, he is precisely free to do what he likes, including allowing others' status to decide how he should behave!

The governing principle that determines how he would exercise his 'freedom' appears to be the single-minded desire to win others to the Lord. The phrase ἵνα τοὺς πλείονας κερδήσω indicates the particular goal to which Paul will do all to subject his 'freedom'. The word κερδαίνω appears five times in vv 19-23 with σώζω appearing once. Κερδαίνω carries the meaning of 'winning' and 'gaining'; and in our text it means winning people to the Lord, i.e. preaching the gospel to them and leading them to salvation in Christ (v 23), as σώζω at the end of v 22 makes clear. But it is possible that the 'salvation' Paul has in mind includes the kind of

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<sup>146</sup> Horrell 1996:208. Cf. Conzelmann 1975:158 who finds the paradox appropriate; see also his nn27, 29 where he takes issue with Weiss who takes v 17 as a gloss and argues that v 18 as a conclusion from v 17 is pointless.

behaviour that should rightly issue from the gospel and its maintenance.<sup>147</sup> In terms of idolatry, Paul's goal is to 'win' people to the point of faithfulness to God and maintaining it. This goal has already been established in v 18. In the next few verses (vv 20-23), he sets out the various groups like whom he would allow himself to freely become in order to meet this goal. It is thus his example to the 'strong' since it is they whom Paul is addressing.<sup>148</sup> There are four groups: the Jews (Ἰουδαῖοι), those under Law (οἱ ὑπὸ νόμον), those without Law (οἱ ἀνόμοι), and the 'weak' (οἱ ἀσθενεῖς). Who are these groups of people?

Murphy-O'Connor is of the view that there are in fact three groups. The Jews and those under the law form one group, the 'law-less' (i.e. the 'strong' and the Gentiles) form another group, while the 'weak' form the third group.<sup>149</sup> The 'weak' are the 'scrupulous brethren' – the object of Paul's solicitude in chapter 8, with whom Paul identifies completely.<sup>150</sup> While it seems these four groups could be reasonably classed under two groups, i.e. the Jews and Gentiles, it is possible that there are in fact four groups. A closer examination will show the possibility.

To the Jews, Paul says he becomes 'like' (ὥς)<sup>151</sup> a Jew. However, he does not say anything about the Law, which may suggest that there are Jews who, though they may be Jews, do not adhere strictly to the Law. Our discussion of Jews' participation

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<sup>147</sup> Cf. Murphy-O'Connor 1979:91 who suggests that Paul views conversion as a process which will culminate only on the day of the Lord, therefore 'each individual has to be continually 're-won' for Christ'.

<sup>148</sup> See n141.

<sup>149</sup> Murphy-O'Connor 1979:89.

<sup>150</sup> Murphy-O'Connor 1979:90.

<sup>151</sup> ὥς was omitted by F G\* 6\*. 326. 1739 *pc*; Cl Or<sup>1739mg</sup>, perhaps, as Fee 1987:422, n2 suggests, because of their feeling the dissonance of a Jew saying that he became like a Jew. Paul's use of ὥς could mean that he recognises his status in relation to God no longer as a Jew, but as a Christ worshipper and an apostle of Christ. Cf. 2 Cor 5.17, 'Therefore if a person is in Christ, he/she is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come'.



in idolatry in the Diaspora in chapter four has already shown this. The second group, those under the Law, could refer to the Jews who may be described as strict Jews with regard to their strict adherence to the Law of Moses. Thus, Paul could well have such Jews in mind.<sup>152</sup> But it could be possible that Gentile God-worshippers as well as the proselytes to Judaism who have unilaterally subjected themselves to the Law, might have also been in Paul's mind. The third group, those without the Law, is a clear reference to Gentiles. The fourth group, the 'weak', may still constitute a proper group that cuts across all ethnic boundaries to include strict Jews, Gentile converts, Gentile God-worshippers, all of whom have scruples regarding eating food that has been sacrificed to idols. To the 'weak', Paul does not say he becomes 'like' (ὡς)<sup>153</sup> the 'weak', but he becomes 'weak' (ἐγενόμην τοῖς ἀσθενέσιν ἀσθενής, 9.22), i.e. he becomes one of them. But what does Paul mean when he says he 'became' like all these groups of people?

To begin with, Paul unambiguously states that he made himself a slave to everyone. At the end of v 22, he says that he 'became all things to all people in order that he might save some' (τοῖς πᾶσιν γέγονα πάντα, ἵνα πάντως τινὰς σώσω). Two points may be noted. First, Paul's enslavement of himself to all constitutes one of his general principles that govern his preaching of the gospel.

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<sup>152</sup> Barrett 1968:211 cites Moulten's view that Paul might be referring to a particular occasion, possibly that of Timothy's circumcision.

<sup>153</sup> The only clause without ὡς in the series is ἐγενόμην τοῖς ἀσθενέσιν ἀσθενής, ἵνα τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς κερδήσω ('to the weak I became weak, in order that I might win the weak', 9.22). Fee 1987:422, n5, and 431, Conzelmann 1975:161, n28 and Gardner 1994:103 have all noted its absence. Barrett 1968:215 cautions against pressing too much significance out of this. It is to be noted, however, that ὡς is attested by κ<sup>2</sup> C D F G Ψ and made the majority text reading. Horrell 1996:208, n54 is right in saying that the insertion is more easily explained than an omission. The omission, however, is supported by P<sup>46</sup> κ A B 1739 *pc* lat; Cyp. The significance lies in the fact that in 1 Cor 8.10-13, Paul urges the 'strong' to consider the 'weak', for whom Christ died, who may fall as a result of the exercise of their 'right' to eat idol-meat by the 'strong'. Now that Paul mentions the various groups whom he would become 'like', but appears to deliberately leave out the word 'like' to show the 'strong' his becoming one of the 'weak', his example for them therefore is much more powerful.

