Conversing
Across the Ages

A CONVERSATION AROUND SOME
INTELLECTUAL AND SOCIAL
PARADIGMS OF GRAECO-ROMAN
ANTIQUITY, THE APOSTLE PAUL, AND
MODERN EVANGELICALISM

This thesis fulfils the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury

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1997
PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning this thesis,

and the best possible result has been obtained.
No part of this thesis has been submitted in any form for the award of any degree at this or any other educational institution.

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### Summary: The Conversation in Outline

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**Figure 1: How the chapters carry the conversation**

In Part One, *A Confrontation of World Views*, I first argue that the life and thought of educated Graeco-Romans was profoundly shaped by a tension between characterisations of a primary reality and the social experiences of everyday reality. This tension surfaced in various models, images, and expectations of the real-the essence-the ideal-the perfect which both reflected and reinforced the presumption of a higher reality lying somewhere other than in the stuff of everyday life. The second chapter sketches the broad contours of Paul's preoccupation with Jesus Christ. I note how his focus on Christ spilled over into a penchant for the historical, the personal, and the social. I explore these as three interdependent axes of his thought. In chapter three I use the vantage point constructed in
the first two chapters to see the distinctiveness of Paul's thought and experience over against the patterns of Graeco-Roman philosophy, theology, religion, and morality.

Part Two, *The Character of a New Way*, explores the ways in which Paul's knowledge of Christ offered coherence within the contingencies of everyday experience. Chapter four focuses on Paul's experience of desire and freedom. Chapter five seeks to describe the rhythm of Paul's conversations for change. The topics of these chapters are really inseparable not only from each other, but from those of the previous chapters on Paul's life and thought. Thus certain themes recur through chapters two to five so that the four chapters form a continuous presentation of Paul's life and thought, albeit from several different perspectives.

Part Three, *Conversing Across the Ages*, carries the conversation forward to evangelicalism. In chapter six, I view the sermon as a critical event in the life of evangelicalism, and as the bridge between the academy and the congregation. I concentrate on the intellectual and social phenomena which highlight an evangelical's experience of the movement as a system and a culture. This leads me to consider how evangelical meanings have broken down in the experience of some evangelicals. In chapter seven, I look at ways in which the systems and culture of evangelicalism shape the reading of Paul. My focus here is on the drive to attach the epithets 'biblical' and 'unbiblical' to people, propositions, and behaviours. I argue that the intellectual and social phenomena suggest that being 'biblical' or otherwise has as much to do with social acceptability as it does with proximity to the biblical texts. This brings me full circle to the analogies which evangelicalism holds both to Paul and to his Graeco-Roman milieu.
Preface

I wish to record my thanks to those who joined this conversation. My supervisors—Professor David Russell of the University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury, and Dr. Stuart Piggin of Robert Menzies College, Macquarie University—have encouraged me since the beginning. Independently, both urged me to ‘discern where the enthusiasm was greatest and to stick with it’. I have gone back to this advice over and again. Until my final writing marathon, I often left them with little to go on but intuition as to whether I had something to say and would ever find a way to say it. My heartfelt thanks to both of you for your trust.

As a self-taught newcomer to the worlds of social history and the Graeco-Roman milieu, it has been a great privilege to submit my thoughts to Professors Edwin Judge and Bruce Harris of Macquarie University. They generously gave their time to read and comment on the first draft of each chapter. My sincere thanks to both of you for encouraging me in this labour. I would like to acknowledge my particular appreciation for Prof. Judge. Over ten years ago, his writings opened new horizons for me and they have played a vital role in shaping my line of enquiry. It has been a rare pleasure to meet with him and to know the scrutiny of his interest.

My close friends and business colleagues, David Jones and Tony Golsby-Smith, laboured with me over the architecture of many of my ideas. Their candour and vision frequently set free the thoughts I had been struggling to bring to light. Some other marvellous friends—Jewel Jones, Anne Golsby-Smith, Dianne and Ray Pridham, Pam and Adrian Fox, Roger Burgess, and my mother, Elva Strom—helped keep me going when it all seemed too much, and provoked me to not let it be ‘just another thesis’. Friends, I hope this is what you had in mind. My thanks in any case.

Most of all, I salute Susan, Miriam, Luke, and Hannah. No one one has done more than Sue to bring this labour to light. I may have thought of most of it first, but she has always been part of the conversation. Thanks for all the cuppas, the walks, and the sheer hard work. This is it guys—it’s finished! Kids, it’s time to do all those things we’ve been putting off. Sue, the study is now your studio.
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Introduction

This thesis\(^1\) aims to bring two worlds together in conversation\(^2\): the life and thought of the apostle Paul\(^3\) and of modern evangelicalism.\(^4\) In itself that is unremarkable given evangelicalism’s strong attachment to Paul’s writings and its long history of Pauline research. But this very familiarity may blind evangelicals to ways in which Paul’s life and thought could challenge and enrich their own agendas.

\(^1\) This thesis was written within the School of Social Ecology of the Faculty of Health, Humanities, and Social Ecology. It is not a thesis in history or biblical studies, though it draws heavily from those disciplines. While much of the thesis is particularly oriented to ancient history, the aim is to create a dialogue between the ancient sources and a modern community. At the modern end of the conversation, I employ popular sources, some of which are little known and particularly oriented to certain sub-groups of Sydney evangelicals. This is a deliberate strategy in order to trace the conversations of an actual evangelical community, rather than to remain with those sources more normally accessed in scholarly debate. True to the ethos of the School of Social Ecology, I seek a genuine collaboration with a community whose identity and purpose continually emerges within and around their conversation. I ask, then, that my examiners allow me a degree of methodological latitude not normally associated with a strictly historical or theological study.

\(^2\) Scholarly debate on hermeneutics frequently focuses on those epistemological, sociological, and psychological complexities which enlarge the impression of distance between the text and the reader. For a comprehensive survey of modern approaches to these issues, see Thielicke (1980, 1992). On conversation as an apt metaphor for the exchanges between a ‘classic’ text and a modern reader, see Tracy (1987). My description of the interpretative process as a conversation or dialogue does not imply my acceptance of the approach(es) of any particular hermeneutical school(s). Nor do I wish to minimise the normative character of Paul’s writings for evangelicals. I use the metaphor for the tone it conveys of an open reading in which (1) the readers are candid about their own contexts, as (2) they seek to handle the texts with respect and integrity.

\(^3\) Throughout this thesis I assume that Paul authored all the letters identified as his in the NT, or had a significant hand in shaping those letters which indicate joint authorship or the use of an amanuensis. I also assume that Acts provides a reliable historical witness to the ministry and thought of Paul. I am aware that scholars have raised historical and literary critical challenges to both points. Such critics usually regard 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, and to a lesser degree Ephesians, Colossians and 2 Thessalonians as Deutero-Pauline, ie. as representing later contexts and developments within communities influenced by Paul. I do not put aside their arguments lightly. The disputed letters in part exhibit styles, themes, and vocabulary different to the undisputed letters. These are real issues requiring careful analysis not simply dogmatic assertion. Nevertheless, many scholars have rigorously defended the authenticity of the letters and the historicity of Acts. Nor is there any simple uniformity between theological conviction and literary opinion: many evangelical scholars restrict the Pauline corpus, while other non-evangelicals have argued for the genuineness of certain disputed letters. The issues are well known and the literature voluminous such that there is no value in offering bibliographies here. More relevantly, it is appropriate that I locate my thesis within the assumptions of the evangelical mainstream.

\(^4\) Like most cultures defined by an ideology of some kind, it is harder to define ‘evangelicalism’ than it is to recognise a person or group as evangelical. Most evangelicals define themselves by certain theological distinctive: in particular, the historicity of Jesus Christ, the centrality of Christ to all questions of personal salvation and biblical interpretation, and the complete trustworthiness, inspiration, and authority of the Old and New Testaments. Evangelicals normally distinguish themselves from those they would call fundamentalists, pentecostals, charismatic, sacramentalists, and ‘liberals’. Quite often those who own these labels also consider themselves to be evangelical. Evangelicals tend to be conservative, both politically and in terms of broader cultural mores. Frequently, evangelicals see themselves as a purely theological phenomenon, and refuse any validity to cultural definitions. My experiences of evangelicals in Australia and the USA convinces me that the paradigms and themes which I employ in chapters six and seven are widely prevalent among all who identify themselves as evangelical. Readers aware of other Christian traditions might find further similarities. Rather than define evangelicalism, then, I ask the reader to judge for herself or himself whether or not my sources and characterisations fit those groups commonly accepted as evangelical. For recent discussions of evangelicalism, see Marsden (1980), Hunter (1987), Babbington (1989), and Grenz (1993).
Social historians\(^5\) studying Paul have drawn attention to how his life and thought was both conservative and radical within the frames of reference of his own world.\(^6\) Their work has often highlighted the profound challenge which Paul’s message brought to the classical view of a person’s place in the world. By the fourth century, a synthesis of these two rival world views had been hammered out. This synthesis is largely responsible for many of the social and intellectual tensions of subsequent western history.

Evangelical life and thought is as much an heir to this synthesis as is any other Western tradition. Yet evangelicals frequently presume an uncomplicated transparency for, and simple correspondence between, Paul’s perspectives and their own. Thus some evangelicals seem to assume that the contours of their own interactions with western culture roughly match Paul’s patterns of conformity and innovation within his own world. This assumption may distort evangelical readings of Paul. Indeed, evangelicals may hear Paul backing away from his world when, in fact, he didn’t—or hear him endorsing conventions which he actually eschewed. I seek a way into these interpretive anomalies and fallacies by examining Paul alongside the popular intellectualism of his day:

\[\begin{array}{ccc}
& 1stC & 4thC \\
\text{Graeco-Roman life and thought} & \text{Grasping Paul’s distinctiveness yields possibilities for new evangelical conversations} & \\
\text{Paul conformed, critiqued, and innovated within this world} & \text{clash accommodate realign} & \\
\text{Paul’s life and thought} & \text{Western life and thought} & \\
\text{Certain anomalies and fallacies occur as evangelicals look to Paul} & \\
\end{array}\]

\textit{Figure 2: Interpretive anomalies in evangelical responses to Paul}

\(^5\) My own appreciation of this approach began with Robert Banks (1980). This subsequently led me to the work of Edwin Judge and to the \textit{New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity} project inaugurated by him and carried out in the ancient history department of Macquarie University. Somewhat later I discovered the work of Meeks (1983) and Malherbe (1977a, 1986, 1987, 1989). My own work has been largely fired by a sense of the possibilities of social history as a means of opening up new conversation on issues of vital importance to rank-and-file evangelicals by breaking the stranglehold of traditional theological methods and agendas.

\(^6\) As the title indicates, I am majoring on the Graeco-Roman contexts for Paul’s life and thought. The comment of Malherbe is appropriate here also: “That Paul claims to have become all things to all people in order to save some (1 Cor. 9:19-23) indicates that he was aware of the need to adapt to particular contexts in which he found himself, and should caution us not to force everything he said or did into one mold. Here I wish to comment on the Graeco-Roman side of Paul, without thereby implying that it offers us the keys to unlock all the mysteries surrounding this enigmatic figure” (1989, 67).
Introduction

Much scholarship has been devoted to identifying formal parallels at the linguistic and literary levels between biblical authors and their supposed Graeco-Roman counterparts. In the case of Paul, a virtual industry has developed searching for parallels among Stoics, Epicureans, Cynics, Hellenistic Jewish scholars, mystics, and other tall figures of the ancient past. But as Judge has argued, it is a waste of time to look for conscious dependence by Paul on classical identities or on specific schools of thought. Paul did not represent any school, yet neither was he isolated from them:

If one is the kind of independent thinker that Paul is, one is simply building out freely from that, exploiting the material rather than subjecting oneself to it. The ways forward for historical research in this field in my opinion lie along the lines of studying this kind of popular intellectualism...It is rather that in any community there is a fluid and active field of thought-convention which belongs to every intelligent man and in which he shares. (Judge, 1973b, 110)

How significant this popular intellectualism may be to understanding Paul and his associates depends on where they were placed socially. If the early gentile Christians were poor and illiterate masses of dispossessed peasants and slaves (Deissmann, 1910), then talk of any kind of intellectualism may be well wide of the mark for Paul and his associates. If, on the other hand, Paul moved among and was supported by “persons of substance, members of a cultivated social elite...‘devout and honourable’ citizens of the Hellenistic states” (Judge, 1960c, 128, 130), then Paul’s ekklēsia7 are placed socially to share the “fluid and active field of thought-convention” of the educated:

Far from being a socially depressed group, then, if the Corinthians are at all typical, the Christians were dominated by a socially pretentious section of the population of the big cities. Beyond that they seem to have drawn on a broad constituency, probably representing the household dependents of the leading members...The interests brought together in this way probably marked the Christians off from the other unofficial associations, which were generally socially and economically as homogeneous as possible. Certainly the phenomenon led to constant differences among the Christians themselves, and helps to explain the persistent stress on not using membership in an association

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7 I adopt the somewhat clumsy convention throughout of referring to ekklēsia or ekklēsiai. Theological or semantic pedantry is not intended. It is simply that the translation church has become so loaded with subsequent centuries of ecclesiastical tradition as to prejudice the discussion of what Paul's groups actually were and did. In my experience this is as true of evangelicalism as of any other Christian tradition. I use the Greek term to keep the options open in the conversation. Normally a thesis of this kind would use Greek (and Hebrew) script were necessary. However, I have chosen (with the support of my supervisors) to transliterate all ancient language citations. The breadth of scope of this thesis requires that I make the argument as accessible as possible to those with more modern interests who may lack familiarity with the ancient languages.
of equals to justify breaking down the conventional hierarchy of the household (eg 1 Cor 7:20-24). The interest of the owner and patron class is obvious in this. It was they who sponsored Christianity to their dependents. (Judge, 1960a, 60)

In a recent thesis, Kidd (1990) surveyed the influence of Judge’s work, and the subsequent debates, and concluded that: “the Pauline movement as a whole contains within itself the acute stratification that in general marks municipal society” (Kidd, 1990, 74-75). It seems then that both Paul and at least certain of his associates were well-placed to be aware of the common intellectual currents of the day. How then do we identify this “popular intellectualism”, this “fluid and active field of thought-convention”?

A way forward lies in an approach like that of Albrecht Dihle’s work on popular ethics as the apparatus of thought for educated people (eg. 1982). The sharp edge of Dihle’s work comes at the nexus of the classical intellectual tradition and the commonplaces of a person’s inner life and social relationships. These have been summarised as: (1) radical evil and the basic failure of man; (2) will and the power of choice; (3) conscience; (4) one’s neighbour as one’s first obligation; and (5) humility as deliberate humiliation (Judge, 1973b, 115-116). For all its intellectual richness, Dihle argues, Greek philosophy could not offer mechanisms for reflection able to connect the individual’s living experience to the theorists’ axiomatic explanations. Rather, it fell to Paul to open up the inner person and his or her relationships. Paul’s teaching on the person-in-relationship stood at odds to the classical tradition, but subsequent generations of theologians and churchmen opened the way for the synthesis of the two world views in the fourth century.

Like Dihle, I seek to explore the tensions in antiquity between the abstractions and ideals of theorists and the realities of everyday experience. It is from this vantage point that I will view the world in which Paul lived and from which he also kept his distance.

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9 See also the recent work confirming the likely connections of certain members of various ekklēsiai (especially Corinth) with the wealthy and influential (Winter, 1988c, 1989a,b, 1991a, 1993b, 1994b; Gill, 1989, 1992, 1993a,b, 1994a; and Clarke, 1991, 1993). See Blue (1994) for the links between ekklēsia, home ownership, wealth, and social position among the early Christians.
Part One:
A Confrontation of World Views
OVERVIEW OF PART ONE

The chapters of this first part are broad in scope.

In the first chapter, I describe the popular intellectualism of the first century as shaped by a tension between metaphysical characterisations of a primary reality, and the everyday realities of social experience. The interaction of these two realities was pervasive, influential, and problematic. I note various models, images, and expectations of the real—the essence—the ideal—the perfect which reflected and reinforced the presumption of a purer reality lying somewhere other than in the stuff of everyday life.

In the second chapter, I pencil in the broad contours of Paul’s preoccupation with Jesus Christ. I note how his focus on Christ spilled over into his penchant for the historical, the personal, and the social. I treat these as three interdependent axes of his thought. Paul showed a marked preference for talking about specific people and contexts rather than general ideas, ideals, or images of perfection.

In chapter three, I use the vantage point constructed in the first two chapters to see the patterns of Paul’s thought and experience over against the Graeco-Roman paradigms of philosophy, theology, religion, and morality.

My aim in part one is to highlight the distinctives of Paul’s life and thought alongside the popular intellectualism of his Graeco-Roman contemporaries. Once this is established, I will be in a position to draw out in part two Paul’s desire, experience, and method. Finally, this will allow us in part three to view evangelicalism in terms of its proximity to both views of the world.
Primary Reality versus Everyday Reality: Tensions of Classical Antiquity

1.1 A MODEL OF A SPLIT REALITY

The presumption that a purer reality lay somewhere other than in everyday life coloured the intellectual and social life of Graeco-Roman society. Though there was wide divergence, even contradictions, between the characterisations of this purer reality, nevertheless the presumption seems to pervade the literary and non-literary sources across the era. It appears in the earliest sources and persists into late antiquity despite the substantial shifts in philosophical, religious and social thought throughout that time.

We may characterise this presupposition as a model of reality split into what I will call primary reality and everyday reality. The two were not unrelated. Theorists, too, were social beings and could not decouple their intellectualism from the worlds in which they raised families, taught, and fulfilled civic responsibilities. Moreover, their insights influenced the moral, political, pedagogical, and religious practices of society. But the mix was not easy. As much as primary reality influenced the mindsets of the educated and beyond, everyday reality proved problematic for the theorists’ systems and confidence:

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 3: The relationship of primary reality and everyday reality*
The connectedness of the two realities generated deep conflict and ingenious accommodation. If the world of experience, and the person, was a microcosm of a greater reality, then the vicissitudes, uncertainties, and brokenness of experience deeply questioned the theorists’ elegant models of a perfect reality. If, on the other hand, these models were borne along on the triumph of an unquestionable logic, then the stinging contradictions of experience threatened to collapse into illusion and irrelevance. Likewise, while rhetoric could move an audience to acclaim the transparent veracity of moral ideals, the same ideals could crumble in the face of a dying child. The stark gap between classical ideals and the uncertainty of life in antiquity could not only bring scorn to the ideals, but also ensure their sanctity as a vision of something better, giving meaning and hope.