Second, whenever Paul enslaves himself to any group, it is for the chief aim of ‘saving’ the members of the group. Thus, as a Jew, Paul becomes like a Jew so as to win the Jews. Does this mean that Paul would revert back to the practices of the Jews, just to win the Jews? Fee argues that Paul is free from all the Jewish peculiarities such as circumcision, food laws, and special observances.<sup>154</sup> At the same time, Paul probably has no difficulty with Jews continuing their practices, as long as they are not made the requirement for a right relationship with God.<sup>155</sup> Thus, Paul is willing to adapt his style in such a way as to win the Jews, i.e. he could still practise Jewish customs when appropriate. The word ὥς thus provides the qualification – he does not become a Jew, but *like* a Jew.

This is the same principle which governs the second group. Paul is careful to state that while he becomes like those under the Law, he is himself not under the Law (μὴ ὦν αὐτὸς ὑπὸ νόμον, v 20b). Similarly, when he becomes like those ‘without the Law’, he is nevertheless ‘not outside God’s law but under Christ’s law’ (μὴ ὦν ἄνομος θεοῦ ἀλλ’ ἐννομος Χριστοῦ, v 21). The qualifications in both instances seem to be a safeguard against possible misunderstanding or misinterpretation on the part of the Corinthians over what Paul might have meant. Paul is no longer under the Law because he is a free man in Christ. His purpose in becoming like one of those under the Law is that he might win some of them. As to those outside the Law, Paul becomes as one outside the Law not in the sense of being lawless;<sup>156</sup> for he is not

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<sup>154</sup> Fee 1987:428.

<sup>155</sup> Fee 1987:428; cf. Conzelmann 1975:160, ‘He (Paul) is able as a Jew to practice Jewish customs, without teaching that the Law is a way of salvation. And he does not have to deliver the Jews from their practice of the Law, but from their ‘confidence’ in the Law as a way of salvation (Phil 3.2ff)’.

<sup>156</sup> Hollander 1998:125.



outside the law of God but in the law of Christ.<sup>157</sup> Paul seems to view the law of Christ here as an expression of the law of God. What is the law of Christ? In Gal 6.2, Paul urges the Galatians to bear one another's burdens (ἀλλήλων τὰ βάρη βαστάζετε) because it is one of the ways in which the law of Christ is fulfilled (ἀναπληρώσετε).<sup>158</sup> The virtue of ἀγάπη clearly is the goal here.<sup>159</sup> Therefore, while claiming to be outside the Law, Paul is concerned to point out that he is nevertheless in the law of Christ, which is ἀγάπη that expresses the law of God. Thus, Paul is careful to avoid putting himself under the slogan of the 'strong', 'all things are lawful' (πάντα ἔξεστιν, 10.23; cf. 1 Cor 6.12). But to the 'weak', Paul becomes weak (v 22). Given the context of Paul's defence of his apostolic authority, and of his efforts in setting himself as an example to the 'strong', the 'weak' here probably refers to the 'weak' in 1 Cor 8.<sup>160</sup> As to the use of the word κερδαίνω, as mentioned earlier,<sup>161</sup> Paul's idea of salvation probably includes the kind of behaviour issuing from the gospel and maintaining it, so the word could also mean 'keeping' the 'weak'. Barrett is right in saying that this would mean '*keep* them for the church, instead of driving them out by wounding their consciences'.<sup>162</sup> In the light of 8.13,

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<sup>157</sup> This is a difficult clause with regard to whether it should be objective genitive or subjective genitive. Fee 1987:429, n43 argues for the objective genitive for ἄνομος θεοῦ, i.e. Paul is not lawless 'towards God'. However, cf. Barrett 1968:212-13 who suggests that this could be done by emphasising the genitives 'in relation to the implied law' and so render 'not subject to the law *of God*', 'under obligation to the law *of Christ*'. The context suggests that a subjective genitive for both ἄνομος θεοῦ and ἔννομος Χριστοῦ makes more sense. See further Blass-Debrunner §182 on genitive with adjectives.

<sup>158</sup> Barclay 1988:158-59. Longenecker 1990:275-76 argues that ὁ νόμος τοῦ Χριστοῦ here stands for the prescriptive principles stemming from the heart of the gospel, 'which are meant to be applied to specific situations by the direction and enablement of the Holy Spirit, being always motivated and conditioned by love'.

<sup>159</sup> Murphy-O'Connor 1979:90, '...for all practical purposes, Paul is guided by 'the law which is in Christ', and whose single demand is love'. Cf. 1 Cor 13.

<sup>160</sup> Willis 1985b:37.

<sup>161</sup> See n141 above.

<sup>162</sup> Barrett 1968:215

Paul is saying that when he seeks to keep the 'weak' from falling into idolatry, he is in fact 'winning' them. And it is Paul's example to the 'strong'.

The last clause, 'I have become all things to all people, in order that I might save some' sums up Paul's basic principle in 'winning' and 'keeping' others for the Lord.<sup>163</sup> I would like to suggest that this principle of Paul is modelled after the life of Jesus and the cross. He will say in 1 Cor 11.1 that he is an imitator of Christ. Jesus Christ suffered and was crucified. This seems to be what Paul is seeking to imitate, by doing manual labour and facing persecutions, as he says in 2 Cor 4.10 that he is constantly carrying in his body the 'death of Christ'. In 2 Cor 8.9, Paul uses the generosity of Jesus to encourage the Corinthians to be generous towards the Christians at Jerusalem. He tells them that 'our Lord Jesus, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich'. This seems to be the *modus operandi* of Paul's attitude towards the preaching of the gospel. He gives up his right to material support, just as the Lord Jesus has given up his 'riches', in order to 'win' others to the Lord. Thus, in 1 Cor 2.2 he says that he wants to know nothing among the Corinthians except Jesus Christ and him crucified, an indication that he wants to see the life of Christ being imitated by the Corinthians when they embrace the gospel.

Martin uses the concept of humiliation-exaltation in Phil 2.6-11 to explain Paul's self-enslavement as not only saving others, but also saving himself.<sup>164</sup> This forms the framework of Paul's soteriology and ethics, and it is also the model which Paul wants the Philippians to emulate.<sup>165</sup> This notion of Paul's soteriology means that

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<sup>163</sup> Fee's argument that the word σώσω means that κερκήσω in the five instances before must mean 'win'. However, the broader meaning of κερδαίνω need not exclude itself from σώζω, which, if taken as a process, would certainly include the work of κερδαίνω.