What, then, characterised Graeco-Roman models of primary reality? The eclecticism and romanticism of the era requires that the investigation hark back to the classical period, the intellectual cradle of Paul’s day.

1.2 PHILOSOPHICAL AND LITERARY PRESUMPTIONS OF A PRIMARY REALITY AND THE RELEGATION OF THE EVERYDAY

1.2.1 Primary reality among the gods in early literature

Homer’s Odyssey sees traces of the gods throughout the world of men. To some, the gods actually appear (Odyssey 14.19-23). While the gods may have cared, there was a limit to this familiarity. Even in epiphany the heavenly ones disguise themselves so well that few men ever discerned the event for what it was until after the fact. And when they dropped such disguises, the gods towered over men, radiating brilliant light, captivating by their other-worldly beauty, and striking awe with their pounding voices and rapid departures. In a by-gone age it had been different, and this fragile past survived in idyllic Phaenicia so long as mere mortals kept their distance (books 6-7; Fox, 1986, 106).

The heroes of epics and tragedies clung to the edge of the world of the gods. Those few lucky and courageous enough to win the honour might gain a vestige of the Golden Age (Fox, 1986, 110). But men did not belong in the other realm. Thus while the gods were deeply involved in the Trojan War, and were not untouched by man’s suffering, they always returned to splendid Olympus for feasting. The contrast to men was extreme: “For

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1 My use of the masculine is deliberate. Throughout this chapter, and whenever I focus on classical and Graeco-Roman people and thought, I maintain the convention of referring to ‘men’ and ‘man’. This is how the ancients uniformly wrote and spoke as a generic for both sexes and, more often, simply because they discounted the feminine sex as a worthy audience. That is the historical reality. I prefer to adhere to it in these contexts, and to switch my style where appropriate when I deal with Paul (thus indirectly reinforcing his own non-conformity). Similarly, I alternate in the last chapters on evangelicalism between evangelicals’ own uses of the masculine, and a more inclusive style.
the gods there are no crucial turning points in past or future; their life is diluted by immortality" (Taplin, 1986, 57). The vision of a Golden Age, or of even a moment’s bliss in the company of the gods, thus also poignantly expressed men’s limitations. The poet’s dreams of an idyllic life found no fulfilment in time and space: “The existence of such images is like the existence of the blessed gods: it defines by contrast the real lot of man” (Griffin, 1986, 86).

Hesiod’s Theogony wove together generations of tradition with a new critically aware analysis in order to tell the truth about the gods: “We know how to say many lies as if they were true, and when we want, we know how to speak the truth” (Theogony 27, trans. Caldwell). In his work on the theology of the earliest Greek philosophers, Jaeger (1947) argued that Hesiod’s epic provided numerous parameters for later, more systematic, cosmological and theological thought. These parameters are: the primacy of chaos; the origin of chaos in some form of generation; the hint that something existed at the beginning (arché) of becoming without itself coming into being; the notion of generation as a basic heuristic for what was expressed as cause-and-effect relationships; the hypostatisation of Eros as the power behind all generations; and the subjection of gods and humans to universal law (ibid, 13-15). Hesiod, it seems, was moving towards that place where gods and men alike must yield to reason.

Yet the gods continued to inhabit a reality somewhere beyond the everyday world of mortals. The encounters of gods and men could not bridge the great gulf of power between them. Neither could those moments solve the riddle of destiny, providence, and chance: How did a man’s will intersect with the greater powers that rule the world?

Though retaining the same sense of gulf (“From their high-towering hopes...all that is wrought by the powers divine is free from toil”, Suppliant Maidens 100-3, trans. Smyth), Aeschylus’ answer foreshadowed a more systematic treatment of reality: “the ultimate justice of Providence, in whose designs the rival claims, whether of men or of supernatural powers, were at last reconciled and contending wills brought to work together within the universal scheme of ordered government and goodwill towards men, which is what the name of Zeus signifies to him” (Pickard-Cambridge and Winnington-Ingram, OCD, 19). Likewise Sophocles saw the need to move beyond mere piety to an active reflection on those natural, universal laws which promised to explain the actions of gods and men alike (Kitto, OCD, 1002).

In the amusing argument of Euripides and Aeschylus in Aristophanes’ Frogs, Euripides shows scant inclination to rely on the old myths to convey his purposes:
No hippococks or goatstags, for a start—or any other mythical monsters from Persian tapestries. When I took over Tragedy from you, the poor creature was in a dreadful state. Fatty degeneration of the Art. All swollen up with high-falutin' diction. I soon got her weight down, though: put her on a diet of particles, with a little finely chopped logic (taken peripatetically), and a special decoction of dialectic, cooked up from books and strained to facilitate digestion. (Aristophanes, Frogs 959, trans. Barrett)

The sixth and fifth centuries BC were a time for men of action. Yet the ideal man detached himself somewhat to guard the serenity and status of his settled life. In this respect at least, the same maxims held in the worlds of the gods and men: know yourself, do nothing in excess, and count the cost of every commitment.

1.2.2 Primary reality takes shape among the Presocratics

With the Presocratics a new sophistication emerged in the articulation of primary reality. First, the world and history revealed an intrinsic principle of order. Second, all things could be explained by the one set of principles. Third, any explanation should emphasise simplicity and singularity, without pretentious elegance.

A common vocabulary emerged to carry the investigation. kosmos served the need to speak of the totality of things, the ordered and elegant universe. phusis, nature, signified not only those phenomena which are not artificial, not techné, but more importantly, the principle which pervades the natural part of the universe. They wanted to know the nature of things, what makes anything this and nothing else. Taking the logic of phusis to the whole cosmos, the Presocratics searched for the archai, the first principles, the basic stuffs of the universe which make the kosmos what it is. Finally, in so far as the Presocratics proceeded by argument and critical thought, they were expanding and exploring the shift from myth to reason—not logos as incredible tale, but as an account in which belief could no longer be suspended (Mortley, 1986a, 13).

This account opened with the Milesians—Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes—searching for the stuff which shapes all reality: the archai of the kosmos. The key features of these archai were infinitude, eternity and the creative tension of opposites:

It is with reason that they all make [the infinite] a principle; for it can neither exist to no purpose nor have any power except that of a principle. For everything is either a principle or derived from a principle. But the infinite has

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2 The summary points in this paragraph and the next come from Barnes (1987, 9-24).
no principle—for then it would have a limit...And it is also divine; for it is
deathless and unperishing, as Anaximander and most of the natural scientists
say. (Aristotle, Physics 203b6-11, trans. Barnes)

The creative tension of opposites and the eternal motion of reality allowed the
Milesians, Pythagoras, and Heraclitus to grant a place to change within an otherwise fixed
reality. For Pythagoras, history was an unwavering, endless cycle of recurrence in which
the soul passes through a sequence of incarnations. Likewise for Heraclitus, “the world,
the same for all, neither god nor any man made; but it was always and is and will be,
fire ever-living, kindling in measures and being extinguished in measures” (Fragment B30,

But whereas the Milesians allowed change in and around primary reality, the
Eleatics, Parmenides, Melissus, and Zeno, dismissed change as the very antithesis of being.
Motion implies change, the antithesis of being, and even the slightest change would signal
imperfection. Change is therefore illusion. Nor can being have pain, else it is not whole,
for pain is loss. Being, reality, is therefore one:

(The One) is ungenerated and indestructible, whole, of one kind and
unwavering, and complete. Nor was it, nor will it be, since now it is, all
together, one, continuous...The same and remaining in the same state, it lies by
itself, and thus remains fixed there. For powerful necessity holds it
encha...because it is right that what is should be not incomplete.
(Parmenides, in Simplicius, Commentary on the Physics 144.25-146.27, trans.
Barnes)

Being...is infinite...unique...changeless...always homogenous with itself...can
neither perish nor grow nor change its arrangement nor suffer pain nor suffer
anguish...(nor) move. (Melissus, in ibid, 103.13-104.15, trans. Barnes)

If we can rely on Simplicius (sixth century AD) to have retained anything of the
Presocratics intent in his commentary on them, then Empedocles revived the earlier notion
of the creative tension of opposites even while preserving the arguments of Parmenides
and Melissus to the effect that nothing comes into existence, nor ceases to exist, and that
vacuums are logically impossible. It seems to Empedocles (Simplicius?) that motion and
change are possible since the eternal stuffs (earth, air, fire, water) can move and change
places according to the opposing powers of Love and Strife working via chance and
necessity:

(Empedocles) also hints at a double world—one intelligible and the other
perceptible, one divine and the other mortal, one containing things as
paradigms and the other as copies. He showed this when he said that not only
generated and perishable things are composed of these but so too are the
gods...in the following verses too you might think he is hinting at a double
world: 'For they are all in union with their own parts—Sun and Earth and
Heaven and Sea—which have been separated from them and grown in mortal
things'. (Simplicius, Commentary on the Physics 160.8-161.1, includes quote of
Empedocles, trans. Barnes)

The idea of twin realities or opposing forces would inevitably raise the question of
balance. If the cosmos is shaped by two powers or realities, then the perfect reality would
hold these in absolute balance. And if the person is a microcosm of the whole, or simply
an entity caught between the two, then balance becomes the key to the ideally harmonious
life. According to Plutarch, Alcmæon had anticipated this response:

Alcmæon says that health is conserved by egalitarianism among the powers—
wet and dry, cold and hot, bitter and sweet and the rest—(illness) comes by an
excess... (or) from a surfeit... health is the proportionate blending of the qualities.
(Plutarch, On the Scientific Beliefs of the Philosophers 911A, trans. Barnes)

In a bold new move, Anaxagoras dismissed both the Eleatics and Empedocles, and
argued that every substance or stuff is eternal—there are no 'basic' elements or stuffs.
Moreover, no stuff is ever entirely separated (i.e. there are no pure stuffs), but every stuff
has a bit of every other stuff. Thus there is no purest or smallest piece of reality.

It sounds like Anaxagoras has contradicted our theme. But behind the cosmos in his
system is mind, pervading everything and responsible for everything. Later philosophers
saw a designer here, but for Anaxagoras this mind may only be an impersonal force:

Mind is something infinite and self-controlling, and it has been mixed with no
thing but is alone by itself... For it is the finest of all things and the purest,
and it possesses all knowledge about everything, and it has the greatest
strength. And mind controls all those things, both great and small, which
possess soul... All mind, both great and small, is alike... Mind is where all the
other things also are. (Anaxagoras in Simplicius, Commentary on the Physics
155.21-157.24, trans. Barnes)

The atomists, Leucippus and Democritus, offered the last major delineation of
reality. Rather than make an appeal to contrary forces or to an all-embracing One, they
concluded that the universe consisted of an infinite number of bodies in an infinitely
extended void. These bodies have primary qualities (size, shape, hardness, etc) and
combine in an infinite number of substances.
Where then do we find the character of reality: in alternative proposals for first principles; creative eternal opposites; in an all-embracing One; in simple stuff shaped by pervasive mind; or in atomism? What was impossible and incredible to one Presocratic, was critical and irrefutable to another, yet each in their own way presumed a greater reality behind the world we know. Likewise, though there was considerable dissension over the value of the senses, there was near unanimous confidence in the power of reason to peel back those layers of the everyday which obscured the essence of reality, and so to provide a comprehensive, systematic understanding of the cosmos.

For most, this investigation of reality inescapably challenged tradition and convention. Xenophanes held up to ridicule the immorality of the gods of Homer and the poets, and dismissed customary religious beliefs as groundless. The anthropomorphific gods must give way to a god of rational theology—moral, motionless, all-knowing, and all-powerful—no longer a dubious personality, but an abstract force:

Xenophanes...supposed that the first principle, or existing universe, was one and neither finite nor infinite, neither changing nor changeless...Xenophanes said that this one universe was god...‘Always he remains in the same state, changing not at all, nor is it fitting for him to move now here now there...but far from toil he governs everything with his mind’. (Xenophanes, in Simplicius, Commentary on the Physics 22.26-23.20, trans. Barnes)

The Eleatics, Parmenides, Melissus, and Zeno, elevated reason into new prominence. Whatever the precise character of primary reality, reason showed it to be other than what we discern through empirically verifiable phenomena. If our senses say something else, then this only confirms their corruption. Reason and being were becoming corollaries of each other:

Parmenides too touched on this doctrine inasmuch as he identified being and thought and did not locate being in sensible objects. He said: ‘For the same things can be thought of and can be’. (Plotinus, Enneads 5.1.8, trans. Barnes)

(Parmenides) saw being itself in that which is separated from all and the highest of all beings, in which being was primarily manifested; but he was not unaware of the plurality of intelligible objects. (Proclus, Commentary on the Parmenides 708.7-22, trans. Barnes)

Now these things do not agree with one another. For we said that there are many eternal things with forms and strength of their own, but they all seem to us to alter and to change from what they were each time they were seen. So it is clear that we do not see correctly, and that those many things do not correctly
seem to exist, for they would not change if they were true. (Melissus, in Simplicius, Commentary on On the Heavens 558.17-559.13, trans. Barnes)

The last Presocratics thus faced a considerable dilemma. The Eleatics had dismissed the senses along with change and there seemed no going back from their arguments. Yet the devaluing of the senses threatened scientific pursuit. Hence a new respect for sense perception began to assert itself. But, as Philolaus shows, the choice still lay with reason as the path to a knowledge of primary reality:

All the so-called mathematical sciences are like smooth flat mirrors in which traces and images of intelligible truth are reflected. But it is above all geometry which, according to Philolaus, being the origin and native city of the others, turns and elevates the mind which is purified and gently released from perception. (Plutarch, Table Talk 718E, trans. Barnes)

Democritus’ science raised the same issue of certainty. Reality is only atoms and void, and these are unknowable because they lack sense characteristics. Yet the senses do seem to say something about reality. Democritus’ answer was that most of what we take for the fixed laws of nature is simple convention:

By convention hot, by convention cold: in reality atoms and void...In reality we know nothing—for truth is in the depths. (Democritus, in Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Philosophers 9.72, trans. Barnes)

That in reality we do not know how each thing is or is not has been shown in many ways...And a man must recognise by this rule that he is removed from reality (Democritus, in Sextus Empiricus, Against the Mathematicians 5.2.135-140, trans. Barnes)

Yet at least one fragment shows Democritus’ own tenacious hold on the value of the senses:

By convention colour, by convention sweet, by convention bitter: in reality atoms and void. Poor mind, do you take your evidence from us and then try to overthrow us? Our overthrow is your fall. (Democritus, in Galen, On Medical Experience 15.7-8, trans. Barnes)

Whatever the value of the senses, the Presocratics as a whole grew in confidence in the power of reason to peel away everyday phenomena and so reveal the essence of reality. Such arguments jolted self-awareness of process. Some had ‘proved’ the indivisible oneness of reality and therefore the illusion of the world of our senses. Others went in the opposite direction to describe reality, but ended in much the same place on the senses. Confidence had shifted from the phenomena to the hypothesis.
1.2.3 Plato and the full articulation of primary reality

The tension between primary and everyday realities was bound to provoke a range of accommodations. One of the legacies of the Presocratics in this regard is epitomised in the words of Heraclitus: “I inquired into myself” (in Plutarch, Against Colotes, 1118c, trans. Barnes). Perhaps as the gap widened for Heraclitus between his metaphysic and his moral conservatism, some form of inner enlightenment offered a personal resolution through a more profound realisation of the traditional maxim “know yourself”. He was not alone.

Plato dismissed Heraclitus’ sentiment as individualism (Theaetetus 179d-180c). Nevertheless, his own initial direction was akin to Heraclitus in that he sought to make self-knowledge the basis of understanding (First Alcibiades 132, Lovers 138b). In the Charmides, however, the argument runs out of puff, and in the slave boy passage of the Meno (82b-86c), Socrates moves towards characterising all knowledge as recollection of what our souls already knew. Having triumphantly identified reason as an activity of the soul, Plato sharply separated it from any empirical means of knowledge.

The Phaedo developed an even more radical separation of body and soul—of everything that is not reason from reason. The Republic pushed this further again. Years of mathematical training grounds the soul for its quest to grasp the higher levels of knowledge. But the more Plato emphasised knowledge as a “grasp of an objective, shared, impartible system of hierarchically ordered truths, the more we wonder what has happened to (his) original concern to wake each of us up to personal understanding as the basis of our actions” (Annas, 1986, 241).

Plato’s dichotomy of body and soul would seem inevitably to relegate the everyday as inferior to that reality grasped only by the mind. Yet he wanted the primary to influence the everyday. Thus, in the Statesman, the Critias, and the Laws, works from his most mature period, Plato appears to take history more seriously and to shift from the ideal to the workable. But, in the Critias at least, his Athens remains the ancient city which rivalled the legendary Atlantis.

If Plato can at all be seen to have brought cosmological debate back to earth, it was only by a huge concession: real reality is beyond our everyday experience and understanding:

We must in my opinion begin by distinguishing between that which always is and never becomes from that which is always becoming but never is. The one is apprehensible by intelligence with the aid of reasoning, being eternally the same, the other is the object of opinion and irrational sensation, coming to be and ceasing to be, but never fully real. (Timaeus, 27D-28A, trans. Lee)
Thus begins Plato’s account (in the voice of Timaeus) of the creation, and of the character of reality. From the outset we learn that there are two types of reality: the fully real—eternal, good ‘being’, known by intelligence through reason; and the somewhat less real—perishing, changing, not so good ‘becoming’, never known beyond mere opinion and irrational sensation (see also Phaedrus, 250BC).

Clearly there are two methods of knowing the two realities and two corresponding levels of certainty for our knowledge:

We must lay it down that the words in which likeness and pattern are described will be of the same order as that which they describe. Thus a description of what is changeless, fixed and clearly intelligible will be changeless and fixed—will be, that is, as irrefutable and uncontroversible as a description in words can be; but analogously a description of a likeness of the changeless, being a description of a mere likeness will be merely likely; for being has to becoming the same relation as truth to belief. (Timaeus 29BC)

The fully real is the perfect expression of God. Yet, the logic seems more naturally to flow in reverse: the creation, and God, are exactly what it and he must be. It is as though the abstractions ‘good’ and ‘intelligence’ reign over the realms of all possibility:

God therefore, wishing that all things should be good, and so far as possible nothing be imperfect, and finding the visible universe in a state not of rest but of inharmonious and disorderly motion, reduced it to order from disorder, as he judged that order was in every way better. It is impossible for the best to produce anything but the highest. When he considered, therefore, that...nothing without intelligence is to be found that is superior to anything with it, and that intelligence is impossible without soul, in fashioning the universe he implanted reason in soul and soul in body, and so ensured his work should be by nature highest and best. (Timaeus 30AB)

What else besides eternity, immutability, and order would constitute this single, perfect world (Timaeus 31B)? It should be complete and free from disease (Timaeus 33A). Moreover, its very shape must be the highest of shapes, incorporating all other shapes as derivative:

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3 The translation of Plato’s Timaeus is from Lee (1971). I have chosen to concentrate on the Timaeus for my analysis of Plato’s characterisation of primary reality and his relegation of the everyday. Though the theme is discernable throughout his works, the Timaeus is unique in its extensive cosmology and explicit comparisons of the two realities.
...a figure that contains all possible figures within itself...a rounded spherical shape...a figure that has the greatest degree of completeness and uniformity, as he judged uniformity to be incalculably superior to its opposite...(and) of the seven physical motions he allotted to it the one which most properly belongs to intelligence and reason, and made it move with a uniform circular motion on the same spot; any deviation into movement of the other six kinds he entirely precluded. (*Timaeus* 33B-34A)

Having established the basic parameters for his perfect reality, Plato turns to musical, mathematical, and geometrical axioms, structures, and analogies to explain the harmony and order of the universe (*Timaeus* 35B-36C). His presumption throughout is that perfection consists of symmetry and an ordered hierarchy, evidenced in rounded-off mathematical sequences and completed scales. Likewise, the soul has some kind of embedded mathematical structure.

As in the *Sophist* (252E-253D), so here, “the cognitive activity of the soul’s ceaseless and intelligent life is based on the principle that like knows like” (Cornford, 94). The dialectician’s task, in imitation of the world-soul, is to discern “the true structure of the realm of Forms, what each Form is in itself and how it differs from others—what it is and what it is not” (Cornford, 96):

The body of the heaven is visible, but the soul invisible and endowed with reason and harmony, being the best creation of the best of intelligible and eternal things. And because it is compounded of Same, Different, and Existence as constituent parts, and divided up and bound together in proportion, and is revolving upon itself, whenever the soul comes in contact with anything whose being is either dispersed or indivisible, it is moved throughout and calculates similarity and difference, that is, exactly what respect and in what way and how and when it happens that a particular thing is or is qualified by these terms in respect of anything either in the realm of change or in relation to things eternally the same. (*Timaeus* 37AB)

In this ceaseless discernment and discourse, the world-soul senses the forms of a perfect diversity in life (*Timaeus* 39E). The lesser gods must complete this perfect design: “There are three kinds of mortal creature yet uncreated, and unless they are created the world will be imperfect, as it will not have in it every kind of living creature which it must have if it is to be perfect” (41B).

Having originally fashioned the world-soul from a mixture of intermediate kinds of Existence, Sameness, and Difference (*Timaeus* 35A), the Demiurge now makes the
immortal part of individual souls from the left-overs of the same mixture (41D) and
arranges for their egalitarian beginnings in a first, undifferentiated incarnation and
subsequent diversification as each soul proves worthy or otherwise of its calling.

The possibility of failure, of deviating from the intelligent design, moves Plato to the
heart of the problem of humanity: the soul fights to control the 'sensations' of the body—a
microcosm of the grand struggle of reason over necessity. As the gods move to fulfil their
charge, they bring the soul into union with the body, with less than perfect results:

...(the gods) took the immortal principle of the creature and...borrowed from the
world portions of fire and earth, water, and air...and welded together (a
body)...subject to the flow of growth (into which) they fastened the orbits of the
immortal soul. Plunged into this strong stream, the orbits were unable to
control it, nor were they controlled by it, and because of the consequent violent
conflict the motions of the whole creature were irregular, fortuitous, and
irrational...but still greater was the disturbance caused by the properties of
objects which it encountered...The motions caused by all these were transmitted
through the body and impinging on the soul, and for that reason were later
called, as they still are, 'sensations'. (Timaeus 42D-43C)

This model of the soul's motions and its struggle to achieve harmony, order, and
gentle rhythm becomes a heuristic for understanding everyday realities; in particular,
individual and social development. Just as the child depends upon outside agencies, so its
soul's orbits are irregular, and the child's behaviour is irrational. But as:

...the stream of growth and nourishment flows less strongly, the soul's orbits
take advantage of the calm and as time passes steady down in their proper
courses, and the movement of the circles at last regains its correct natural form,
and they can name the Different and the Same correctly and render their
possessor rational. (Timaeus 44B)

So the perfect is the unchanging, the unmoved, the one with mastery over sensation.
It is easy to imagine that Plato has wandered from his grand cosmological scheme to an
unexceptionable description of the wise citizen. Indeed, one might wonder which came
first: Plato's metaphysic, or his personal experience of moral and social ideals within the
relative calm of a privileged life. The interdependence between the primary and the
eyeryday looms large.

Plato continues his cosmological system with an account of the origins and purposes
of the parts of the human body. Note the role of reason in the system: (1) reason explains
each part without apparent need for clinical observation; (2) the primacy of reason
provides a schema for the location of each part in respect to the head; and (3) each part serves the primacy of reason in human life. Thus:

...(the gods) copied the shape of the universe and fastened the two divine orbits of the soul into a spherical body, which we now call the head, the divinest part of us which controls all the rest...they then put together the body as a whole to serve the head...And to prevent the head from rolling about on the earth...they provided that the body should act as a convenient vehicle...carrying on top of it the seat of our divinest and holiest part. That is the reason we all have arms and legs...the first organs they fashioned were those that gave us light...The pure fire within us that is akin (to gentle non-burning fire) they caused to flow through the eyes, making the whole eye-ball...smooth and close-textured so that it would keep in anything of coarser nature, and filter through only this pure fire...when the eyelids...are shut, they confine the activity of fire within, and this smoothes and diffuses the internal motions, and produces a calm...(the cause and purpose of sight) was that we should see the revolutions of intelligence in the heavens and use their untroubled course to guide the troubled revolutions of our own understanding...(to) correct the disorder of our own revolutions by the standard of the invariability of those of god...and all musical sound is...a heaven sent ally in reducing to order and harmony any disharmony in the revolutions within us. (Timaeus 44D-47D)

Until now, Plato has looked at the creation, as it were, from 'above', from the designs and intelligence of the Demiurge and the soul. Now he views the universe from 'below', from the chaos and abyss which confronted the Maker (Cornford, n.d., 159). Eschewing any traditional arguments over first principles (Timaeus 48BD), he sees the four elements as qualities rather than as substances, and subsumes them under the categories of being, becoming, and the receptacle. So far he has spoken of the process of creation as though it were the steady unfolding of an unhindered intelligence. But now his particular concern is to relate this reason to errant necessity:

For this world came into being from a mixture and combination of necessity and intelligence. Intelligence controlled necessity by persuading it for the most part to bring about the best result...(but) to give a true account of how it came to be on these principles, one must bring in the indeterminate (or 'errant') cause so far as its nature permits. (Timaeus 48A)

The discussion which follows of the elements—being, becoming, and the receptacle—is exceptionally odd to modern ears and hard to follow. But for our purposes, certain points become clearer about the nature and location of reality:
There is in fact a process of cyclical transformation...Whenever we see anything in process of change, for example fire, we should speak of it not as being a thing but as having a quality...in general we should never speak as if any of the things we suppose we can indicate by pointing and using the expressions 'this thing' or 'that thing' have any permanent reality: for they have no stability and elude the designation 'this' or 'that' or any other that expresses permanence. (Timaeus 49CE)

Plato has returned here to his initial distinction (Timaeus 27D-28B) between being and becoming, and the resulting levels of reality. But what is this receptacle, this space, this half-way house between being and becoming, this "nurse of all becoming and change" (49A)?

...it never alters its characteristics. For it continues to receive all things, and never itself takes a permanent impress from any of the things which enter it...and the things which pass in and out of it are copies of the eternal realities. (Timaeus 50BC)

Plato follows with the metaphor of birth: the receptacle is the mother, the model is the father, and the resulting things are their children. The model, the father, has a certain superiority in this scheme. Moreover, the receptacle must not hinder the pure imprint of being on becoming. Thus, "so as to receive in itself every kind of character", the receptacle itself must be "devoid of all character...invisible and formless, all-embracing, possessed in a most puzzling way of intelligibility, yet very hard to grasp" (Timaeus 50E-51B).

Hard to grasp, indeed! The specific characteristics of the receptacle remain shadowy. Yet the fit of character to purpose is clear enough given Plato’s model of pure reality: the receptacle must remain on the being side of the equation; unchanging, untainted, and passive. But what is the model, the original, the eternal reality? Plato is ready to introduce his Forms. Unlike his accounts in the Phaedo, Parmenides, Republic, and Sophist, however, he will not expound at any length this "unchanging form, uncreated and indestructible, admitting, no modification and entering no combination, imperceptible to sight or the other senses, the object of thought" (Timaeus 52A). Rather, he pins his 'proof' of the forms on the self-evident distinction between intelligence and true opinion:

If intelligence and true opinion are different in kind, then these 'things-in-themselves' certainly exist, forms imperceptible to our senses, but apprehended by thought; but if, as some think, there is no difference between true opinion and intelligence, what we perceive through our physical senses must be taken as the most certain reality. Now there is no doubt that the two are different,
because they differ in origin and nature. One is produced by teaching, the other by persuasion; one always involves truth and rational argument, the other is irrational; one cannot be moved by persuasion, the other can; true opinion is a faculty shared, it must be admitted, by all men, intelligence by the gods and only a small number of men. (Timaeus 51DE)

Plato’s Forms are notoriously difficult to define precisely, though the reason for this is simple enough. It seems Plato never intended to provide a single consistent system of thought, but used the language of ‘forms’ quite fluidly. For all his abstraction, he wanted philosophy to be a living dialogue (Phaedrus 274b-277). Thus although there is no definitive picture of the Forms, yet they do stand as ‘something other’, a truer reality beyond the corruption and change of experience: “they are objects of pure thinking, and thus separate from our experience...(yet) they motivate us to grasp them in a way that lifts us out of our everyday individual concerns” (Annas, 1986, 242). How then will Plato explain the phenomena of the sensate world?

The incredible diversity of the sensate world is the result of three key factors: the mixtures of the four substances; the innumerable variations and aberrations of the basic geometric shape, the triangle; and the transformations brought about by fluctuations in the harmony and equilibrium between the substances (Timaeus 52A-61C). The whole scheme echoes his previous use of mathematical categories, and his presupposition of stability, immobility, order, harmony, hierarchy, and symmetry as the hallmarks of purest reality.

The same model controls his description of the human senses:

...what is structurally mobile, when affected by even a slight impulse, spreads it round...until it reaches the consciousness and reports the quality of the agent. By contrast, what is immobile is too stable to spread or communicate to its neighbours the effect of any modification it suffers. (Timaeus 64AC)

Any sudden and violent disturbance of our normal state is painful, and a sudden return to it pleasurable. (64CD)

Our faculty of smell has no definite pattern. All smells are half-formed things, and none of our regular figures corresponds to any smell. (66D)

The last major section begins again with the divine purpose as it makes the best it can out of the material constituents of the universe and their physical processes. The sensible phenomena of our experience, it seems, are some kind of necessary evil, both essential for, and inimical to, moral and intellectual life:
We must therefore distinguish two types of cause, the necessary and the
divine...reflecting that without them we cannot perceive, apprehend, or in any
way attain our objective. *(Timaeus 68E-69A)*

(The gods built onto the soul) another mortal part, containing terrible and
necessary feelings: pleasure, the chief incitement to wrong, pain, which
frightens us from good, confidence and fear, two foolish counsellors, obstinate
passion and credulous hope. To this mixture they added irrational sensation
and desire which shrinks from nothing, and so gave the mortal element its
indispensable equipment. *(69CD)*

Plato now assumes the threefold model of the soul which he had made in the
*Republic* *(435-444)*: reason, emotion, and appetite. This model or, more particularly, the
implied struggle for supremacy, order, and balance between the three aspects of soul,
accounts for the respective positions and functions of the bodily organs. The more noble,
the more oriented to reason, are located nearer the head; the baser, below the midriff:

Since (the gods) shrank from polluting the divine element with these mortal
feelings more than was absolutely necessary, they located the mortal element in
a separate part of the body, and constructed the neck as a kind of isthmus and boundary
between head and breast to keep them apart...the seat of courage,
passion, and ambition...nearer the head...well-placed to listen to the commands
of reason...the heart...in the guardroom, in order that when passions were
aroused to boiling point...commands and threats should circulate quickly...they
secured appetite (in the belly) like a wild beast...to feed at its stall, but be as far
as possible from the seat of deliberation...and wound the bowels round in coils,
thus preventing the quick passage of food, which would otherwise compel the
body to want more and make its appetite insatiable, so rendering our species
incapable through gluttony of philosophy and culture, and unwilling to listen
to the divinest element in us. *(Timaeus 69DE-73A)*

As for the rest of the body—thickness of skin, bone structure, bodily fluids, spinal
cord, circulation, respiration—these are similarly explained in terms of the affect of
proximity to the divine seed, the degree of movement, and susceptibility to change. Even
plants and animals are transparent to Plato’s axioms *(Timaeus 73B-87C)*.

Now if the universe is a mixture of the intelligible and sensible, of the orderly and
chaotic, and if the person is a microcosm of this same stability and instability, then disease
and health are the absence and restoration of balance. At the same time, tranquillity ought
to be preferred to disruption, and inner impulse rather than external influence:
The good...is always beautiful, and the beautiful never lacks proportion. A living creature that is to have either quality must therefore be well-proportioned...For health and sickness, virtue and vice, the proportion or disproportion between soul and body is far the most important factor. (Timaeus 87B,D)

Among movements, the best is that we produce in ourselves of ourselves—for it is most nearly akin to the movement of thought and of the universe; next is movement produced in us by another; worst of all is movement caused by outside agents in parts of the body while the body itself remains passive and inert. (89A)

This emphasis on balance is entirely predictable. Once again, one suspects that Plato’s moral and social elitism, enshrined in the conventions of his ideal society, has really been leading us here all along. Plato intended his trilogy, never completed and of which the Timaeus was the first part, as an exploration of his ideal society. The work was intended to root his ideals within cosmology and the heroic ideals of legend and past history. The entire work has served to open up to us the character and location of the real, the ideal, and the perfect, and to instruct us in the parameters for the reasoned life turned towards the tranquil apprehension and expression of the Forms which are supremely real. After all, our home is not here:

We should think of the most authoritative part of our soul as a guardian spirit given by god, living in the summit of the body, which can properly be said to lift us from the earth towards our home in heaven; for we are creatures not of earth but of heaven, where the soul was first born. (Timaeus 90A)

The motions in us that are akin to the divine are the thoughts and revolutions of the universe. We should each therefore attend to these motions and by learning about the harmonious circuits of the universe repair the damage done at birth to the circuits in our head, and so restore understanding and what is understood to their original likeness to each other. When that is done we shall have achieved the goal set us by the gods, the life that is best for this present time and for all time to come. (90D)

There were other larger-than-life figures in classical philosophy besides Plato. Yet the outlines of his thought largely set the agendas and answers for debate throughout antiquity. Not that most agreed with him. Nor, in many cases, had subsequent thinkers even read him. Nor again does it mean that Plato’s models were necessarily original or widely acknowledged.
Plato’s influence lay in the manner in which he had reflected the more basic cultural presuppositions of what constitutes the real, the essence, the ideal, and the perfect. At this level we will find broad agreement across the centuries between the Presocratics, Platonists, Aristotelians, Stoics, Cynics, Neo-Platonists, and even the Sceptics. Apart from the not inconsiderable influence of the Epicureans, most philosophers accepted the ‘otherness’ of reality, the priority of reason to grasp its essence, and the basis of moral ideals of balance, order, impassivity, and independence within this other reality.

But a question recurs: which came first—Plato’s metaphysical hierarchies of reality, or his privileged experience of a deeply stratified society? Or to put the question on a wider footing: what was it about Plato’s characterisation of two realities, and about the social structures of antiquity, which made his perspectives acceptable, adaptable, and durable even for those who took exception to his exposition? The question takes us to the next great expositor of primary reality in Greek antiquity.

1.2.4 Aristotle and abstraction as the key to primary reality

My heading may seem to misunderstand Aristotle. After all, it was Plato who based his political theory within the forms and the idealised history and mythology of Athens and Atlantis; it was Aristotle who drew on a collection of data gathered from the constitutions of over 150 city-states. It was Aristotle, the son of a physician, who is credited as the first biologist, amassing and classifying large collections of natural specimens. And again it was Aristotle who moved away from Plato’s ‘otherly’ forms and located them within the functions of the mind.

It seems more justifiable, then, to argue that Aristotle brought philosophy back from the abstract, and relocated reality in the everyday. His methods were sensitive to the contextual nature of inquiry. This is as true of the Physics and Metaphysics as it is of the Nicomachean Ethics, in which he sought a realistic account of everyday experience and practical reasoning. Moreover, he rejected Plato’s forms or other abstract concepts wherever these cut him off from the world of experience.

Thus in place of Plato’s confident reduction of all explanations to one, the forms, Aristotle considered four: the forms or defining characteristics; matter; sources of movement (roughly, ‘causes’); and goal. This same refusal to over-simplify complemented his humble estimation of his place within a tradition of intellectual exploration:

The study of Truth is in one sense difficult, in another easy. This is shown by the fact that whereas no one person can obtain an adequate grasp of it, we cannot all fail in the attempt; each thinker makes some statement about the
natural world, and as an individual contributes little or nothing to the inquiry;
but a combination of all conjectures results in something considerable.