<sup>164</sup> Martin 1990:129-30.

<sup>165</sup> Martin 1990:131.



when Paul enslaves himself to all, he is not giving up power but merely shifting the power to a lower status.<sup>166</sup> While this notion appears to turn Paul into quite a carefully calculating person, ensuring that what he does would gain for himself salvation at the end, the use of Phil 2.6-11 explains Paul's imitation of Christ. Martin is right in saying that lying behind Paul's reasoning in 1 Cor 9 is his theology of the cross.<sup>167</sup> For it is the kind of self-sacrifice of Jesus after which Paul patterns the giving up of his right to material support and his self-enslavement. We are told in the Christ-hymn that Christ lowered himself and became a human person, even though he was equal with God. He was obedient even to death. This motif seems to be behind Paul's own self-enslavement. Even though he is an apostle who has authority and complete freedom,<sup>168</sup> Paul puts the gospel at the centre of all his decisions with regard to his behaviour. He gives up his right and enslaves himself to all in order to save some, thus demonstrating to the Corinthians, i.e. the 'strong', the need and importance of living and behaving in a manner that would advance the gospel. Thus, 1 Cor 9.23 is a clear summary of his example, 'I do all this for the sake of the gospel' (πάντα δὲ ποιῶ διὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον). And his reward is to be συγκοινωνὸς αὐτοῦ. The meaning of this phrase is less certain. Conzelmann understands 9.19-23 to be a call to strive after salvation, so that at the 'Last Judgement' Paul will point to the Corinthians as his fruits.<sup>169</sup> Both Barrett and Fee point out that it is the 'benefits of the gospel' which are in view here; and Paul is not just speaking about his obtaining these benefits only, but

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<sup>166</sup> Martin 1990:134.

<sup>167</sup> Martin 1990:135.

<sup>168</sup> Horrell 1996:207 points out that Paul 'asserts his freedom (v 1) only to show that he has enslaved himself to all (v 9)' and draws the conclusion in n46 that 1 Cor 9 is thus not a defence of Paul's freedom. But whether 1 Cor 9 is to be viewed as a defence of Paul's freedom is debatable; what is important is that Paul can be so free as to 'freely' enslave himself to others! This self-enslavement may be seen as an act of discipline, resulting from his own imitation of Christ's self-lowering.

<sup>169</sup> Conzelmann 1975:161.

as a fellow-participant with the Corinthians.<sup>170</sup> Ultimately, Paul's 'reward' is not only in preaching the gospel 'free' of charge, but more importantly, he would obtain his 'reward' during the eschatological day of the Lord when the Lord will commend everyone accordingly (cf. 1 Cor 4.5). The key word on such behaviour and attitude seems to be 'discipline', and Paul goes on to set out in 9.24-27 the principles that are supposed to govern a disciplined life (see the discussion in chapter 6.7.1 above).

We have shown that 1 Cor 9 constitutes Paul's defence of his apostolic authority. We have also looked at how Paul establishes his authority by arguing from daily experiences, the Jewish scripture, and cultic tradition, that he has apostolic rights to material support. But by establishing his right to material support, Paul seeks to show that he has given up his right, so as to set himself an example to the 'strong'. In 1 Cor 10.31-11.1, Paul rounds up his argument of 1 Cor 8-10 by outlining four imperatives which the 'strong' ought to be doing: (1) glorify God in whatever they do; (2) avoid giving offence to all; (3) please all with the view of saving them (a clear echo of 9.19-23, which argues against the 'partition' theories); and (4) become imitators of Paul.

In 10.23, Paul corrects the claim of the 'strong', 'all things are lawful', by pointing out that not all things build up. The 'strong' ought to know this since their participation in idolatrous acts is causing the 'weak' considerable unease and concern. Hence in v 24, he says to them not to seek their own advantage, but that of the others. Seeking the advantage of others is not indiscriminate; it must be governed by the first imperative: glorify God. Further, do visits to pagan temples, eating idol-meat, participating in pagan religious rituals, and the like, hinder the gospel? Even if the 'strong' have the right to do any of these things, should they not give up their right,

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<sup>170</sup> Barrett 1968:216; Fee 1987:432.



just as Paul gives up his right to material support, in order to save others and not to cause offence to the 'weak'? All these imperatives have the capability of glorifying God, which picks up the 'thanksgiving' in v 30. It suggests that what one does must be capable of being a 'praise', or a means of 'praise' to God.<sup>171</sup> The 'strong' must consider how the exercise of their freedom in eating idol-meat is capable of causing others to render praise, honour and the like, to God, or whether it is causing others to fall. The concern to glorify God is then to be translated into one's behaviour in relation to others. The second imperative is 'give no offence to all' (v 32). Three groups are mentioned here: Jews, Greeks and the church of God. Perhaps the 'weak', as we have suggested earlier, comprise both Jews and Gentiles whose Jewish influence concerning idolatry has caused them to be scrupulous about the behaviour of the 'strong'. Thus, the exercise of the freedom by the 'strong' in attending pagan temples, eating idol-meat, and even possibly participating in pagan religious rituals, is causing offence to such ones. In the end, the church of God will be scandalised. Barrett comments, 'I do not act to the glory of God if I give to an idol some of the honour due to God alone; nor if I cause scandal or ill-feeling in the church, or cause a fellow-Christian to fall from his faith'.<sup>172</sup> Similarly, the third imperative for the 'strong', which is to please everyone, is to be seen in conjunction of the first two imperatives. Paul has already argued for and demonstrated his own giving up of his right to material support, so as not to put an obstacle in the way of the gospel, but to become a slave to all. Paul's voluntary surrender of his right to material support and willing self-enslavement are described here by Paul himself as πάντα πᾶσιν ἀρέσκω μὴ

<sup>171</sup> BAGD 204, 'to the praise of God'. Cf. Aalen 1976:46, where meanings include 'honour', 'fame', 'repute'. In 1 Cor 10.31, Aalen takes it to be 'to the glory of God'.

<sup>172</sup> Barrett 1968:244. Héring 1962:99 argues that it is addressed to the 'strong' as much as it is to the 'weak', whose 'over-scrupulousness' might be a shock to pagans whom the gospel is meant to win. But this is stretching Paul's point and missing the context of 1 Cor 8-10.