(Metaphysics 993a31-b4, trans, Tredennick, emphasis his)

So Aristotle was more outward-looking than Plato. Yet the same presumption of a
greater reality persisted:

Of substances constituted by nature some are ungenerated, imperishable, and
eternal, while others are subject to generation and decay. The former are
excellent and divine, but less accessible to knowledge. The evidence that might
throw light on them, and on the problem which we long to solve respecting
them, is furnished but scantly by sensation...The scanty conceptions to which
we can attain of celestial things give us...more pleasure than all our knowledge
of the world in which we live. (Parts of Animals 1.5, trans. Barnes)

Nevertheless, where Plato largely followed the Presocratics’ lead by focussing on
the ‘stuff’ basic to all apparent reality, Aristotle was not so concerned with the ‘stuff’ of
reality, as with its ‘inner’ logos. At times his approach to logos was entirely traditional:
“the universal is known by logos, and the particulars by sense-perception” (Physics 189a,
trans. Mortley; cf. Ethics 1.7). In other places, the ‘inner’ logos took him towards
mysticism. In two difficult passages, On the Soul 3 and Nicomachean Ethics 10, “he presents
the peak of human achievement as abstract thinking which is a unity with its object...and
in Metaphysics 12, he identifies his prime mover as god and sees thinking of him as
‘thinking of thinking’ a thinking that escapes the mundane limitations of our cognitive
activities, which always require a distinct object” (Annas, 1986, 251).

Of particular interest to our inquiry is Aristotle’s use of logos in contexts which show
his innovative approach to the question of the relation of mind to reality: “the general
thrust of the notion (in Greek tradition) is that mind is identical with the ‘essential’, or
most intelligible part of reality” (Mortley, 1986a, 160).4 Aristotle accepted that in some
sense the mind already possesses the object of its inquiry. But he did not explore down

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4 Mortley summarises Aristotle’s uses of logos as ranging from the everyday to the
philosophical: “Aristotle’s logos marks the full flowering of the concept in the classical era, since its
great variety of meanings is fully exploited, and fully accepted as part of the technical language of
rationalism. He is heir to all the tendencies discovered in the use of the word prior to him: logos
appears as the defining characteristic of man; it is contrasted with ‘voice’, and therefore appears to
mean the faculty of making rational sounds; yet it is defined as having an internal aspect, as well as
an outward, articulated aspect; it is the characteristic of man which is chiefly responsible for his
being a city-dweller; it has an explanatory and expressive power; it is the essence of man, and the
basis of his voluntary acts, and therefore of his freedom; it is the design which inheres in both
natural objects and artefacts; it is the original principle (arché) of reality; it is the two-fold capacity of
the human soul; and it is the science which groups and specifies the essence of reality...it is that
which informs human communication” (1986a, 29-30). My summary of Aristotle’s understanding of
mind and reality draws on his analysis of the shift in Greek philosophy from reason to silence as the
means of grasping ultimate reality (1986a,b).
Plato's path of knowledge as recollection. Instead, "Aristotle begins the process of the reification of logos" (ibid, 59). In this sense, the logos of a thing is not some external intellectual replica of it, but is something like the rational element within it (ibid, 77).

This reification of logos is critical to Aristotle's answers to a cascading set of questions: "What is the object of thinking; must thinking always have an object beyond itself; and what is thinking?" Thinking, it seems, comes from first principles, archai, or form, eidos (Metaphysics 1032b15). The thinking process is basically "receptive of the form of an object (which is) potentially of the same nature, though not identical with it" (On the Soul 429a15, trans. Mortley). As Mortley puts it:

"it is a process in which the soul is acted upon by that which is thinkable. It must therefore be receptive, and in fact it has no other characteristic than its ability to receive...Thinking here is really a means of allowing being to be what it is, in the soul." (1986a, 78).

What then is the form? The form is that 'intellectual' aspect of a thing which the mind can grasp: or, the mind grasps that aspect of a thing which lies in the realm of the forms. But where is this realm? Rejecting Plato's forms 'out there', Aristotle located them 'within' the object. But this 'within' is not as transparent as it might seem, particularly when he turned to the celebrated theme of self-thinking thought: "Therefore mind thinks itself, if it is that which is best; and its thinking is a thinking of thinking" (Metaphysics 1074b35, trans. Tredennick).

The key to the riddle seems to lie in Aristotle's entirely traditional aversion to matter. He wanted to restrict thought to whatever is in an object which is like thought itself; in other words, whatever is devoid of matter. Whatever the subtleties of Aristotle's model, our theme emerges clearly. Purity of being and of thought can only be maintained by distancing both from matter and change:

There still remains the question whether the object of thought is composite; for if so, thought would change in passing from one part of the whole to another. The answer is that everything which contains no matter is indivisible. Just as the human mind, or rather the mind of composite beings, is in a certain space of time (for it does not possess the good at this or that moment, but in the course of a certain whole period it attains to the supreme good, which is other than itself), so is absolute self-thought throughout all eternity. (Metaphysics 1075a6-10, trans. Tredennick)

For all his aversion to Plato's forms, Aristotle remained caught in the same paradigmatic web of 'otherness' as he moved towards locating pure reality away from the
imperfections of the material world. Like Plato, ironically his presumption of a split reality was clearest when he sought to be most practical: the virtuous life consists in finding balance between the competing interests of the material and the intellectual:

Consequently when one of these elements, the material or the intellectual, is active it is acting in opposition to the nature of the other. When they are exactly balanced the result is something which is not felt as either painful or pleasurable...For there is an activity not only of movement but of immobility, like that of thought, and there is in rest a more real pleasure than in motion. Yet, as the poet says, 'in all things change is sweet.' It is sweet to us because of some badness in us. For a nature that needs change is bad, just as a changeable person is bad. (Nicomachean Ethics 7.14, trans. Thomson)

The methodological outcome of both his reification of logos, and of his aversion to matter, was the procedure of abstraction. Presuming that reality is many layered, or at least that the form of an object is not identical to the object itself, reason must peel back the layers of reality, or strip away that which is only matter, until the essence is reached. Once the method is brought to bear on grasping Being itself, or prime-mover, or any other articulation of the purer reality, it is only a short step from there to the negation and privation so tantalising to later philosophers:

Abstraction, then, leads towards a negative state, and so grasps non-existence, but it grasps it as a cause. It will therefore reach an apprehension of non-existence, which it can place in a causal context, that of generating the superstructure of physical reality. Abstraction is the science of removing the layers with a view to finding the first principle, and so it is directed towards the discovery of causes. The layering of reality secretes a causal connection, as well as an originating principle, and abstraction follows this trail: ironically, it may pursue it to the point where the mere absence of reality is left as the cause.
(Mortley, 1986a, 149)

Our study of Plato ended with the speculation that his experience of social privilege was a critical factor in understanding his delineation of primary reality. Aristotle's abstraction was similarly embedded in social experience. The noblest human activity, the least active of activities, was for Aristotle the pure intellectualism of the contemplation of thought and reality itself. But few had the means to indulge in philosophy. The higher status of primary reality in Aristotle's scheme was perhaps due to the intellectual projection of the vast gulf between kings, together with their tutors, and the vast sea of people who made their indulgence possible. We leave Aristotle in the privileged self-sufficiency of his intellect:
For 'contemplation' is the highest form of activity, since the intellect is the highest thing in us and the objects which come within its range are the highest that can be known... At all events it is thought that philosophy ('the pursuit of wisdom') has pleasures marvellous in purity and duration, and it stands to reason that those who have knowledge pass their time more pleasantly than those who are engaged in its pursuit. Again, self-sufficiency will be found to belong in an exceptional degree to the exercise of the speculative intellect.

*(Nicomachean Ethics 10.7, trans. Thomson)*

### 1.2.5 Hellenistic philosophy and the relocation of primary reality in moral idealism

The Hellenistic period was an age for practical action, not idle speculation. The Lyceum had virtually folded by the second century BC, and the Academy had begun to run out of puff even earlier. Aristotelianism was still an influence, but as a distinct school it was now a relic. Platonism had lost its way too. An intense traditionalism emerged, driving schools to amalgamate their central tenets to form united fronts.

For nearly two centuries Stoicism and Epicureanism dominated philosophy as clear alternatives to one another. In the second century, as intellectual originality declined further, traditional oppositions gave way to a recognition of similarities. But from this time the waters were muddied. Antiochus of Ascalon believed that the Old Academy, Peripatetics, and Stoa were basically the same. Panaetius and Posidonius incorporated Platonism and Aristotelianism into Stoicism. Cicero and Seneca followed suit. The Scepticism of the Academy all but died out, though Pyrrhonian scepticism revived. New editions of Aristotle revived interest in the philosophical aspects of the Peripatetic system. And Platonism began to emerge as perhaps the most eclectic of all.

The split between primary reality and everyday reality survived this reconfiguration of the philosophical task. The art of living needed a secure foundation. Thus the philosophical schools of the age maintained an interest in nature in order to delineate the primary reality which reason emulated in the sage and in those who strove to match his moral perfection. None advanced or epitomised this more than the Stoics and Epicureans.

The Stoics were strict materialists, but not atomists. There is no 'other' level of reality. This world is the best of all possible worlds under the benevolent providence of Zeus or Nature — the ideal differs from the everyday only in scale. The universe is governed by reason and providence, and is therefore intelligent and imbued with purpose. We perceive evil because we see only part of the grand design of Nature. A chain of cause and effect, frequently identified with Fate, shapes all. But Fate sits uneasily with
individual freedom, a point critics, Epicureans and Sceptics alike, did not miss. In defence
Chrysippus, a Stoic of the third century and schooled in the scepticism of the Academy,
developed elaborate classifications of causes to sidestep the charge of sheer determinism.

The heart of the Epicurean system, on the other hand, was a mechanistic
reductionism. There is no teleology. No gods to fear. The study of nature produces
tranquillity since it shows fears of any kind of other reality to be groundless (Barnes, 1986,
374-76). Dismissing the traditional models of unencumbered reason rising beyond matter
to contemplate purest being, Epicurus regarded sense-perception as the one and only basis
of knowledge. But two centuries later, Lucretius (IBC) ironically had to deal with similar
accusations to those levelled at the Stoics: the implied mechanistic fatalism of Epicurus’
system also led to determinism. Lucretius countered that atoms swerved. There is no
Providence here, just a random and dangerous world in which strict materialism rules.
On the face of it, then, atomism, whether Presocratic or Epicurean, seems the major
exception to our portrait of two realities.

Yet differences in the understanding of nature, and pedantic debates about the value
of the emotions, may obscure the common ground between Stoics and Epicureans. The
moral idealism of both schools was entirely conventional. Even where Epicureans seemed
somewhat more socially radical than their Stoic cousins, their non-conformity rarely took
them beyond the social acceptance of the affluent. In this respect, Grant’s summation of
the goal of Epicurus applies equally well to Stoicism: “happiness was ataraxia, or freedom
from disturbance: renunciation, independence, imperturbability” (1960, 217; see also
Fitzgerald, 1988, 53). Well into late antiquity these schools held high ground in the
delineation of that superior moral perfection which drew men above the everyday.\footnote{5}

1.2.6 The Platonist revival of a transcendent primary reality

Alongside the great scientific and technological advances of Hellenism, and its spirit of
rationalism enconced in the materialist philosophies, there were clear longings for
immortality and a more existential route to perfection. In this context, Platonism revived
to become the leading intellectual force for centuries to come, absorbing Aristotelian
tradition, and outliving Stoicism and Epicureanism. But why Platonism?

Virtually any religion sufficed to provide a sense of contact with the greater reality.
But those who sought an intellectual framework required a cosmology where man was
linked to this greater reality which gave life and consciousness to the world of the senses.
Immortality required a reality of some kind apart from the world of the senses—a reality

\footnote{5} I will return to Stoic and Epicurean models of moral idealism in chapter 3.
tied like a pyramid. The changing, perishing, and imperfect lay at the bottom; the immutable at the top. In such a scheme, the reality of experience is measured by those canons of the greater reality; immutability, rational order, and eternity.

Platonism was ideally suited to support a religious experience of another reality. Intellectuals found what they needed in such tantalising phrases as Plato’s oft-quoted remark that the Supreme Being lived completely ἐπεκείνα τῆς οὐσίας, “outside the realm of being” (Republic, 508B/509A, trans. Dihle). But here lay the Achilles heel: if the pinnacle was beyond being, then how could philosophy lay hold of it? The mechanism was not as immediately clear as the destination: “Only from this peak far above sensual experience in the realm of the intelligible could one hope to come to a proper understanding of the structure of both reality and human consciousness...(that knowledge basic) for a moral and happy life” (Dihle, 1982, 10).^6

Philosophers increasingly arrived at a very similar place: they began to speak of the summit as the One. This One, which transcended all being and change, could not be fully known by rational inquiry. The mind could go only as close to the One as a profound apprehension of the difference between being and non-being. Aristotle had said as much when he guessed that the Supreme Being may be either mind or something beyond mind. Unlike the new mood, however, Aristotle sought to open up this summit to full rational inquiry via an elaborate scheme of notions of potentiality and motion. But for all his brilliance, “ideas such as indirect knowledge of the Supreme Being, intellectual contact with the One as distinguished from its intellectual cognition, the turning of one’s mind towards the unattainable summit of being, did not make much sense.” (Dihle, 1982, 170) Whatever way he saw it, the One could only be articulated negatively and ‘known’ irrationally. Plato had stopped in a similar place, on the verge of the summit needing “sudden illumination” and “revelation” to complete the climb. Reason had brought him so far, but no further.

This portrait of the pinnacle of reality as beyond the reach of reason gained new currency in the Graeco-Roman period. Pseudo-Pythagorean fragments dating from the first centuries picture the One beyond both being and thought (Stobaeus, Anthology, 1). It is neither supreme intellect, nor can it be known intellectually. In somewhat similar

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^6 There are parallels between Dihle’s work and my focus. Dihle notes that it took a long time for a clear and positive theory of will to emerge in the intellectual world of antiquity. His thesis is that rationalism tended to preclude and devalue any theory of will as a determinative aspect of human behaviour. Although I would argue that what I have called the primary reality is equally at home with irrationalism or rationalism, nevertheless, our arguments walk side by side. Putting my concerns in his terms, Greek rationalism propped up the dismissal of the relational and the everyday in preference for a reality undiluted by experience. It thus shied away from esteeming the immediacy and open-endedness of human volition. I am indebted to his analysis at several places in this chapter.
fashion, the Alexandrian Platonist, Eudorus (in Simplicius, *Aristotelian Physics* 181.10), put forward the pair, monad and undefined duality, as the basis of being and perception. Yet both depended on the One which is beyond both being and perception (Dihle, 1982, 170-71). The question loomed large: how to hold together being and thought while seeking a way to ‘know’ something beyond being. Some suggested the key lay in the separation of being and its cause. But this only white-anted their agenda of a thoroughly ordered rational universe. After all, what’s to stop the One, which is beyond Being and Thought, from fiddling with the system?

This Platonist agenda has considerable significance for understanding the popular intellectualism of the first century AD—so long as several caveats are kept in mind. Platonism as a formal school was not prominent in this time. Indeed there was never a single body of Middle or Neo Platonism, nor any clear dependence between thinkers. Yet there was a general ill-defined allegiance to Plato, and to overcoming “the crucial difficulty in his system...the gulf created by the theory of the forms between ultimate, static, reality and the changing unstable world of matter and sense” (Meredith, 1986, 706).

This focus may have been made for the times. The materialism of the dominant schools, Stoicism and Epicureanism, was somewhat out of touch with the growing fascination for immortality and the transcendent. Two near-identical first century AD inscriptions to the Platonist Laetus, one in Athens and one in Ephesus, indicate that Stoics and Epicureans were probably not having it all their own way (cf. Acts 17:18); indeed, “Plato lives again” (*I. Eph.* VII, 2.3901 and *IG II*, 3816, in Horsley, ND 4:70, his trans.). In this sense, the Neo-Platonism of the next century or so may well reflect something of the mood and themes among the educated in Paul’s day.

By the second century, many of the educated found the knowledge and experience they sought in the elaborate philosophical-religious hybrids of the Hermetics, Gnostics, and so-called Chaldaeans. The genius of these systems lay in a blend of intellectualism and an appeal to a suprarational, divine revelation. Each stressed an act of will—acceptance, choice, conversion—rather than intellectual grunt, for direct access to the Absolute. Purist Platonists fought hard to keep philosophy from this kind of religious synthesis. But the new mood was prevailing. In the second century work, *Life of Apollonius*, Philostratus has his hero conquer the old-fashioned Stoic, Euphrates. The moral? Philosophy only comes after divine revelation. But what happens to ethics? Greek philosophy in all ages had always based virtue and happiness on conformity to nature through reason. But divine revelation was revealing new codes which must be accepted independently of reason. The latter, of course, would continue to promote and shape perfection, but the act of acceptance was becoming prior and primary.
This move from intellect to an act of will resonated with Philo. The Jewish Scriptures had grounded ethics in a covenant relationship to Yahweh. The will to act and the substance of the action both stemmed from the same root: the compassionate rule of Yahweh over his chosen people. What was unthinkable to Graeco-Romans—surrender of the intellect to the revelation of God’s will—was the height of piety and wisdom to Jews. For the Graeco-Roman, reason yielded free conformity to the divine law in nature; for the Jew, obedience to Yahweh was the well-spring of wisdom.

Philo saw himself bridging these two worlds: the grace of Yahweh and the perfect rationality of the Supreme Being and nature. Part of the bridge was his doctrine of the *dunamis* of God, the archetypes of everything. This allowed him to fix the Platonic forms within his scheme. He could also express the end of the soul’s quest as the religious experience of exposure to the power of God, rather than as an immediate cognition of God himself. The Philonic system involved a clear hierarchy: at top, the first God and Father of all, incomprehensible and eternal (often described in familiar Platonic terms); next, a second God or Logos, the mind of God, the first-born, the agent of creation; at bottom, the world of sense.

Yet Philo did not completely identify God with impersonal Being. Frequently, his explicit doctrine proceeded along pronounced, and very un-Platonic, personal and relational lines: God gave the law because of his sheer mercy and friendliness; he simply wanted to communicate with his people; it is entirely due to the mercy of God, if some people come nearer to him than others; he goes to greet those whom he wants (*On Drunkenness* 145, *On the Virtues* 185, *On the Migration of Abraham* 79, *On the Life of Moses* 2.189; Dihle, 1982, 93). The same two-sided approach appeared in his anthropology and ethics. As a Platonist, he spoke of the irrational affections of men drawing them away from their spiritual selves and the rational appreciation of nature towards the enslavement of their material bodies. As a Jew, he put the matter plainly in terms of disobedience to Yahweh (*Allegories of the Law* 3.113, *On the Migration of Abraham* 128). Philo also accommodated the traditional Jewish doctrine of the Two Spirits to the Platonic scheme by locating them both in every human soul (*Questions and Answers in Exodus* 1.23) and in the macro structure of the creation (*Allegories of the Law* 10.896E; Dihle, 1982, 208).

Returning to the Platonist dilemma, Philo agreed that intelligence (*phronēsis*) was the consummation of all virtues and the basis of freedom. But the Old Testament emphasised obedience, not intellectual mastery. Revelation bridged the gap. The intellect takes one so

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far, then Yahweh completes this knowledge with the revelation of his will and intellect (logos). This new knowledge surpassed the limitations and fallibility of normal knowledge and was beyond intellectual dispute. But how could a man acquire this knowledge?

The mechanism is familiar to all who work between two realities. The sage trained his normal intellect in detachment from the body and in imitation of those who had already received the revelation (On the Change of Names 81f, On the Confusion of Languages 147f). For some, the great prophets and saints of old, Yahweh augmented their souls with the divine spirit (Who is the Heir? 69, 74, 85, 265, Allegories of the Law 3.41; Dihle, 1982, 94). The supreme example of this perfection was Moses (On the Posterity of Cain 18020, On the Sacrifices of Abel and Cain 55, On the Special Laws 1.44):

...the psychological mechanism, as foreseen in philosophical theory, remains unchanged. But now it is the divine spirit and no longer human reason that controls affections and emotions. Perfection in human life can be brought about by the supranatural gift of the divine Logos or Nous that provides the superior knowledge and restores man’s nature as the image of God (Conf. 145f, det. 138f)...(such perfection results from the) unswaying knowledge, granted by revelation or the divine spirit, that God is imperceptible to the human intellect. Yet the human intellect fully realizes, in the state of perfection, that God is the source of everything that is good in the universe and that man can perceive (Post. Cain 16)...(this) awareness...(also) implies insight into man’s own baseness. (Dihle, 1982, 94-95)

Much the same mechanism served the Gnostics well. In the regrettable intermingling of matter and spirit which is the everyday world, particles of the light of the purer world lie trapped in human souls and bodies, unaware of their loftier home. But the Supreme One has sent messengers to confer knowledge and to effect release. The messenger brings knowledge of the soul’s home and opens a way to return to the Father. This knowledge does not conform to the canons of contaminated reason. The soul must free itself through a series of acts of cognition (Dihle, 1982, 100). Picking and choosing among the teachings of Christians, philosophers, and cults: “the Gnostics transposed the interaction of God and man from history with all its vicissitudes into the unchanging order of being which they could find only in the realm of pure spirituality...this fitted the general tendency, from the first century BC onwards, to locate man’s salvation beyond the limits of time and space” (ibid, 102).

In the third century AD, one intellectual did as much as any philosopher had ever done to synthesise the centuries of conjecture about primary reality. True to his Platonist
roots, Plotinus constructed a new model of the uppermost parts of reality. At the top of
Plotinus' pyramid was the impersonal One, beyond the reach of normal reason, yet the
source of all reality. But unlike Plato, Plotinus' One was not limited and static. Plotinus
sought to break down the static dualism of the past in favour of a dynamic spiritual
monism—philosophy was to be experienced as well as argued for. His biographer and
pupil, Porphyry, mentioned at least four ecstatic and mystical experiences in Plotinus' life.
In this simplification and surrender of the self, at one and the same time a supreme
intellectual effort and the end of thought, the shackles of the everyday fall in the face of the
primary reality.

Yet Plotinus was more conventional than radical. Greek intellectualism had
consistently presumed a purer reality existing beyond the everyday. The mindset had
been present from the beginning:

(Emepdocles) also hints at a double world—one intelligible and the other
perceptible, one divine and the other mortal, one containing things as
paradigms and the other as copies. He showed this when he said... 'For they are
all in union with their own parts—Sun and Earth and Heaven and Sea—which
have been separated from them and grown in mortal things'. (Simplicius,
Commentary on the Physics 160.8-161.1, trans. Barnes)

The ease with which Simplicius read dualism out of Empedocles' somewhat
innocuous remark was not simply a mark of his own Byzantine times. Several centuries
earlier, Hippolytus and Clement had both made use of Empedocles to support their own
religious dualism (Hippolytus, Refutation of All Heresies 1.3.2, 7.29.14-23; Clement,
Miscellanies 4.23.150.1, 5.14.122). The same kind of appeal had also been made by Plutarch
(On Tranquility of Mind 474BC), by Hierocles (Commentary on the Golden Verses 24.2), and
by Porphyry (The Cave of the Nymphs 8).

The complexities and subtleties of a person's experience of social mores and
religious ritual (to name but two contexts in which meaning was created) precluded any
simple monochromatic formulation of ideas. There was no agreed formulation of the two
realities, nor of how the perfect was apprehended or experienced. Plato had looked for his
forms 'out there'; a realm of Being over against Becoming. Aristotle tended to locate the
essence of reality 'inside', embedded in the categories of mind. Hellenised Jewish scholars
talked of two Spirits or of an ethical dualism of good and evil (Horsley, 1978a, 229-231).
Later Platonists became more explicit in the contrast of intellect and matter, or spirit and
matter. Christians added the novel social dimension of the separation of the sacred and
the secular. But the differences in expression only mask the commonness of paradigms
grounded in everyday social and religious experiences. These paradigms were not merely the stuff of metaphysics and cosmology: they were the vehicles of idealism and perfectionism in a society gripped by the contradictions of caste and ambition.

1.3 EVERYDAY REALITY AS PROBLEMATIC FOR PRIMARY REALITY

1.3.1 The inadequacy of primary reality and reason to explain and control the everyday

The house of reason had been built on the identity of thought and being, and on the transparency of reality or nature to the critical gaze of the intellect. This confidence in the self-evident nature of primary reality, and in the power of reason, persisted in the face of growing mysticism about the structure and pinnacle of reality, and the need for a suprarational last step in the quest to grasp the One. This house still stood in the first century. The immutability and transparency of reality, and the virtually omniscient quality of pure intellect, admitted no breach in the presuppositions of traditional philosophers. The order of the universe stood and its laws were sovereign:

Not even for God are all things possible...he cannot bestow eternity on mortals...he cannot cause twice ten not to be twenty or do other things along similar lines, and these facts unquestionably demonstrate the power of nature. (Pliny the Elder, Natural History 2.27, trans. Dihle)

This supreme confidence in reason shaped ethical reflection. Moral idealism built itself on the same foundations of the transparency of reality and the sufficiency of reason. The root of any lack of moral progress was a failure to correctly judge what could and could not be controlled. The remedy was to correct one’s judgement and control of the mind. In his study on the theory of will in antiquity, Dihle captured the recursiveness of Greek philosophical reflection on nature and morality:

...wherever we find...the attempt at a comprehensive understanding of the divine order rather than reflection on isolated phenomena in human life, attention is focused on the regularity, perceptibility, and reliability of the divine rule over the world...the social and cosmic orders remained mutually interpretable...when Greek philosophy turned to social and moral problems...its main task was to find standards of moral conduct that were as rational and generally applicable as the rules of the cosmic order...there was hardly ever disagreement about the principle that only rational understanding of reality leads to a good life or moral perfection. (Dihle, 1982, 36-37)
The intellect must control the passions. But there was a hitch in the argument—the palpable experience of failure and its power to undermine confidence in reason. For Plato, the answer had been clear: *oudais ekôn hamarianei*, 'nobody fails on purpose', 'nobody chooses to sin' (cf. Gorgias 467C. When a choice proves later to have been bad, the person did not see it that way at the moment of choice. He was ignorant of its outcomes. As a rational being he could not have deliberately chosen to be irrational. It was fear or anger which led him unwittingly against reason. Homer himself had made it clear enough that everything hung on having the right knowledge. Only reason could triumph over impious and irrational forces, as young Telemachus testified: “But I am wise in my heart and know each thing, whether good or less good; before I was just a little boy. But I am unable to think everything through correctly, for they intimidate me from all sides where they sit” (Odyssey, 18.228, trans. Dihle).

Dihle argues that what Plato meant by 'nobody fails on purpose' is that “the intention implied in *ekôn* is not directed to the action itself but to the objective of action, which is always, in the view of the acting individual, an *agathon*, a good, though sometimes erroneously supposed to be so” (Dihle, 1982, 39, my transliteration; cf. Gorgias 467Cff). In the Republic, Plato used a simple dualism to account for this error: failure lies in matter interfering with reason. In the Timaeus a strict determinism relegated volition to the immaterial part of the soul. Thus the soul must bear some relation to failure. But how? Plato’s solution was to posit two souls in the universe and the person; the first causes regular motion, the second causes irregular motion, and thus evil:

Only the human mind participates in the intelligible, only the intelligible is entirely real. The world that we experience through our senses is perishable, disorderly, irrational in many respects, unpredictable as to its further development, and has, therefore, only a small share in reality. Knowledge, however, which the intellect acquires, can only refer to reality, to that which is lasting, unchanging, and structured by reason. So knowledge which leads to action cannot be tested by any results this action may cause in the empirical world. Moral quality can only be ascertained by examining the state of mind, the consciousness of the human being who produced action. (Dihle, 1982, 40)

There are three critical points here for our theme. First, human experience was once again structured around the partitioning of reality. Second, and deeply related to the first, a particular act and its context were largely secondary to the general ideal of harmony between intellect and action, and to the personal goal of moral perfection. Third, the moral life was reduced to the individual taking care of his own soul. But no matter how positively or negatively the schools viewed the power of the intellect over irrational
impulses (Malherbe, 1986, 40-47), all sensed the intellectual frailty, moral weakness, and fallibility so powerfully captured in Greek tragedy.

The key to moral knowledge, then, encompassed more than epistemological profundity: it included a consciousness of inadequacy. The repudiation of perfection is itself the path to freedom of moral choice. This had been acknowledged indirectly from the beginning. Motivated by the command of Apollo, "know yourself", Socrates could only ever know his own ignorance and deficiency in relation to a particular context—he could not know lack of the fear of death except in the face of his impending execution. Knowledge of ignorance is thus actually knowledge of something definite. But it can only be tested in situ. The coveted freedom of the moralists could not be freedom to do anything, but only such action as will maintain conformity to sophrosyne, that curious hybrid of self-control and sound judgement (North, 1966). An abstract 'good' could not adequately shape moral knowledge, nor delineate an appropriate or inappropriate self-knowledge. But this need for context and particulars ran contrary to the tenor of tradition. The contemplative intellect had always been honoured as the only guardian of moral freedom. Cracks—old cracks—were appearing in the house of reason.

The intellectual tradition could not deliver the goods for freedom of choice in the vicissitudes of the everyday. The predominant models had presumed that intellect alone would discern and evaluate the means and ends of action. But such 'objectivity' only reinforced determinism—the general holds in every case—and destroyed freedom. Without involvement in particulars, in the subjectivity of others' affairs, in the vicissitudes of relationships and the everyday, claims and goals of freedom of intellect and action could sound like baseless and hollow ideals.

Not surprisingly, however, the priority of purest reality held. Aristotle's answer had been to create two categories of intellect, the theoretical and the practical (though he remained committed to the superiority of theory). Orthodox Stoics and Epicureans wanted no wedge between the orders of nature and of human affairs, yet tended to side with Plato, for whom theory, which lead to the intelligible, held far more dignity than practice, given the latter's inevitable ties to the empirical world. Matter, after all, was the realm of fate or chance, and the philosopher sought "to go beyond fate". If man felt helplessly bound to the relentless march of cosmic processes, then that only showed what was already clear: the world of experience was exceedingly imperfect, and the senses unreliable. What other explanation could there be when those same factors—order, immutability, and impassivity—always confirmed the unquestionable perfection of primary reality?
So much for the house of reason. Primary reality had always had another house too—a darker dwelling where other forces loomed larger than reason.

1.3.2 Fate, fortune, and the vicissitudes of the everyday

In many respects, Stoicism and Epicureanism were enjoying an Indian summer throughout the heady days of the third and second centuries BC. Indeed, Stoicism was to remain a vital force for several centuries to come. Confidence in nature and reason was buoyed by remarkable scientific advance. The tensions between order, fate, and freedom were well contained within the self-evident rectitude of philosophical inquiry and social convention. Or so a tiny handful of intellectuals believed.

The intellectuals, of course, were really split over Fate. Epicurus had stated his preference for an enslavement to the old gods rather than to the Fate of the philosophers. Cicero attributed fate to natural causes and to ignorance. Virgil couldn’t make up his mind, Tacitus was similarly uncertain, and Lucian parodied it (Dialogues of the Dead, 30). But there were also those like Manilius and Fuscus, Stoics who argued strongly for Fate as an essential expression of the mechanism of nature. Even the educated could sense the capriciousness and unpredictability of living under the gaze of those who showed no apparent regard for the plans and desires of men:

Fortune, like some poetess, creates roles of every kind: the shipwrecked man, the poor man, the exile, the man of repute, the man without repute. (Teles, On Circumstances 6.52.2-3, trans. Fitzgerald)

Fortune, exulting in her cruel work, and stubborn to pursue her wanton sport, shifts her fickle favours, kind now to me, now to some other (Horace, Odes 3.39.49-52, trans. Bennett)

Seneca, a contemporary of Paul, described a widespread feeling of pointlessness and tedium which to him characterised his time (Tranquillity 2). If Pliny the Elder is any guide, the grand achievements of Hellenistic rationalism could not hold back this darkness:

Throughout the whole world, at every place and hour, by every voice, Fortune alone is invoked and her name spoken: she is the one defendant, the one culprit, the one thought in men’s minds, the one object of praise, the one cause. She is worshipped with insults, counted as fickle and often as blind, wandering, inconsistent, elusive, changeful and friend of the unworthy...we are so much at the mercy of chance that Chance is our god. (Pliny the Elder, Natural History 2.22, trans. Dihle)
Fortune (Tyche) figured prominently throughout the empire. Copies of the famous statue by Eutychides of her at Antioch (290sBC) proliferated so that every virtually community and family had a Fortune of their own. The coins of emperors—"Fortune of Augustus"—bore the same message and ideal. Thus while Pliny seems somewhat exasperated with the conduct of the masses, he himself had acknowledged that "Fortune's mutability makes it impossible to declare any mortal truly 'happy'" (Fitzgerald, 1988, 48, referring to Natural History 7.45; see the whole discussion, pages 70-87). No doubt he staked his own future on the more noble ideals of self-sufficiency and reason:

Fortune but seldom interferes with the wise man; his greatest and highest interests have been, are, and will be, directed by reason throughout the course of his life. (Epicurus, in Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers 10.144, trans. Hicks)

Yet even the most privileged could feel the dark presence. A funeral oration in the late first century BC of a great Roman lady offers a fascinating insight into the world of the highest elite—her husband has no doubt been a magistrate. She had been orphaned on the eve of her marriage, arranged revenge with her sister, orchestrated her husband's escape from enemies, negotiated with Caesar for his return from exile, vigilantly kept him out of further scrapes, whisked him away to safety again, defied the insults and abuses of his colleague while she resolutely stuck fast to Caesar's pardon for her husband, and offered to divorce so that her (!) infertility would not prevent her husband from siring heirs. No wonder he missed her. Like the Jewish book of Esther, the favourable hand of the gods seems everywhere apparent by its omission. But it is bitter Fate that consumes this nobleman's attention as he seeks solace for life's caprice:

It would have been more just for me to have yielded to fate, since I was older than you...I should confess, however, that on this occasion I suffered one of the bitterest experiences of my life, in the fate that befell you...We longed for children, which an envious fate denied us for some time. If Fortune had let herself smile on us in the normal way, what would have been lacking to complete our happiness?...But fate decreed that your life ended before mine. You left me the grief, the longing for you, and the sad fate of living alone...I pray that your Manes (protective spirits) may assure and protect your rest. (Inscription of late first century BC at Rome, the so-called Laudatio Turiae, in Horsley, ND 3:33-36, his trans.)

Nearer to the other end of the social scale is a gladiator's epitaph from Amasia in the imperial period. Alongside the renewal of hope in immortality during this period, there
continued to be strong denials of anything beyond the grave, as the first line of this
epitaph to a rough-and-ready man shows:

I did not exist, I was born; I existed, I do not exist; so much (for that). If anyone
says anything different he will be lying; I shall not exist. Greetings, if you are a
just person. (Inscription at Rome from the Imperial period, IG XIV (1890) 1201,
in Horsley, ND 4:42, his trans.)

The two verdicts appear again in the contrast between one very matter-of-fact
epitaph for a dead infant (first text below), and another expressing hope for a young child
recently deceased (second text):

When I had just tasted life fate snatched me, an infant, and I did not see my
father’s pattern; but I died after enjoying the light of eleven months, then I
returned it. I lie in the tomb forever, no longer seeing the light; but you,
stranger, read this and weep as you come upon the tomb of Eunoe. (Inscription
at Rome from the imperial period, IG XIV (1890) 1607 + 2171, in Horsley, ND
4:40, his trans.)

This tomb encloses a beautiful body which—alas!—(suffered) a violent fate. For
Kore, wife of Ploutos, led you to Hades when you were six years old or a little
more. But the blessed gods taking pity did not abandon your soul to sink into
Hades’ dwelling, and in the air it is in flight in the sky. (BE 440, in Horsley, ND
2:51-52, his trans.)

From Smyrna in the second century AD comes a moralising poem found on an
epitaph with nearby relief of a bearded man with his staff resting on a skull. Horsley
thinks the figure is likely to represent a philosopher (ND 4:44):

This is a human being: consider who you are and what awaits you. As you
look at this image reflect upon your end and do not treat life as though you had
forever to live, nor as though you are short-lived, with the result that many will
scourge you verbally when you have become old and are afflicted with poverty.
(Pfuhl/Möbius L847, in Horsley, ND 4:43-44, his trans.)

What are we to make of this philosopher’s response to life’s brevity and
uncertainty? One thing seems sure: death’s imminence has brought him down to tin-
tacks. No rarefied metaphysics or theology or moral idealism here. The bottom-line is
simple: ‘Your turn will come too—so make of life what you can now’.
Life for most remained caught in the grips of a mysterious, awesome, and frightening ‘other’, and a pressing world of everyday concerns and opportunities—the unseen powers and the puny efforts of men:

Magic without doctrine; devils without priests; prayers unintelligible; worship homeless; and ignominious realms of rule over a single house, a single field, cow, racehorse, gladiator, rival in love or adversary to one’s career or party—all, together, constituted the broad underpart of the world above this one, the part which mortals felt themselves to be most in contact. (MacMullen, 1981, 83)

No wonder that many looked for ways to predict and manipulate these forces, and to shield themselves from their power.