ζητῶν τὸ ἑμαυτοῦ σύμφορον ἀλλὰ τὸ τῶν πολλῶν, ἵνα σωθῶσιν. This parallels 9.22b, where we have Paul describing his enslavement to the various groups as τοῖς πᾶσιν γέγονα πάντα, ἵνα πάντως τινὰς σώσω. In 9.22b, Paul says he has become all things to all people; in 10.33, he says he pleases everyone in everything. In both instances, Paul's purpose is expressed in the ἵνα clause, both of which aim at 'salvation'. There is yet another difference between the two verses: in 10.33, Paul adds a qualifying clause that he does not seek his own benefits but that of others; whereas this is absent in 9.22. And it should mean the same thing, i.e. that Paul seeks to become like others that they may be saved, which is their very interest, rather than his own interest, which is material support. The third imperative is therefore to be seen as a recapitulation of Paul's example in 1 Cor 9.19ff.<sup>173</sup> Having spelt out the first three imperatives, Paul then issues the final imperative: be imitators of me, as I am of Christ (11.1). And the summary confirms 9.1-23 is about imitation of Paul as well.

Is Paul so arrogant as to ask the Corinthians to become imitators of him? The qualification Paul makes is instructive, καθὼς ἐγὼ Χριστοῦ (just as I also am of Christ). While Paul is telling them to imitate his example, he also tells them that his example is the result of his imitating Christ. And as we have discussed earlier, Paul's enslavement is modelled after the life and the cross of Christ; his imperative to the 'strong', and indeed, to all the Corinthians, is to imitate the self-sacrificial life of Christ, which is expressed on the cross. The very closing imperative interestingly acts like a declaration of Paul's authority as the founding apostle of the Corinthian church. By issuing this imperative, Paul seems once again to assert his position and status as the founding apostle who has authority over the Corinthian church, and so echo his statement in 4.16.

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<sup>173</sup> Barrett 1968:245



## 7.5 The centre of authority: who is to decide?

We have discussed above that in 1 Cor 9 Paul defends his apostolic authority by arguing that he has the apostolic right to material support from the Corinthians. Having established his authority, Paul goes on to explain his deliberate giving up of his right. He does this in order to set himself as an example to the 'strong': just as he (Paul) has given up his right to material support and so not put any hindrance to the gospel, the 'strong' ought also to give up their right to freely eat idol-meat, so as not to cause the 'weak' to stumble. Paul further argues that he has become all things to all people, seeking to please everyone in everything, *for the sake of the gospel*, i.e. that many may be saved. The 'strong' ought to follow Paul's example by 'pleasing' others, not looking to their own benefits, but those of others. These raise a further question: who is to decide what is the right or appropriate behaviour with regard to idolatry?

In the case of the situation described in 1 Cor 8.1-11.1, the answer appears uncertain. For the 'strong' do not seem to agree with Paul's position, and have even called into question Paul's authority. Meanwhile, the 'weak' do not seem to agree with the behaviour of the 'strong' and are recipients of Paul's sympathy. In chapter six, we have set out the theology of the 'strong' which serves as the basis for their idolatrous behaviour. In chapter four, we have also shown the possible conceptual overlap between the understanding of the 'strong' concerning the true God and that of other people who do not worship Yahweh or believe in Jesus; and the possibility that the 'strong' may be aware of the LXX (Exod 22.27a) ban on reviling other people's Gods. Paul therefore argues in 1 Cor 10 that the objects of the pagan sacrifices are in fact demons, destroying the basis of the 'strong' and therefore their 'authority'. In 1 Cor 9, he seeks to show them the authority on which decisions for the Corinthian community may be based.

In chapter five, we have looked at the question of authority in the Jewish community in the Diaspora. In that chapter, we have seen that the Jewish assemblies had their own leadership structure whereby decisions for the community were made. Moreover, the law served as the basis for the communities' life, both within and outside. Philo tells us that the people gathered together on the Sabbath to listen intently and in quiet alertness learn 'what is best and profitable and capable of improving the quality of the whole of life' (*Spec* 2.62). Josephus tells us that the Jews managed their affairs and settled their differences in accordance with their native laws (*Ant* 14.235). Further, the Jewish assemblies were centres of authority for decision-making over such matters as religious (cf. Acts 17.1-3), social (*CPJ* I no. 138)<sup>174</sup> and legal affairs (cf. Philo, *Legat* 156-57; Josephus, *Ant* 16.167-68) for individual local communities. In other words, for most of the matters pertaining to the Jewish communities in the Diaspora, the leaders of the Jewish assemblies and the law provided the leadership.

The question arising from this conclusion is, 'what happens when deviant behaviour takes place?' We have looked at examples of deviant behaviour in general in chapter five, and in the form of idolatry among Jews in 3 Macc. In 3 Macc 2.30-31, it is recorded that a minority of Jews, having seen and experienced the sufferings they had to undergo as a result of strictly following their religious tradition, took up the offer of Ptolomy IV Philopater's to worship Dionysus which came with the reward of Alexandrian citizenship. But the great majority of the Jews 'resisted' (ἐνίσχυσαν) and 'did not abandon their religion' (οὐ διέστησαν τῆς εὐσεβείας) (3 Macc 2.32). The behaviour of the minority who 'gave in' to the king may be described as 'deviant', i.e. departing from the majority 'behaviour' which was considered the norm.

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<sup>174</sup> This seems to be the only surviving record, a papyrus from Egypt, dated possibly in the first century BCE, of an actual meeting in a Diaspora assembly held by members of a Jewish burial club.



And the author of 3 Macc suggests that the norm from which the minority departed was the 'holy God and his Law' (τὸν ἅγιον θεόν...τοῦ θεοῦ τὸν νόμον...). The result for the minority deviant behaviour was punishment by death (3 Macc 7.10-12, 14-16).