1.3.3 The everyday manipulation of primary reality

The philosophers had a hard time refuting belief in the stars. Not only did astrology enjoy great popularity, but wittingly or otherwise philosophy had provided its intellectual framework. The basis lay in common cosmological assumptions: the order, unity, and harmony of the universe; the interdependence of all its parts; and the general conviction that affairs on earth were a microcosm of the heavenly relationships. Moreover there had always been a deep curiosity to find a place for man in this system. Somewhat unwittingly Plato’s cosmology had fuelled the occult (Grant, 1960, 156-7). Astrology was proof of the orderliness of the universe. It could fit easily with Stoic acceptance of the divinity of the heavenly bodies, and even received support from no less a figure than Posidonius. The doctrine seemed neat, complete and indisputable.

But astrology was never likely to rest on its intellectual appeal. It was essentially religious: it dealt with the heavenly bodies and powers and propped up hope in immortality. It was practical: it offered a way to beat the cosmic system. And it was eclectic: it drew together a deified Time, the ritual significance of seasons, and the movements of the divine heavenly bodies. Yet it could not be dismissed as the foolishness of the uneducated: even emperors believed in astrology.

Astrology should not be isolated from other ‘manipulative’ techniques. It found a ready clientele for the same reasons which inculcated faith in magic, prophecy, charms, and oracles. Wherever people were disturbed by the sense of greater realities manipulating the world of the everyday, a tenacious creativity arose for finding ways to make the greater reality work in one’s favour. How then did a man or woman placate the gods and dispose them to favour?
An introspective Stoic emperor may have only needed piety and platitudes: "Walk with the gods. And he does walk with the Gods who lets them see his soul invariably satisfied with its lot" (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 5.27, trans. Haines). Many intellectuals preferred to keep theology at a safe distance from enthusiasm. Thus this epitaph of a Roman 'theologian' of the third or fourth century: "I did not think about things which I ought not to: whether I had a previous existence, whether I shall have one in time (to come)" (IG XIV [1890] 2068, in Horsley, ND 4:32-33, his trans.). Better to stick to writing aretalogies and teaching morals.

This was not simply a trend of the later empire. Centuries before, Cicero had taught that theology does not speculate on the gap of power between God and man, but "on the order, regularity, and beauty that are established and maintained through divine activity" (Dihle, 1982, 2). For Cicero this is the key to the difference between *superstitio*—which creates fear, and *religio*—which creates admiration and understanding of order. There is simply no need for a divine will behind or apart from "the entirely rational programming of reality" (Dihle, op cit). Why should there be? God cannot improve a perfect design. One prayed to align oneself with reason embedded in the universe, not to move the deity to change things (Seneca, *Epistles*. 41.1; Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris* 1). Or at least that was how some intellectuals saw it.

But not all intellectuals were so averse to the popular means of placating and second-guessing the gods. Moreover, the vast majority of the population had always taken prayer as a means to influence or change a god's mind and will. The same desire found expression in charms, like this one from Antinoopolis in the third or fourth century:

I entrust this binding-charm to you gods of the underworld...I conjure all daimones in this place to assist this daimon Antinoos. Rouse yourself for me...and bind Ptolemais...(to not) provide pleasure to another [read etero] man...Drag her by the hair, tear at her guts, until she does not reject me...If you do this, I will release you. (*SEG* 1717, in Horsley, ND 1:33-34, his trans.)

These kinds of mechanisms had great antiquity and were not a novelty brought to life by a new anxiety. Although it has been commonly assumed that a considerable shift in mood took place in the mid-to-late empire as it entered 'an age of anxiety' (so Dodds, 1965), more recent studies, while appreciative of Dodds' work, have emphasised the strong continuities across the period (Brown 1978, MacMullen 1981, Fox 1988). In other words, wherever there are shifts in the features and prominence of the mystery cults, oracular shrines, theurgists, and dream-interpreters, these now appear as 'new' angles on
an old market. The themes retained that “old compound of awe and intimacy” (Fox, 1988, 237).

Some sought their insurance against the gods in oracles.²

Concerning the things about which you asked. You are well. What you desire night and day will be yours. As for what you want the gods will guide you and your livelihood will be for the better and your life will be distinguished.”

(Unknown provenance, first century AD; P. Vindob. Salomons I, in Horsley, ND 2:37-38, his trans.)

Lysanias asks Zeus Naïos and Dione whether the child which Annual is carrying is not by him. (Dodona, second century BC; SIG 1163, in Horsley, ND 4:134-135, his trans.)

Some sought the control they needed through dreams:

To Ammias, her children and the initiates of the gods set up the altar with the sarcophagus for the priestess of the gods as a memorial. And if anyone wants to learn the truth from me, let him pray at (?) the altar whatever he wants and he will get it, via a vision, during night time and day. (Thyatira in Lydia, second or third century AD; EG IV.119-120, in Horsley, ND 4:136, his trans.)

A dead priestess was not the only one to offer revelation in a dream. The gods had done so for centuries, and the philosophers had backed them. In a dream, a man’s soul was more attuned to the gods and their realm, as even Plato had hinted. A cottage industry developed around the risky art of interpreting these nocturnal visitations—always, of course, in line with a man’s rank (Fox, 1988, 151). Dreams could offer fresh impetus to piety, even conversion:

...it seemed that in his sleep Sarapis was standing beside him and instructing him...to give to Eurynomos the letter which was under his pillow. Waking up (Xenainetos) was amazed at his vision and perplexed about what he should do because of the political hostility which he had towards Eurynomos. But falling asleep again, he had the same dream, and when he awoke he discovered the letter under his pillow, just as was indicated to him. When he returned home, he handed the letter to Eurynomos and reported the god’s instructions. Eurynomos took the letter and after hearing what Xenainetos said he was perplexed (also)...But when he read the letter and saw its contents were

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² The shrine likewise had a little insurance against disgruntled clients—you never can tell how “the god’s natural truthfulness might be interrupted while they come down from heaven” (Fox, 1988, 215)
consistent with what had been said beforehand by Xenainetos, he accepted Sarapis and Isis. (Inscription at Thessalonike in the first century AD, IG x 2255, in Horsley, ND 1:29-31, his trans.)

Like dreams, the mysteries offered the chance of a safe encounter with a god whose powers might control Fate for the one he or she favoured: "I conquer Fate. It is to me that Fate listens" (I. Kyme 41, in Horsley, ND 1:18-21, his trans.). This sentiment is attested in inscriptions throughout the empire dating from the second century BC to the fourth century AD. Where there was an awareness of the god's presence, there was fear of its potential anger "and a wish to 'placate' it and avert it by correct performance" (Fox, 1988, 230). But the mysteries offered more than safe ritual. They were vehicles for personal faith and encounter.

The appeal of the mystery cults lay in the taste for certainty and dependence via palpable experience. What they offered was a distinct means of detaching the inner life from the normal routine of ceremony and tradition: an immediate enlightenment by revelation leading to union with the god, and victory over every evil force. The combination of myth and ritual could create a moment of dramatic experience. All the more so when the myth communicated in ceremony and initiation was kept 'secret' (Fox, 1988, 93). For the most part, however, the mysteries were as public as the traditional ones. Thus Lucian complained that his teacher, Demonax, was the only one in Athens not initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries (MacMullen, 1981, 24). But the image of dark rings of devotees waiting in anticipation and sworn to strictest silence was part of the experience. Some creative special effects could make the encounter even more memorable (Fox, 1988, 135-137). For some, the encounter was nothing less than a rebirth:

...it was in her power by divine providence to make them, as it were, new-born...Holy goddess, everlasting saviour of mankind, ever generous in your help to mortals, you show a mother's warm love for the misfortunes of those in distress...you can unravel the inextricably tangled web of Fate, you can calm the gales of Fortune. (Apuleius, Metamorphoses 11.21-25, trans. Graves)

The terrors and fortunes of the everyday had always weighed on the hearts and minds of the empire. For some this was nowhere stronger than in the face of death. While most educated people saw the other side of the grave much as the philosophers did—as a disembodied soul—there were those disposed to hope for a pleasurable afterlife (MacMullen, 1981, 55-57; Fox, 1988, 97). Thus in the second century there was a something
of a shift from cremation to inhumation.\textsuperscript{9} In the end, immortality might be the only comeback for the fortunes of the everyday.

Powers and deities could seem too remote or too menacingly close to help. Simple belief was far from simple. With no orthodoxy to restrict one’s choices, a man would gather gods as he might friends. The more the safer. Perhaps he was particularly close to one. But everyday realities brought a distinctly business-like mood to the relationship. There were always transactions to be done to balance the accounts between the everyday and that other darker reality.

\textbf{1.4 THE MUTUAL REINFORCEMENT OF SOCIAL AND METAPHYSICAL HIERARCHIES}

\textbf{1.4.1 Primary reality as the guardian of social conformity}

Metaphysics had never proceeded independently of social reality. The philosophers belonged almost without exception to the privileged. For the most part, they upheld the conventions of society. A ‘new’ metaphysic might appear to have revolutionary implications, but it was always easy enough to absorb antinomy and anomaly through tradition. The vast gulf between the two realities, and the sophisticated hierarchies of the metaphysicians, presupposed and reinforced the self-evident rectitude of the social pyramid.

Rare was the philosopher who could live where reason led. The atomism of Democritus had opened up radical perspectives on primary reality, but the numerous fragments in Stobaeus’ \textit{Anthology} suggest that he remained tied to the structures of traditional morality and society:\textsuperscript{10}

Men fashioned the image of chance as an excuse for their own thoughtlessness; for chance rarely fights with wisdom, and a man of intelligence will, by foresight, set straight most things in his life. (2.8.16)

Fortune offers many gifts, but is unstable: nature is self-sufficient: that is why, being smaller but stable, she conquers the greater forces of hope. (2.9.1-5)

It is fitting to yield to the law, the rulers, the wiser. (3.1.45)

\textsuperscript{9} However, it should be noted that the evidence is inconclusive since epitaphs of the period equally attest both verdicts on the afterlife (Fox, 1988, 96).

\textsuperscript{10} Some texts attributed to Democritus may be of dubious authenticity. See Barnes (1987, 24-35). The following translations from Stobaeus and Clement are by Barnes.
Chance may be no more than convention and ignorance, but fortune, natural law, and civil order remain unshaken. So too are the ideals of moral and social life: status, balance, temperance, order, discipline, reason, and the higher priority of things immortal and of the soul:

It is hard to be ruled by an inferior. (Democritus, in Clement, Miscellaneia 4.4.27)

If your character is orderly, your life too will be well-ordered. (3.37.25)

For men gain contentment from moderation and a measured life: deficiencies and excesses tend to change and to produce large movements of the soul, and souls which move across large intervals are neither stable nor content. (3.1.210)

Fortune provides a rich table, temperateness a self-sufficient one. (3.5.26)

Democritus' atomism could well have rendered him insensitive to the gap between experience and ideal: "All men, aware of the wretchedness of life, suffer for their whole lives in troubles and fears, telling false stories about fear after death" (Stobaeus, Anthology 4.34.62, trans. Barnes). Yet he did not dismiss the turmoil and darkness of his soul as merely the movement of atoms and void. Nor was his anguish simply the result of unnecessary conventions about the soul. In a later age, Plutarch found him to be a kindred spirit:

Let us say to ourselves that your body, O Man, produces many diseases and afflictions by nature from within itself and receives many that strike it from without, and that if you open yourself up, within you will find a large and varied storehouse and treasury of evils, as Democritus says, which do not flow in from outside but have, as it were, internal and native springs. (Plutarch, On Afflictions of Mind and Body 500DE, trans. Barnes; cf. On Desire and Grief 2)

The fifth century had brought new social complexities and laws, changing quickly, without sanction in antiquity, and therefore without the traditional hallmark of credibility. Comparative anthropology raised questions about the fixity of law and religious custom. Law normally meant that "entire body of traditional usage which governed the whole of (a man's) civic conduct, political, social, and religious" (Dodds, 1973, 97). It was an accepted, unchangeable inheritance. All human laws are sustained by one divine law. Beneath the changes of the everyday stood constant nature, even as diet and exercise depended on the body's constitution. But the debate had begun in earnest: "Is the social restraint which law imposes on nature a good or a bad thing?"

For Protagoras, much like Heraclitus, the law may be better or worse in each state, but it stands while the people believe it. The law is king. But for Hippias the law is a tyrant, an artificial bond. So also Euripides' famous line, "there is nothing shocking but
thinking makes it so” (fragment 19, trans. Barnes). In this spirit Antiphon rejected race and class distinctions as arbitrary:

By nature we all stand with a like equipment, whether we are barbarian or Greeks; our natural wants are the same...we breathe a common air...we feel respect and awe for the nobly born, and for them only: in this matter we behave like barbarians to our own people. (P.Oxy 1364, trans. Barnes)

Likewise, Euripides and others felt intensely conscious of the rights of individuals against society and a concern for the oppressed classes. Alcidamas, Georgias’ student captured the mood: “God has left all men free; Nature has made none a slave” (Schol. Aristotle, Rhetoric 1373B, trans. Dodds). Here were individualists, humanists, secularists and iconoclasts of tradition whose intellectual bonds were greater than arbitrary national customs. Yet confidence in reason did not lead the Sophists to social revolution, nor to any other single set of implications. Indeed, their legacy—‘nature is right’—passed to many conventional sons (Dodds, 1973, 99-105).

Earlier I noted how the tenor of Plato’s moral teaching and social ideals matched the characteristics of reality and perfection presumed and expounded in his cosmology. All moral and social prescription derived from ‘the Good’, the form of absolute beauty and moral perfection:

We distinguish between the many particular things which we call beautiful or good, and absolute beauty and goodness. Similarly with all other collections of things, we say there is corresponding to each set a single, unique Form which we call an ‘absolute’ reality. (Republic 507B, trans. Lee)

The Good therefore may be said to be the source not only of the intelligibility of the objects of knowledge, but also of their existence and reality; yet it is not itself identical with reality, but is beyond reality, and superior to it in dignity and power. (Republic 509B, trans. Lee)

Plato’s ultimate goal was not a perfect cosmology, but a perfect city-state, ruled by a sagacious philosopher-king, and politically and pedagogically engineered to maintain strict guidelines for social and moral purity. It is a bold vision—a scheme to bring heaven as close to earth as mortals can. The vision would appear to have left the forms for a reality closer to our experience. But this impression passes as the theoretical axioms of cosmological perfection are recast as social idealism. We leave Plato with a taste of that conservatism which drove his idealism:

It will be for the rulers of our city, then, if anyone, to deceive citizen or enemy for the good of the State; no one else must do so. And if any citizen lies to our
rulers, we shall regard it as a still graver offence than it is for a patient to lie to his doctor...you will punish him for introducing a practice likely to capsize and wreck the ship of state. (Republic, 126, trans. Lee)

Aristotle’s idealism was shaped by the experience of the decline of the Greek city-states in the fourth century. In the face of this demise, both he and his mentor articulated the shape of a society founded on the assured results of rational inquiry: the ideals of liberty, autonomy, autarchy, and the rule of law. The noblest citizens of such a society evidence and experience the primary reality in their deliberate choices of the highest and purest of ends:

As an instance of pleasures of the soul consider the love of distinction in public life or in some branch of learning. The devotee in either case takes pleasure in what he loves without any physical sensations. What he feels is a spiritual or intellectual pleasure, and we do not speak of men who seek that kind of pleasure as ‘temperate’ or ‘intemperate’. (Nicomachean Ethics 3.10, trans. Thomson)

For this reason such gratifications should be moderate and rare. They should never clash with the rational element...So in the soul of the temperate man the appetitive part should be harmonized with this principle. (ibid, 3.12)

Addressing his audience in the Lyceum, Aristotle would have been assured of assent to his ideals for those who should form the elite ranks in society:

As for the superior man, since nothing is too good for him, he must be the best of men. For the better a man is, the more he deserves, so that he who deserves most is the best. Therefore the truly superior man must be a good man. Indeed, greatness in all the virtues is surely what stamps him for what he is...Indeed, if we examine his conduct in all its branches, we shall find the absurdity of supposing he could do anything but good. Besides, he would not be worthy of honour if he were bad. For honour is the guardian of goodness and is awarded to the good...He will rarely undertake anything or, if he does, it will be something great and glorious...He must live his own life uninfluenced by anyone, unless perhaps a friend, since to permit such influence would involve some degree of complaisance. (Nicomachean Ethics 4.3, trans. Thomson)

Balanced, temperate, perfect, superior men; above the irregularities of life and the pettiness of lesser men; serene, reasonable, intellectual men. Such men can read the extremes of the everyday and, guided by reason and the canons of primary reality, discern and choose the middle way:
...virtue...observes the mean relative to us, this being determined by such a rule or principle as would take shape in the mind of a man of sense or practical wisdom. We call it a mean condition as lying between two forms of badness, one being excess and the other deficiency; and also for this reason, that, whereas badness either falls short of or exceeds the right measure in feelings and actions, virtue discovers the mean and deliberately chooses it. (Nicomachean Ethics 2.6, trans. Thomson)

The confidence of materialism reached into every corner of Hellenistic life. Paintings and sculptures which had conveyed the lofty images of universal ideals in classical times and the emerging individualism of the fourth century now became more realistic. Huge pressure surfaced at every level to conform to the undefined yet clearly emerging culture. Kings and the wealthy built and stocked vast libraries. New trade routes and mechanisms brought unimagined commodities and treasures. The gap between rich and poor widened dramatically. The old rivalry of cities and aristocratic dynasties extended down the social scale bringing new players and pressures into the old game of keeping up with the neighbours. Vast expenditure in education and public projects were meant to impress and influence.

The age brought new access to education, but it was far from egalitarian. Training in rhetoric, the essential preparation for young men entering the burgeoning world of bureaucracy, remained housed in the best gymnasia or with expensive private tutors, ensuring that the boys of the best families would “keep up the idealization of the city” (Fox, 1986, 343).11

Several Latin writers, notably Cicero, Virgil, and Seneca, opened up themes of human cooperation and the brotherhood of man. Posidonius, one of the great intellects of the second and first centuries, fused hopes of a universal commonwealth with the reality of Roman imperial rule. The city of God, the rule of divine providence, had come to earth in the great cosmopolis, the symbol of the unification of human history. Here philosophers and law-givers mediate between the world of matter and the world of God. True morality and political virtue may yet spring from above to turn humanity back to its prehistoric innocence.