While 3 Macc seems to paint a rather negative picture of the minority of Jews who departed from the religious tradition of the Jews, the author appears to be inclined towards giving a positive picture of the Jews and the kind of good fortune that went with one's faithfulness to the 'holy God and his Law'. What is important is that within the Jewish community there seemed to be an established norm which defined what was appropriate behaviour in general, and with regard to idolatry in particular. Further, the 'zeal' for the law was held up as the basis for violent actions against deviants, when the law cannot be imposed. Thus, the Law and 'zeal' for the law seem to be what the author has in mind as the norm; and the law is held as the final authority to which appeals are made.

The issue of authority in the Diaspora Jewish community serves as a parallel to the situation in 1 Cor 9, particularly the question of Paul's authority. Like the majority Jews in 3 Macc, the 'weak' in Corinth hold to a particular 'norm' with regard to idolatry. Their position finds parallels in chapter three where a hostile and negative attitude towards idolatry can be seen in Jewish literature like Philo, Wisdom of Solomon, Sibylline Oracles, etc. However, the 'strong' adopt a more accommodating stance towards idolatry. They have no scruples in visiting pagan temples, eating idol-meat, and even possibly participating in idolatrous rituals. What they have done would be viewed as 'deviant' behaviour, based on the perception of the 'weak'. Thus, the problem between these two parties, the 'strong' and the 'weak', arises.

However, unlike the Jews in 3 Macc, the Corinthians do not seem to have a final court of appeal available. But this is where Paul's authority as the founding father plays a most crucial role. It is not clear who decides what is the right or appropriate behaviour with regard to idolatry in the Corinthian church. Just as the Jews in the Diaspora turned to the assembly and possibly leadership for settling their disputes and managing their affairs, Paul is seeking to turn the Corinthians to himself for settling their dispute over idolatrous behaviour. Even though some Corinthians may have questioned his apostolic authority, Paul sees himself as the one who preaches to them the gospel and to whom the Corinthian church owes its existence. What can be certain is that Paul, in establishing his authority among the Corinthians, seeks to make himself the 'final court of appeal' where he rules on the issue of idolatry, on the basis of the gospel.

#### **7.6 Summary and conclusion**

The above discussion focuses on the function of 1 Cor 9 and argues that in this particular chapter, Paul puts up a defence of his apostolic authority because it has been called into question by some Corinthians. His defence consists of the establishment of his right to material support from the Corinthians, thus, proving his apostleship and authority. In defending his authority, Paul is not seeking to lay claim to the material support to which he has a right; he is in fact wanting to demonstrate that he has given up his right to material support, thus offering himself as an example to the 'strong' with regard to their accommodating behaviour in freely eating idol-meat. Because the behaviour of the 'strong' has caused some unease among the 'weak' Corinthians, Paul tells them to imitate him by also giving up their right to eat idol-meat, so as not to cause any of the 'weak' members to fall.



Paul argues from various scenarios and shows that preaching the gospel is a necessity laid upon him for which he has no claim of reward. Thus, his preaching is involuntary; however, his giving up of the right to material support is voluntary. He has done so because of his desire not to put any hindrance in the way of the gospel. Further, he finds his reward in preaching the gospel 'free of charge'. This he does by taking up manual labour and by 'becoming all things to all people', so that he might save some, that is, bring as many as he can to the Lord.

Such a concept is modelled after the life and the cross of Christ. Paul acknowledges that he is free from all; but he is free precisely to become a slave to all. This is the action he takes in order to imitate Christ. Ultimately, his exhortation to the 'strong' to imitate him is based on the principle that he imitates Christ. Thus, his exhortation to imitate him is to be viewed as an exhortation to imitate Christ.

By defending his apostolic authority and setting himself as an example to the 'strong', Paul is able to turn the Corinthians to his gospel and the biblical history as interpreted by him as the 'final court of appeal' whereby he, as the founding father of the Corinthian church, rules on the issue of idolatry. For the gospel has now taken over the place of the Law, and the biblical history is reinterpreted in the light of the gospel. Thus, Paul, Christ, gospel, and salvation are all aligned with each other and serve as a new standard of authority. And such an authority is able to carry out discipline by excluding the 'deviants' (i.e. those who fail to live up to its standards) from the eschatological salvation.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUSIONS

#### 8.1 Summary

The main function of this study has been to establish Jewish parallels to the positions of the three parties on idolatry, namely the 'strong', the 'weak', and Paul. This helpfully enables us to situate the positions of the three parties in the world of the Corinthian church. In carrying out this task, I have looked at the various interpretations put forward by various scholars over the past two decades or so, together with F. C. Baur. Baur had advocated a theory that saw a conflict between Paul and the Jerusalem apostles, and that Paul's opponents used a different tactic in the church at Corinth from that used in Galatia. Others had posited different theories. The survey reveals a gap in the history of scholarship in the interpretation of 1 Cor 8.1-11.1. Much attention has focused on the consistency and meaning of the text between 1 Cor 8 and 10.<sup>1</sup> Some have tried to study the section by looking at the Graeco-Roman religions and the practices of eating.<sup>2</sup> However, none of the scholarly works has attempted a full-scale definition of idolatry; all simply assume its definition. Thus, as part of the thesis, I have established a critical tool that carefully defines idolatry in a multifaceted way, based on the work of Halbertal and Margalit, by which the various selected Jewish texts in the Jewish Diaspora during the Second Temple period were examined, beginning with the Septuagint, followed by the Jewish authors, various inscriptions and papyri, and finally the NT passage in question. These studies reveal that while Jews in general abhorred idolatry, there were Jews in the Diaspora who were

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<sup>1</sup> See the survey of Gardner 1994:2-10.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Willis 1985; Gooch 1993:1-46; Witherington III 1995:191-95; Newton 1999.



not altogether free from idolatrous behaviour and/or intention.<sup>3</sup> Their idolatry took various forms: actual idolatrous behaviour in visiting pagan temples and invoking pagan Gods; cognitive error in terms of confusing the true God with nature or the Gods; misrepresenting Yahweh with an object; and open abandonment of the Jewish ancestral tradition.

My examination of the various Jewish practices with respect to idolatry reveals an interesting pattern, i.e. although all the definitions of idolatry appear to combine in defining idolatry, they do not necessarily operate as a package. And different Jews could adopt different definitions and so carve out spaces for themselves.<sup>4</sup> In other words, a person may appear idolatrous to another person, when in fact that 'idolatrous' person may not consider his or her behaviour idolatrous at all because of the different definitions adopted. And the different practices need not mean a difference in belief. In fact, most Jews would accept the monotheistic belief of the 'one God', just as Paul and the 'strong' do. But this is the crucial point of departure: how they apply that belief in their practical life may be very different, as the Jewish authors mentioned in both chapters three and four show.

This led to the question of how Jews maintained their discipline, particularly in the Diaspora. A careful examination of the evidence shows that the Jewish Diaspora organised themselves into assemblies during the Hellenistic-Roman age. Various terms of description testify to this reality. Further, the evidence also indicates that these Jewish assemblies either elected or appointed their own leaders to preside over their meetings and adjudicate their controversies and manage their affairs. To that degree, we have concluded that Jews in the Diaspora were independent of the local

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<sup>3</sup> This is seen in chapter four above. See, however, Cheung 1999, whose thesis is based on a mistaken view that Jews always abhorred idols and abstained from idolatrous practices.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Halbertal 1998:159-72.

pagan or Gentile authorities. The fact that the Diaspora Jews organised themselves into assemblies also suggests that intellectual leaders in the assemblies led the masses with regard to issues of discipline, and in our case, the issue of idolatry. The Torah had been the basis for the Jews with regard to their behaviour vis-à-vis the Gentile environment. Our study of the violent actions of the Jews against those who apostatised and committed acts of idolatry shows that the issue of discipline among the Diaspora Jews was handled in such a manner as to ensure that the Torah was not violated. In other words, the 'law' constituted the 'final' court of appeal for Diaspora Jews. And violence by the masses could be used when official sanctions could not be imposed.

The question of leadership and discipline among the Diaspora Jews helps to enhance our understanding of 1 Cor 8-10, in which no solution or resolution concerning idol-meat seems to be in sight. In order to resolve the issue, Paul's authority/leadership is of crucial importance: who is to decide what constitutes idolatry? We see that Paul not only re-affirms his apostolic authority, but also uses his own sacrifice as an example to the 'strong' to give up their rights to freely eat idol-meat. He further appeals to the biblical history of Israel to drive home the need for and basis of discipline with regard to idol-meat (cf. 1 Cor 10.1-11). This question of leadership and discipline followed our discussion of Paul's position on idolatry: idolatry is an act contrary to the biblical ancestral tradition and a participation in the table of δαιμόνια. The idolatrous acts of Israel in the wilderness brought about their destruction, despite their seemingly spiritual security under the leadership of Moses. Thus, Paul's warning to the 'strong' is that if they think they stand (cf. 1 Cor 10.12), they ought to be careful lest they fall. The implication is that by freely eating idol-meat and participating in the worship of the Gentile Gods, the 'strong' incur the wrath



of God and so run the risk of being destroyed as well, despite their seemingly secure position in Christ.<sup>5</sup> His solution to the entire saga is offered in the example of Christ, who is embodied in his own apostolic practice of self-sacrifice and self-abasement. Thus, he urges the ‘strong’: be imitators of me as I am of Christ (1 Cor 11.1).

## 8.2 The answers to our questions

This thesis began with a list of questions, whose answers are complex but not necessarily insuperable. First of all, we may compare the positions of the three parties, namely, the ‘strong’, the ‘weak’, and Paul, with the Diaspora positions on idolatry. In chapter four, we have seen that some Jews were idolatrous on the cognitive level, as represented by Artapanus and Pseudo-Aristeas. Further, evidence from inscriptions and papyri shows that there were Jews who did not seem to view accommodation to idolatry as something objectionable, even though it is evident that they continued to regard themselves as Jews and remember their Jewish heritage. The ‘strong’ in 1 Cor 8-10 seem to reflect a somewhat similar attitude or behaviour. For example, their slogans in 1 Cor 8.4 that idols are nothing in the world, and that there is no God but one, seem to compare well with the attitude of many of the Jews surveyed in chapter three.<sup>6</sup> And the conceptual overlap in the minds of the Diaspora Jews concerning other peoples’ Gods, as evidenced in the *Letter of Aristeas* (as discussed in 4.3), seems to parallel the thoughts of the ‘strong’ as their slogan ‘there is no God but one’ suggests a conceptual overlap. Thus, while the ‘strong’ share the same concept about that ‘one God’ as Philo, they have an entirely different practice (see 4.4 above). Their temple

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<sup>5</sup> Thus, the argument that 1 Cor 8 and 10 deal with different issues is weak. Paul’s caution that the presence of the ‘strong’ might serve as an encouragement to the ‘weak’ to eat idol-meat implies that the presence of the ‘strong’ in an idol temple, even if they do not actually participate in the worship of the Gods, was most probably seen as idolatrous or viewed as having involved some form of idolatrous practice.

<sup>6</sup> The use of the term εἰδωλον also suggests Jewish influence, which could well explain the background to this particular slogan (see the γνώσις of the ‘strong’ in chapter 6.3 above).

attendance is therefore not of any particular concern to them, just like those Jews surveyed in chapter 4.6.1. Hence, we have suggested in chapter four that they could have been aware of the LXX ban in Exod 22.27 (see 4.2.3). The term εἰδωλον is therefore not used pejoratively by the ‘strong’. The parallel between the examples of Diaspora Jews’ accommodation to idolatry and that of the ‘strong’ appears clear.

The position of the ‘weak’ seems to be more scrupulous. For Paul tells us that they were accustomed to idols, and given the fact that Paul is constantly making reference to them, it is reasonable to assume that they abhor idols. They would probably view any acts of idolatry as objectionable and their past association to idolatry would provide them with the reason for rejecting idols. In chapter three, we have examined the reactions of some Diaspora Jews to idolatry and found them to be wholly negative and condemning; they tended to ridicule, reject, and pour scorn on idols and idol makers. While there is no explicit mention of how the ‘weak’ react to idolatry, their scruples and objections may be seen as paralleled to those of the Diaspora Jews in chapter three. In other words, while their past association with idols is causing them to be wary of idols and idol-meat,<sup>7</sup> Jewish influence concerning idols could have generated in them a scruple that did not permit them to eat idol-meat. And their conversion to Christ had most likely caused them to adopt a more stringent Jewish stance like that of the Diaspora Jews discussed in chapter three. Besides, they could be simply following Paul’s instructions in his previous letter (cf. 1 Cor 5.9-11).