But individualism prevailed. The ideal remained detachment, self sufficiency, and withdrawal into oneself. Such withdrawal was rarely quietist. Philosophers, especially those with Roman connections, frequently lived, taught and moved amongst the ranks of

11 Note also the epikrisis papyri P.Mich. XIV 676 in Llewelyn (ND 6:132-140).
the ambitious. But from Plato to Plotinus, the axis of philosophical morality was the inner and outer serenity of the wise man. Stoics, Epicureans, and Platonists each held images of the sage who stood above the impact of life. Such was the power of the image that Seneca seemed unperturbed by whether or not such a man had existed or would ever exist: the ideal sage stood supreme over all other men (Const. 15.1). He may be defeated in body, but never in mind:

Know, therefore, Serenus, that this perfect man, full of virtues human and divine, can lose nothing ... The walls which guard the wise man are safe both from flame and assault, they provide no means of entrance—are lofty, impregnable, godlike. (Seneca, On the Firmness of the Wise Man 6.3-8, trans. Basore)

Likewise, Epictetus could harmonise an ultimate inner freedom with social conformity (Discourse 3.22.38-49, cf. 1.1.22-24). All philosophers agreed that the primary task of life was to shape the self (ibid, 1.4.18-21; Musonius Rufus, What is the Best Provision for Old Age, fragment 16). It began with self-knowledge ("know yourself"), proceeded through education in the cardinal virtues—courage, wisdom, justice, self-control (sophrosunē)—and concentrated on cultivating reason and pruning back the emotions till apatheia, impassivity, brought its serene rule:

Do you ask me what you should regard as especially to be avoided? I say, crowds; for as yet you cannot trust yourself to them with safety. I shall admit my own weakness, at any rate; for character that I took abroad with me, something of that which I have forced to be calm within me is disturbed; some of the foes that I have routed return again. But both courses are to be avoided... withdraw into yourself as far as you can. Associate with those who will make a better man of you. Welcome those whom you yourself can improve. (Seneca, Moral Epistles 7.1, 8, trans. Gummere)

The same ideals held for Stoics, Epicureans, Peripatetics, and Cynics alike, no matter how they disputed each other's verdicts on the emotions or the likelihood of genuinely converting the masses (Dio Chrysostom, Oration 13.13; Seneca, Moral Epistles 75; Pseudo-Diogenes, Epistle 29:4-5). The ultimate hold of convention lessens our surprise that socially well-placed Stoics could hold up a fiercely individualist Cynic as the embodiment of the Stoic quest for autonomy, even while castigating the Cynic's anti-social behaviour. Similarly, self-praise could at the same time be both odious and an accepted tool and right

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12 See Fitzgerald (1988, 59-65) and the texts cited there.
of the philosopher (Plutarch, *Moralia* 539A-547F, see Forbes, 1986, 8-10; also Brown, 1978, 41-45 on Aelius Aristides).

The ideals and self-control preached by the moralists put philosophy beyond reach. Most people found their direction in folksy maxims and in religion. The latter could be a powerful vehicle for patriotic emotion (Polybius, *Histories*, 6.56). Plato had long ago argued the need for rulers to hold the masses in check by lies if necessary (*Republic*, 398C). Isocrates interpreted the religious agendas of the Egyptian legislator Busiris this way: "he thought that the crowd ought to be habituated to obedience to all the commands of those in authority" (*Busiris* 26, trans. Van Hook). Lucretius protested. But the first century scarcely heard such protests. Livy and Virgil glorified Rome and Italy and employed religious myth and themes liberally to do so. No one made more political use of religion than Augustus (Grant, 1960, 180-1). And while somewhat sensitive to the hypocrisy, Plutarch nonetheless concurred "that the masses' faith should be stimulated so as to direct their thoughts upward in reverence for nobility: to be found among the gods, found likewise among the local—nobility" (MacMullen, 1981, 59).\(^\text{13}\)

Whatever private release the individual may have enjoyed in the mysteries, the cults themselves were carefully monitored and patronised to maintain social order. Individual, aristocratic, and civic pride found expression in piety, priesthoods, and benefactions (Fox, 1988, 76-82). A late first century AD inscription from Ephesus conventionally links the imperial cult to the celebration of the mysteries of Demeter:

To Lucius Mestrius Florus, proconsul, from Lucius Pompeius Apollonius of Ephesos. Mysteries and sacrifices are performed every year at Ephesos, sir, to Demeter Karpophoros and Thesmophoros and to the divine Augusti by initiates with much propriety and lawful customs, together with the priestesses; (the mysteries) have been watched over for many years by kings and emperors and the annual proconsuls...Accordingly, since the mysteries are soon upon us during your term of office, sir, those who ought to perform the mysteries necessarily petition you through my agency in order that you, recognising their rights... (*I.Eph.* II.213, in Horsley, ND 4:94-95, his trans.)

We leave the religious reinforcement of social convention with another inscription, this time from the mid-second century. Once again, the Ephesian worshippers of Artemis seem to both need and be able to count on Roman imperium. More importantly for our

\(^{13}\) On the nexus of religion and social order, see Fox (1988, 38, 76-80, 225, 255) and Winter (1991b, 127-130).
theme, the author leaves us in doubt as to the social function of his role—and his inscription:

The proconsul Gaius Popillius Carus Pedo states: 'I learned from the decrees which was sent to me by the most illustrious council of the Ephesians that the honourable proconsuls before me regarded the days of the festival of the Artemisia as holy and have made this clear by edict. This is why I considered it necessary, since I also have regard for the reverence of the goddess and for the honour of the most illustrious city of the Ephesians, to make it known by decree that these days shall be holy and the festal holidays will be observed on these days'. (This edict was promulgated) while Titus Aelius Marcianus Priscus, son of Aelius Priscus, a man very well thought of and worthy of all honour and acceptance, was leader of the festival and president of the athletic games. (1 Eph. 1a.24, in Oster, 1987, 74-76, his trans., emphasis mine)

1.4.2 Social rank and status as the nexus of the two realities

The sense of purest reality was carried by the mechanisms of Graeco-Roman social experience. Intellectualism preferred the abstraction and reification of form and logos, mind and being, Demiurge and the One. Religious sensibility located the ‘other’ in dramatic ritual and initiation, and in oracular and epiphanic presence. Popular superstition found transcendent explanations for catastrophic, bizarre, and everyday occurrences in Fate, Fortune, magic, omens, and charms. And social relationships remained for ever fixed in the impenetrable and unquestionable logic of philotimia—the mystery of rank and status—the source of competition and concord alike. Our theme requires a clear grasp of the mechanisms and pervasiveness of the social pyramid.

A great gulf demarcated local aristocracies from their constituents. But for most of the inhabitants of the empire, the senators and knights of Rome might as well have been the Olympian circle, Plato’s forms, or Plotinus’ One, so far were they (and their own stratification) removed from everyday realities. Like the gods, their presence was everywhere felt, with little if any indication of familiarity. In an age when individualist realism vied with idealism in Roman portraiture, imperial coins and statues nevertheless inscribed for their propaganda every ounce of the ethos of an earlier age, setting the omnipotence and omnipresence of the mighty rulers of the world before their far-flung subjects. And much as local aristocrats might ape Rome’s manners, they were more likely to know this fraction-of-one percent of the empire through the steady erosion of their rights to govern than through any personal familiarity (MacMullen, 1974, 88-105).
Modern sensibilities might wish to imagine that such elitism only operated at these rarefied heights. But indicators and mechanisms of distinction, separation, and patronage operated down to the lowest levels of the social pyramid. Free, freed, or slave stamped a person for life. With little prospect or expectations of ever changing rank, the numerous strata of free and freed jealousy guarded their pecking orders. On a papyrus from Oxyrhynchus, an epikrisis for admission to membership of the gymnasion class stretches back six generations on the father's side of a boy's family, and eight on his mother's (P.Mich. XIV 676, in Llewelyn, ND 6:132-140). Household slaves gave themselves ranks—with special prominence for the literate—left for posterity in the occupational references on their tombstones and in the wills of their masters (see P.Oxy. 3197, dated 20.10.111, in Horsley, ND 1:69-70). And a freedman might rise to great prominence, yet never throw off his stigma amongst the old wealth and satirists (MacMullen, 1974, 98-105).

Whatever introspective implications they may have held, the Delphic maxims were completely intelligible in terms of social place: know your place in the pyramid, regulate your behaviour to the mean of what is expected, and weigh carefully the risk to honour and wealth in each new relationship. Platonists, Peripatetics, Stoics, and Epicureans did not create the values enshrined in the maxims or cardinal virtues, nor the ideals of self-sufficiency and impassivity—they were written into the cultural mindset from its earliest expressions of caste. Intellectuals only projected what everybody knew: whatever one's rank, it must be maintained (Libanius, Orations 48.31; Cicero, Pro Cnaeo Plancio 15). A huge social gulf kept the rural world on the other side of the estates of their landlords. Even the urban poor despised their rustic cousins (MacMullen, 1974, chapters 1-2). Verticality, show, and the proximity of urban living made everyone's status conspicuous: "the sense of high and low pressed heavily on the consciousness of both" (ibid, 94). Even in death it was important to set the record straight about rank:

Here lies Valeria, daughter of Marcus, of free-born status from Caesarea in Mauritania. She was kind, affectionate, dignified, blameless. (Side 1, inscription at Cairo, late first or early second century AD, SEG 1536, in Horsley, ND 3:40-43, his trans., emphasis mine)

But every system creates those who can learn how to manipulate it. Thus the tight hierarchy was not always so tight. A slave in Caesar's household had far superior prospects to other slaves, indeed even to many among the respectable free-born (MacMullen, 1974, 92; also Horsley, ND 2:25-32). New blood entered the knights and

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14 See Flory (1978) on the social mobility open to slaves due to the social cohesion of the familia.
senators of Rome, and the lesser local aristocracies. Roman army veterans could rise to a modest local prominence. Occasionally someone might even move down in order to move up:

...Gaia greets you as do her children and her husband. Know, then, that Herminos went off to Rome and became a freedman of Caesar in order to take appointments. Greet all your family individually just as all mine greet you. I pray you are well. (P. Oxy. 3312, Horsley, ND 3:7-9, his trans.)

Honour could be gained and maintained without any change in legal position. Wealth, education, marriage, adoption, administrative or rhetorical talent, piety, virtue, and citizenship could all offer a platform for greater status. For those of some means, the costly business of benefactions brought exclusivity and status: "Most people think that to be deprived of the chance to display their wealth is to be deprived of wealth itself" (Plutarch, Cato maior 18.4, slightly paraphrased in MacMullen, 1974, 62). The quest for status was upheld as a noble goal even by the exploited (Judge, 1975, 195). Those lucky enough to make the climb made sure that at the end others would hear about their fortunes: "The system of public eulogies is the principle ideological regulator in Greek society under the Empire. It interprets and applies the social position which the notable citizens established through benefactions" (1982, 106). Romans left similar indicators of prominence:

This is the tomb of Rufinus, whom they used to call Asterios. He left the land of Rome and went to the city of the Nile; and shining out in the progress he made, he provided many things for many people, causing distress to no one, but considered what was just... (Inscription at Rome from the third or fourth century AD, IG XIV 1976, in Horsley, ND 4:35-38, his trans.; see also CIL 8.11824 for a record of rural rags-to-riches)

No convention surpassed the art of friendship as a mechanism for personal ambition and the maintenance of a balanced system. Contracts of co-operation, amicitia, amongst aristocrats and others of high office, often reinforced through marriage, divorce, and adoption, maintained political affiliations to secure election to important posts on a career path. Clientela cemented the bonds between the powerful and the less so. This was an arrangement of mutual self-interest. Money passed downwards, political and other support passed up, and measures of honour moved both ways. Once entered, the bond was for life, even passing on through the generations in a manner similar to the ties of

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15 Hopkins (1965) surveys the possibilities and circumstances of upward mobility among the elite.
freedmen and their families to their previous masters. An entire society maintained its ideals and elitism through vast, sometimes complicated, quasi-legal networks of obligation (see Judge 1960a, 1960b, 1972b, 1982).

Responding to the criticism that the Roman systems of amicitia and clientela did not operate in Greek states, Judge surveyed the relative frequencies in the Egyptian papyri of the normal Greek term for a protective guardianship (prostatēs) and the technical loan word (pairōn) for the Roman arrangement. He concludes: "we can assume a prevailing familiarity with Roman patronal practice and ideals, which were transposed also to international relations, so that it may be taken as a realistic guide to the ethical character of such other conventions of personal dependency as will have existed in the various Greek states" (1984, 20).

As a specific instance of clientela note the deference of this client to his patron:

Herm ... [to Sarapion] ... greetings, and that you may always remain in good health in your whole person for long years to come, since your good genius allowed us to greet you with respect and salute you. For as you also make mention of us on each occasion by letter so I here make an act of worship for you in the presence of the lords Dioskouroi and in the presence of the lord Sarapis, and I pray for your safe-keeping during your entire life and for the health of your children and of all your household. Farewell in everything, I beg, my patron and fosterer. Greet all your folk, men and women. All the gods here, male and female, greet you. Farewell. (Papyri letter of unknown provenance in first or second century AD, CPR 19, in Horsley, ND 1:56-57, his trans.)

Throughout classical times the honour of a city was a function not of its size, but of its institutions: the quality of its citizenry, the magnanimity of their benefactions, the antiquity of its law, the prestige of its council, the orderliness of its lawful assemblies, and the impressiveness of its architecture and civic projects. The pride of a city was its autonomy and self-sufficiency. Such had been the Athenian ideal. But a bigger political infrastructure had pared away the autonomy of the local elites. Local decisions were increasingly centralised. Thus Dio of Prusa warned the wealthy of Tarsus to make up with the poor linenweavers, else "I fear that you may lose the right of free speech altogether" (Orations 34.39, trans. Crosby). Yet pride in being a citizen remained. Philosophers still declaimed on political models, but such ideals increasingly sounded hollow and artificial.

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16 The next few paragraphs roughly follow the convenient survey in Meeks (1986, 19-64).
Philo followed the path of others in psychologising the utopian state, not least because of his personal experience of the fickleness of emperors' whims regarding the Jews. Few entertained any thoughts of revolution, nor of agendas for social transformation, and no institutions existed for such change.

Rhetoricians, philosophers, and other intellectuals declaimed on the justice and injustice of contemporary arrangements and their ambiguities. Some grew exceedingly sceptical, such as the celebrated Cameades who delivered opposing public speeches on the ideal of justice on subsequent days in 155BC. The philosophical idealisation of the intrinsic orderliness, perfection, and divinity of nature could be taken as its own proof of the rightness of Roman supremacy in fulfilment of political ideals and historical processes. Thus Aelius Aristides lauded Rome's justice. But his timing was nothing if not ironic. During the period in which he praised Rome for its sense of equality (Orations 26.39), the emperors Hadrian and Antoninus Pius supported the creation of formal distinctions in the law for the treatment of the honourable and the humble. Some, like Diogenes, a prototype for later Cynics, professed to be a citizen of the universal cosmopolis. Stoics went in the direction of articulating a universal republic, a commonwealth of mankind, whose king was nature, whose law was the rational structure of reality, and whose citizens were the fortunate few Stoics wise enough to live in harmony with this reason.

Yet the mystique of the empire and of the city stood only so long as no one questioned the lot of its constituents. In Hellenistic and imperial times, social exclusion had spawned numerous small associations, often coming together around trades and occasionally drawing members from different strata of rank. Foreign cults too might pose a threat to the social order by destabilising the normal hierarchy of obligations in family and civic life. Rome might interfere, as it often did, though it was more likely to diffuse a potential source of insurrection by incorporating the group into its legal structures than by any heavy-handed measures.

These spontaneous associations often formed around people of common trades (see the lists in MacMullen, 1974, 74-75), or of like-minded friends, creating social bonds which were not available to some through households, and which the republic could not meet. Like the family and the republic, worship of a patron god gave expression to the unity of the associations, though some were entirely secular. Particularly common in the larger trade centres and in the cities of Asia Minor, the clubs increasingly served an economic function, providing support in hardships and a funeral fund for members, though their activities remained focused in the conviviality of a shared meal. For those with few hopes of public honours, the club's wealthy patron and its elaborate set of titles and regulations mirrored the structures of civic life and offered a focus for pride and loyalty (ibid, 78-79).
Each institution—family, club, republic—upheld and reinforced the ideals of order, balance, harmony, and self-sufficiency. The mechanisms of honour and shame created checks and balances to preserve these in every moral choice, and to keep people fixed firmly in their places. In the popular intellectualism of Paul’s day, the gulf between primary reality and the everyday was the mirror, articulation, and experience of the social pyramid of the Graeco-Roman world.

1.5 CONCLUSION

While ‘primary reality’ and ‘everyday reality’ are anything but neat labels, the picture is clear enough: pervasive within the great diversity of the popular intellectualism of the classical, Hellenistic, and imperial periods is a marked presumption of, and deference to, a greater reality beyond the stuff of everyday life. Nevertheless, idealism and abstractionism could not erase the lived priority of the everyday. Each of the intellectuals and others we have encountered were in their own ways seeking meaning for history, for relationships, and for the everyday. But their methods, their hermeneutic, always presupposed and found a way back to the other reality.

Call it what we will, the greater reality surfaced in idealism, perfectionism, objectification, abstraction, reification, and in the various forms of metaphysical speculation. It occurred in many different, even contradictory senses: that the invisible, incorporeal, unchanging Forms are more real than the everyday world of change and the senses; that there is an inner ‘core’ or ‘essence’ or ‘first principle’ to things; that this essence of something is somehow more real than the outer trappings; that what never changes is better than what does; that the general is more important than the particular; that the greatest truths are timeless and universal; that a certain aloofness marked the great heroes and sages of past times, legends, and philosophers’ ideals; that nature has endowed some men fit to be superior to others; that the highest god is impassible, unchanging, unmoving, unknowable; that one should know one’s place in the world and live up to its expectations; that reason and piety are the paths to immortality; that the highest good is to be found in the speculative, philosophical activity of the mind, the most honourable part of man; that the greatest truths of the gods are to be kept in mysteries; that god is known only where words and logic have ceased. It lived in art and ritual and architecture, in social rank and civic duty and funeral oratory.

Something within, without, above, below, beyond. Something bright, dark, hidden, disclosed, mysterious, magical. Something other than here-and-now, you-and-me. This is the sense of primary reality, of the essence, of the ideal, of the perfect. It is equally the parent of rationalism and irrationalism. Hard-headed logician and contemplative mystic
each make their home on this foundation. Sophists debunked it while creating their own artificiality. Plato sought to name it. Aristotle was equally indebted to it even as he went about correcting his master. The Delphic canon presumed it. Moralists argued as though radically opposed to one another, yet never moved from this common ground. Art and architecture celebrated and mimicked it. Letters, epitaphs, and graffiti presumed it even as they sometimes mocked its manifestations.