Paul’s position seems to be somewhat complicated. For Paul was a Jew, and probably held a position that was informed by the Diaspora Jewish reactions against idolatry. However, he has become a believer and an apostle of Jesus Christ. Even

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<sup>7</sup> Their ethnicity is not the question here, as I have already demonstrated in chapter four that Jews could still be idolatrous even though they may regard themselves as Jews.



though he continues to abhor idols, the reasons are no longer the same as those of the Diaspora Jews. He does not think that the idols are nothing, unlike the 'strong'. Nor does he simply condemn the idolatrous behaviour of the 'strong' as wrong and contrary to the law. Paul represents a new position. He recognises that there are Gods and lords both in heaven and on earth (cf. 1 Cor 8.5) while holding to the monotheistic confession of the one God (cf. 1 Cor 8.6). But it is also here that he differs from the 'strong' over the one God. In 1 Cor 8.6, he appeals to the confession of the 'strong' and reminds them that Jesus Christ is the purpose and agent of creation (6.3.3). Further, his concerns are twofold: (1) the idolatrous behaviour of the 'strong' may become a stumbling block to the 'weak', leading them to idolatry, and so putting a hindrance to the gospel of Jesus Christ;<sup>8</sup> and (2) the idolatrous behaviour of the 'strong' will result in their incurring the wrath of God and cause them to run the risk of losing their eschatological salvation. Paul's concerns for the eschatological salvation of the 'strong', and the advancement (or hindrance) of the gospel, are then interwoven into an argument that involves his defence or re-affirmation of his apostolic authority on the one hand, and on the other hand, the willing surrender of his apostolic rights to material support as an example to the 'strong'. His argument for his apostolic authority situates him in a position of leadership again, that is, he is the founding father of the Corinthian assembly and one who imitates Christ; he therefore has the final authority to define what constitutes idolatry and what is proper Christian behaviour. In other words, as the founding apostle of the Corinthian church, Paul sees himself as responsible for carrying out discipline with regard to idolatry in that church. For the 'strong', their 'knowledge' and 'freedom' allow them to eat idol-meat without scruples. While this shows that they (the 'strong') have a self-understanding as Christ-

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<sup>8</sup> Thus, 1 Cor 9.12 should be read in the light of what Paul says in 1 Cor 8.13, and his willing subjection of his freedom to the status of others in 1 Cor 9.19-24.

believers, for Paul, their behaviour is idolatrous, besides lacking in love and consideration for others (cf. 1 Cor 8.1-3). Their attendance at pagan temples, consumption of idol-meat there, and their possible participation in pagan rituals render them idolatrous on several fronts. Conceptually the 'strong' are idolatrous in the sense that they have thought the true God to be the same as the God/s pagans worship. Further, by accusing them of sharing in the table of δαιμόνια, Paul accuses the 'strong' of confusing the true God with 'demons'. And in terms of the re-interpreted biblical history, the 'strong' have abandoned ancestral tradition and breached the new covenant of Christ.

Throughout, Paul's position takes a different twist from the Jewish tradition: Christ and his gospel are the ultimate determinant of how the 'strong' should behave with regard to their 'freedom' as Christians. And even if the 'strong' were to have a right self-understanding, they still face judgment and destruction if they behave improperly, that is, accommodating to idolatry by freely eating idol-meat and causing the 'weak' to fall, and so putting a hindrance to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This argument of Paul is put forward with an intertextual allusion to the biblical texts which are interwoven here. The implication is strong: the Corinthian 'strong' appeal to the Jewish monotheistic confession of the one God and other slogans for their behaviour, Paul appeals to a reinterpreted biblical history to show the important role the centrality of Christ and his gospel plays in the issue of idolatry, authority and Christian discipline (i.e. with regard to Christian 'freedom'). The 'freedom' and 'knowledge' of the 'strong' are being countered by Paul's imperative to imitate him as he is an imitator of Christ. This leads to the next question of what constitutes the foundation of ethical behaviour for Paul.



### 8.3 A possible fresh approach to understanding Paul's ethics?

The above discussion of 1 Cor 8-10 concludes that Paul views idolatry as an act that is contrary to the biblical ancestral tradition, a rebellious act that involves partnership with δαιμόνια and breaks partnership with the Lord, an unloving act that can possibly cause a 'weaker' fellow believer to fall, an act that reflects spiritual indiscipline that invites God's wrath and the possible loss of eschatological salvation. For Paul, Christian 'freedom' and 'knowledge' of the one God and the insignificance of idols must be balanced by a life that is modelled or imitated after that of Christ by imitating Paul's.<sup>9</sup> And such a life involves acts or patterns of behaviour that willingly subject one's 'rights' to the consideration of those who are 'weak' in their 'knowledge' and 'freedom'.<sup>10</sup> Thus, in 1 Cor 9, Paul sets himself as an example by explaining to the Corinthians his principles for living: allow the status of others to determine how one should behave, with the ultimate purpose of winning them to the gospel. This ethical principle of Paul means that the 'law' is no longer to be the basis for ethical behaviour, but rather the advancement of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, the new paradigm for action is Christ/gospel/salvation/Paul. This raises the question as to whether there is continuity or discontinuity between Paul and the 'law'. Scholarship has of late focused on the continuity between Paul and the law. P. J. Tomson, for example, argues that in 1 Cor 9 Paul expounds his rights as an apostle in connection with a halakhic saying of Jesus. For him, Paul's citation of Deut 25.4 constitutes an appeal to the law and Paul's paraphrasing of various OT stories is directly related to Jewish targumic and midrashic tradition.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, though not entirely from the same approach, Brian Rosner says that when Paul argues against the law, it is only the

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Hays 1996:41-43.

<sup>10</sup> Their 'conscience', in this case, would be sensitive to what the 'strong' do and how they live.

<sup>11</sup> Tomson 1990:77-78.

legal requirements for salvation that he is opposing. Apart from that, Paul does not repudiate the law.<sup>12</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel maintains that when Paul exhorts the Galatians to love one another, he is saying that love as the law is in its entirety the expression of the will of God.<sup>13</sup> While many parts of the Torah have no factual validity, Schnabel argues, 'the Torah remains the revelation of God's will in its new relation to Jesus Christ'.<sup>14</sup> The Christian is therefore not 'absolved' from fulfilling the Torah as the 'law of Christ'.<sup>15</sup> The argument of Paul in 1 Cor 8.1-11.1 is therefore theocentric. This has implications for our understanding of Paul's ethics.

Are Paul's ethics based on the law, so that his instructions for Christian conduct are but lessons from the Jewish scriptures? Or are they fundamentally different from the Law? To put it another way, is there continuity between Paul and the law? If there is continuity, how then does Paul determine ethical Christian behaviour? David Horrell had recently argued that Paul accepts the legitimacy of the right of the 'strong' to eat idol-meat and does not rule out participating in pagan temple activities.<sup>16</sup> What Paul offers is his own example of giving up his legitimate rights in the interest of others, an act that is modelled after the Christ-like pattern. While Paul agrees with the theological principles of the 'strong' in eating idol-meat, he argues for a different ethical conduct that is founded upon a 'christological praxis', a pattern of action shaped by the self-giving of Christ. Although Horrell points out an important paradigm which Paul is shaping, he has not taken into consideration the fact that Paul

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<sup>12</sup> Rosner 1995a:7; cf. Hotz 1995:51-57.

<sup>13</sup> Schnabel 1995:272.

<sup>14</sup> Schnabel 1995:273.

<sup>15</sup> Schnabel 1995:272.

<sup>16</sup> Horrell 1997a:83-114.



seems to view the behaviour of the 'strong' as constituting idolatry (1 Cor 10.14), and his frequent correction of the theological basis of the 'strong'.

Our study suggests that there may be a fresh approach towards understanding Paul's basis for ethical behaviour: while Paul applies aspects of the OT at various points in his argument, he seems to reinterpret them. Could it be that Paul, having converted to the gospel, is now appealing to biblical history only when it serves to highlight the ethical Christian behaviour? This could be seen in his insistence that he is no longer under God's 'law', meaning the Torah, but under Christ's 'law' (1 Cor 9.21), meaning the 'law' of love which he expounds elsewhere (cf. Gal 5.13; 6.2). And if we were to view Paul's use of the OT as primarily the scripture of God for life, to be interpreted and understood in terms of the Christ-event and his love, then there is little justification to posit that there is continuity between Paul and the 'law'.<sup>17</sup> Although 1 Cor 8-10 does not raise the question of the law in an exhaustive or extended manner, the point Paul makes seems to hang on the gospel, and the expression of the gospel of Christ in the life of the Christian community in Corinth. Thus, we may begin to re-examine Paul's ethics in the light of the fact that Paul *reinterprets* the Jewish scripture to advance the gospel, not so much to continue the Torah-requirements.<sup>18</sup> In other words, Paul has carefully moved the basis for action from law to Christ, thus defining for the Corinthian church what is distinctively Christian action. And it is in this sense that the present proposal for understanding 1 Cor 9 may make a fresh contribution to understanding the ethics of Paul in general, and in 1 Corinthians in particular.

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<sup>17</sup> Even if we pick out all the statements in Paul's letters that show a positive attitude to the 'law', in almost every case, Christ and his gospel seem to be the main subject, not the 'law'.

<sup>18</sup> Westerholm 1988:198-209; see the contrasting essays in Rosner 1995b.

#### 8.4 Historical re-construction: ancient Judaism and early Christianity

Our study above has other implications, namely, our understanding of ancient Judaism and early Christianity as they relate to idolatry. Our survey in chapter one indicates that most scholars seem to take for granted that idolatry was abhorred by all Jews, and therefore most of them would regard the 'weak' as primarily Gentile believers on the basis of Paul's statement that they were 'accustomed' to idols (1 Cor 8.7). There seems to be a connection between idolatry and ethnicity: *all* Jews reject idols; *all* Gentiles are idolatrous. While the latter clause may appear representative of most Gentiles, the former cannot be true, as our discussions in chapters two and four have shown. The reason for the generalised conclusion of most scholars is the fact that there is little effort in discovering what constitutes idolatry for the Jews.<sup>19</sup> And the fact of the matter is that there were different definitions of idolatry for different Jews. And there are varying degrees of idolatry, as may be seen in the way Israelites variously define for themselves what is true worship and how different Jews could justify practices for themselves.<sup>20</sup> But this is not particular to ancient Judaism alone. In fact, there is an equally ambiguous understanding of what constitutes idolatry in early Christianity, of which our study of 1 Cor 8.1-11.1 is a powerful piece of evidence. Here in 1 Cor 8.1-11.1 idolatry appears to be a complex issue to which Paul has to devote three lengthy chapters. And it also suggests that whatever Jewish influence the Corinthians might have had, it was not as clear as we might want it to be.

What our investigations indicate is that our understanding of how ancient Judaism and early Christianity viewed idolatry cannot be easily absolutised. Nor can

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<sup>19</sup> See for example Dunn 1991:19-21 who argues that in the post-exilic period Jewish monotheism became a fundamental dogma of Judaism. But monotheism per se is not necessarily the opposing side of idolatry. For a monotheist could view all other Gods as expressions of the 'one deity', as Hengel (1974, 1.261-67) has ably demonstrated.

<sup>20</sup> See for example Halbertal 1998:159-72.



our view of the two religions be based on a generalised notion that all Jews and Christians in the Diaspora abhorred and rejected idolatry. Ancient Judaism and early Christianity are, after all, not as settled and stable as most scholars have made them out to be. We may speak of 'Judaism/s', and early 'believers' in Christ. And 'monotheistic' Jews and Christians need not be free from 'idolatry', depending on our and their definition of these terms. The implication seems to be that it would be wise to avoid an 'absolutised' opinion, and adopt a more 'fluid' idea of what constitutes idolatry. And in the light of our discussions of 1 Cor 9, and of the leadership and discipline in the Diaspora Jewish assemblies, it appears that what constitutes idolatry is to a great extent dependent upon who has the authority to decide what constitutes idolatrous behaviour.

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