The desires of Graeco-Roman intellectuals and the less-educated were as intensely personal as those we shall see in Paul. But the outlook was radically different. Somewhat ironically, ancient intellectuals discarded the ordinary in their search for its value. The last word belongs to Paul’s contemporary, Seneca, that Roman doyen of perfectionists:

Among the very persons who are making progress there are also great spaces intervening. They fall into three classes, as certain philosophers believe. First come those who have not yet attained wisdom but have already gained a place near by. Yet even that which is not far away is still outside...The second class is composed of those who have laid aside both the greatest ills of the mind and its passions, but yet are not in assured possession of immunity...The third class are beyond the reach of many of the vices and particularly the great vices, but not beyond the reach of all...There awaits us, if ever we escape from these low dregs to that sublime and lofty height, peace of mind and, when all error has been driven out, perfect liberty. You ask what this freedom is? It means not fearing either men or gods; it means not craving wickedness or excess; it means possessing supreme power over oneself. And it is a priceless good to be master of oneself. Farewell. (Seneca, Moral Epistles 75.9-18, On the Diseases of the Soul, trans. Gummere)
In Christ: The Social, the Historical, and the Personal in Paul’s Thought

2.1 A MODEL OF INTERDEPENDENT PERSPECTIVES

Paul’s thought was shaped by the events of his gospel—the life, death, resurrection, reign, and imminent return of Jesus the Christ. This complex of events consummated the history of Israel, reconciled the Jew and Gentile, and revealed Jesus to be the central figure of human history. Furthermore, it divided history into two eras headed by two men: Adam and Christ. Their actions established the identity of those they represented: either ‘in Adam’, or ‘in Christ’. Correspondingly, a person experiences life as the legacy of either representative: life ‘in the flesh’, or ‘in the Spirit’. As the firstfruits of those who belong to the new era, Christ lives fully in the power of the Spirit. Yet those whom he represented—those in Christ, and therefore in the Spirit—may continue to act in the futility and self-centredness of the flesh, thus contradicting their new identity. The mark of the Spirit is conformity to the dying and rising of Christ. Consequently, weakness, suffering, and hardship do not indicate the flesh, but the Spirit, since they are marks of identification with the crucified and risen Lord. This life in the Spirit is life in community which both preserves the distinctiveness of the individual, and negates all pretensions to autonomy. Thus idealism and elitism gave way in Paul to an unpretentious focus on people and their everyday concerns and contexts. Such are some of the principal patterns of Paul’s thought.

There is no intrinsic hierarchy to these themes. While historians generally approach Paul in terms of his relation to the social character of the first century, NT scholars are frequently preoccupied with a search for the ‘centre’ of Paul’s thought (see the surveys in Ridderbos [1975] and Beker [1980]). This quest exhibits the same fallacy as the attempt to locate Paul within the thought-world of one or other of the philosophical schools (Judge, 1973b). Paul showed no interest in axiomatic systems. Moreover, his letters exhibit considerable flexibility in thematic architecture and lexical choice.
Paul was preoccupied with a person, Jesus Christ, and the myriad of interconnected implications he saw in the identity and events of Christ for his own life, for others, and for the whole of human history. Thus while certain perspectives and phrases recur in his letters frequently, and at times predictably, there is no one architectonic theme—neither justification, nor redemptive history, nor apocalyptic, nor personal encounter, nor community. Neither is Paul’s thought ‘christocentric’ if this means a preoccupation with expounding a theological system where each axiom is hierarchically related to a nest of propositions about the person and work of Christ. On the other hand, he is certainly ‘christocentric’ if this means that Paul self-consciously related his life and thought to all that he admired about Christ. But Paul was also ‘theocentric’ to the extent that he saw Christ pointing beyond himself to God his Father.

Paul’s consistent concern was to proclaim his message about Christ, and to be a catalyst for the personal and social transformations which he believed the Spirit would effect through the gospel. This preoccupation with Christ gave coherence to all his letters. It also enabled him to contextualise his message in each new contingent circumstance. He maintained his focus on particular people and the specific concerns of his life and theirs. In other words, his thought oscillated between the social, the historical, and the personal.¹ None had priority; none operated in isolation; each led easily into the others:

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Figure 4: The interdependence of the social, the historical, and the personal in Paul
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This interdependence, albeit often with different themes, will surface throughout chapters two to five. In an important sense, these chapters form their own section: a portrait of Paul’s ways of creating meaning within the world. At times the discussion is slightly repetitive and the chapter divisions a touch artificial. All of this is indirect evidence of a developing argument which I will draw into one place in chapter five—that the distinctiveness of Paul is most transparent when we refuse to reduce his life and thought to an axiomatic system of ‘timeless truths’, but instead allow their creativity and coherence to move to centre stage in the dynamics of his personal heritage, passion, heuristics, social relationships, and everyday experience. Thus the logic of the chapters:

¹ The three perspectives are somewhat related to the triad situational-normative-existential employed by my former teachers Vern Poythress and Harvie Conn, and their colleague John Frame, at Westminster Theological Seminary.
the broad patterns of his thought about Christ, himself, and the world (this chapter); his responses to the patterns of Graeco-Roman popular intellectualism as Acts and his letters indicate his encounters with these (chapter three); the desire and freedom he expressed in his engagement with others (chapter four); and what we can glean from these about the rhythm of his conversations for change (chapter five).

The present task, then, is to outline certain pivotal perspectives which carry his respective emphases on social relationships, history, and the person. The metaphor of a pivot is deliberate, for once again I wish to stress the ways in which Paul ‘turned’ his thought around Christ to address the given concern. Moreover, Paul’s understanding and experience of history, of social relationships, and of his own inner man, were shaped by tension, challenge, and paradox. Nowhere was this more true than in his social relationships.

2.2 PIVOTAL SOCIAL PERSPECTIVES IN PAUL’S THOUGHT

2.2.1 Respect, indifference, and frustration towards Jerusalem and the law

Paul appears as a man caught between two worlds. On the one hand, he was the son of a Pharisee (Acts 23:6). His parents raised him within an orthodox faith and apparently moved to Jerusalem while he was still young (Acts 22:3, Phil 3:5), perhaps to enable his training as a conservative Pharisee at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), perhaps also as the only place where he could receive a thoroughly traditional training in Judaism. Though he later repudiated such status, Paul’s ancestry, heritage, training, and progress as a Pharisee were matters of great pride to him for much of his life (Acts 22:3-5, 26:4-5, 2 Cor 11:22, Gal 1:13-14, Phil 3:4-7). On the other hand, he was a freeborn Roman citizen of a thoroughly Hellenised city, Tarsus; the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia (Acts 22:3), and a significant educational centre for studies in philosophy and rhetoric. While some scholars discount the possibility of Paul having received a formal Hellenistic higher education (eg. Kim, 1981, 32), Forbes (1986, 22-24) has shown that such an education is a reasonable and likely explanation for the sophisticated grasp of rhetorical conventions which Paul showed in his deeply ironic reply to the Corinthians’ accusations. The contrast seems stark: Paul, the traditional Pharisee, and the educated Hellenistic man. But the dichotomy is misleading, for these worlds had long since penetrated one another.

If Paul had spent any of his childhood education in the synagogue schools of Tarsus, he would have been well-trained in Greek and quite familiar with the basic materials of a Greek education. But even if he had received all his education in Jerusalem, the same
would still apply. The fact is that Jerusalem was in many ways as 'Hellenistic' as any other city of the empire. Hengel's verdict on the relation of 'Jewish-Hellenistic' and 'genuine Jewish' literature of the intertestamental period holds good as a general assessment of the proximity of the two cultural traditions: "There were connections in all directions, and a constant and lively interchange" (1989, 26). Just as the older dichotomy of Greek versus Hebrew thought is now seen to rest on false antitheses, much of the effort to locate Paul within alternatively 'Hellenistic Jewish', 'Palestinian Jewish', or 'purely Hellenistic' frames of reference is ill-conceived. Hengel goes so far as to suggest that in most cases the terms 'Hellenised' and 'Hellenistic' are misleading and ought to be avoided. But none of this is meant to deny the deeply felt convictions of those Jews who worked to educate their countrymen in, and proselytise their neighbours towards, a distinctively Jewish life shaped by the law and a high regard for Jerusalem as the city of God (cf. Philo, On Dreams 2.245-254).

Paul epitomised this desire. Alongside the status opportunities which the language and education of the Greeks had given him (Hengel, 1989, 16-17), Saul the Pharisee shared his peers' zeal for their heritage (Matt 23:15). It seems that while 'orthodox' Judaism was reasonably pluralistic (far more than its leaders may have cared to acknowledge), nevertheless, "in times of crisis, when the Jews felt themselves threatened, (a) more stringent view gained general acceptance" (R. Tracey, 1987, 204). Here lies something of the rationale for the responses of the Jerusalem leaders to Jesus (Luke 13:1-14:14, 19:41-20:39), for Paul’s response to the first Christians (Acts 22:3-5, Gal 1:13-14), and for the responses of the Jerusalem leaders (including Jewish Christians) to Paul’s preaching of Messiah Jesus (Acts 15:5, 21:20-36). We do not need Hellenistic-Palestinian dichotomies, nor stereotypes of Judaism as excessively legalistic, to understand the tension. Each non-conformist touched a nerve: that deep consciousness of the distinctiveness of the covenant relationship with God, and esteem for its time-honoured vehicles—the law, the city, and

2 My remarks on Paul, 'Hellenism', Judaism, and Jerusalem depend in part on Hengel's essay (1989), and on R. Tracey (1987, 202-209). Hengel's survey of the evidences for educational practices, language, social mobility, architecture, and other everyday features of city life highlights the extent to which Jerusalem had absorbed the new culture. None of this means that the city and its people had lost their linguistic, religious, and cultural distinctives. Rather, Hengel's point is that "even where there was opposition and conflict involving vigorous argument with the new pagan civilization...people became more strongly 'infected' by it than they realized" (1989, 19). An interesting footnote to the extent of this unrealised absorption of culture is the adoption in the Passover meal of the Greek habit of reclining to eat. As Horsley notes, "If the last supper (Jn. 13.22ff) were a Passover meal one might expect that orthodox Jews would not have reclined at least on this occasion, however much they might have done so in other situations...yet this passage may well reveal how thoroughly normal this Greek fashion was felt to be by pious first-century Jews from rural Galilee" (Horsley, ND 1:9). Note also Horsley (ND 4:233) on Hellenistic customs at Jewish weddings.

3 See the surveys in Barr (1961), Silva (1983, 1990), and Horsley (ND, vol 5) on the various linguistic fallacies used to prop up the dichotomy.

4 See Judge (1993b) for the Roman perspective on Jews making proselytes.
the temple. This tension with Jerusalem unavoidably shaped much of Paul’s subsequent life and thought.

Paul understood his dramatic conversion as an encounter with the Messiah, and as a commission to declare the arrival of his kingdom (Acts 9:1-19, cf. 22:3-16, 26:4-18). The event had a deep impact on Paul’s thought. At the very least, it simultaneously reworked his understanding of his Jewish heritage, and undermined his confidence in it. He had come from Jerusalem full of piety and zeal, and with the blessing of its religious leaders to persecute the followers of Jesus. But now he saw the Christians as the ones truly faithful to the God of his fathers. Not only was his self-righteousness shaken, but the city itself began to lose its grip on him.

But Paul’s sense of Jewish heritage did not disappear. He drew from the OT promises and prophetic structures to develop the distinctive patterns of his thought about Christ’s fulfilment of Israel’s identity, covenant relationship, social structures, and history. His teaching and apologetic consistently respected the divine origin and blessing of Israel’s heritage. But his vision was always likely to antagonise Jerusalem. He saw the end of the law in Christ’s epiphany (Rom 10:4, Gal 3:25, 6:2, Eph 2:14-15, Col 2:14). His perspectives brought sharp dispute with conventional Jewish theology and biblical interpretation (Acts 15:2, 18:2, 21:18, 27-29). He became exasperated with what he could only see as Jewish blindness to prophecy and fulfilment (26:2). He still identified with Jews (24:10ff; 25:8), continued to work from the synagogues (18:6, 23), could still conform to Jewish practice (16:3; 21:26), and went to great lengths to collect support for the poor in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1-4, Gal 2:10). Nevertheless, he grew impatient with any attempt to place his gospel within Jewish constraints. Much like Jesus, he knew that he did not need the imprimatur of Jerusalem and its leaders—not even from its apostles (Gal 1:17-24, 2:6-21).

Paul’s refusal to submit his gospel to any supposed priority for Jerusalem, nor to the Judaisers infiltrating his ekklesi, may be seen as providing much of the rationale for his letter to the Galatians (Lincoln, 1981, 9-18). As I noted above, there is no need to

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5 Kim (1981) argues that virtually all of Paul’s thought can be derived from the impact of his conversion. While I find his arguments generally persuasive, at times he seems too tied to portraying Paul’s thought as a tidy system deriving from this primal experience. He helpfully opens up Paul’s allusions to the event beyond those passages normally taken to refer to it (viz. 1 Cor 9:1, 15:8-10, Gal 1:13-17, Phil 3:4-11). I will return to the importance of this event in chapter four.

6 Though Hengel (1991, 10) notes that his Hebrew name no longer seemed important to him.

7 It is also possible that Jewish Christians at Galatia had taken ‘advantage’ of a likely or actual conflict with the imperial cult to press Gentile converts into seeking refuge under the status of Judaism as a religio licita (Winter, 1994b, 136-143). I will take this up in chapter three where I discuss Paul and religion.
stereotype the Jerusalem group, nor the Judaisers or Pharisees for that matter, as legalists without any sense of the grace and mercy of God. Paul’s characterisation of their teaching as ‘works’ stemmed from his own perspectives on Jerusalem and the law: he respected these profoundly as the gifts of God; he held that Messiah Jesus had fulfilled them; he had no concern over those who remained attached to them; but he was frustrated and angered by those who recast the gospel to conform to what in his view was now redundant. It is at the point of what he saw as Jewish elitism defrauding his Gentile converts (Gal 2:4-13, 4:17-20, 6:12), that Paul’s indifference turned into a provocative examination of the Judaisers’ attachment to the city and the law (2:14-21, 4:21-26). Paul declared it another gospel (1:8-9). They did not honour their own commitments and rhetoric (2:3, 11-14, 5:2-3, 12, 6:13). They so badly misunderstood the Abrahamic promises and the place of Jerusalem in the biblical story as to prefer ‘Arabia and its slavery to the freedom of the new and greater city of the prophets’ hopes (4:21-31). They promoted the sheer absurdity of Gentiles ‘returning’ to a law they were never under (3:1-5). They promoted slavery in preference to the freedom of the Spirit, the long awaited promise of the prophets (3:1-5, 4:1-11, 5:1-12). Instead, the law could no longer serve as a reference point for the life of faith, but had reached its end in Christ (6:2). Indeed, when Paul stated that “the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”8 through the cross of Christ (6:14, cf. 2:20), and followed with his verdict that circumcision was now irrelevant, he had placed himself socially and intellectually beyond the claims of Jerusalem and the law.

The Christians of Jerusalem may have desperately hung on to a sense of affiliation with mainstream Judaism, but the parting of the ways was clear for Paul.9 The gospel of Christ could not be shackled to anachronisms where these threatened its freedom of expression. Such ties might find room to include the Gentiles among the people of God (Acts 15:1-29, cf. 10:9-11:18), but they could never grasp the breadth of his vision of Christ reconciling the Jew and the Gentile into one new man (Gal 3:28).

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8 Scripture references are from the New International Version except where I note that the translation is my own. The NIV is perhaps currently the most widely used translation among evangelicals.

9 The question of when Christians parted from Judaism as a distinct social and ideological grouping (the parting of the ways) has been traditionally answered in terms of a long history of continued affiliation and confused identity. Judge (1993b) has recently argued that the Romans never had any confusion about the distinctiveness of the Christians. He maintains that the confusion seems to have been within the minds of those Jewish Christians who maintained “a vain struggle to contain radical beliefs within the limits of a socially conformist sect devoted in the rabbinical manner to the study of the law” (1960b, 15). The point may still hold but it needs to be qualified by Gallo’s ‘verdict’ that the Jews’ dispute with the Christians was an in-house affair (Acts 18:12-17).
2.2.2 The reconciliation of the Jew and the Gentile

Paul’s gospel announced Christ as the fulfilment of the Abrahamic and prophetic promises to include the Gentiles within the one people of God (Gen 12:1-3, Rom 4:1-25, 9:25-29, 10:18-21, 15:8-12, Gal 3:6-4:7). But though this plan had progressively unfolded throughout Israel’s history, its goal had remained somewhat hidden and shrouded in mystery (Rom 15:15-16, 16:25-27, Eph 1:9-11, 3:4-6, 8-9, Col 1:25-27).

The unity of Jew and Gentile was far from academic for Paul. As I noted above, there was widespread interaction between Jewish culture and the Graeco-Roman world. There were tensions and distinctives on both sides. For the most part, Jewish protests in Palestine against Rome were passive, yet the Romans seemed ready to anticipate trouble from the Jews and were not above singling them out for persecution. In Alexandria at least there were “continual controversies and periodic violence between gentiles and Jews” in Paul’s day (Meeks, 1983, 38). In Palestine, considerable loyalty and nationalism attached to the sanctity of Jerusalem, the temple, the law, the Sabbath, and the other traditions of the fathers. Each of these could be a source of curiosity, attraction, or derision (cf. Martial 7.82) for some Graeco-Romans, and there was a long history of gentiles connecting themselves to Jewish customs and communities, especially among prominent women.\textsuperscript{10} As well as converts, wealthy adherents gave financial and social support to the local synagogues—thus the ‘God-fearers’ of Acts.\textsuperscript{11} The Jews’ seven-day week held a particularly strong attraction for many as an alternative to the Roman eight-day arrangement. Inscriptions of the period attest the absorption of Jews into normal Graeco-Roman life, including the conventions of benefactions and honours (cf. R. Tracey, 1987, 202-209), even if their religious and moral scruples curtailed their involvement in some events. There is also considerable evidence that Gentiles incorporated Jewish beliefs into their magical and religious practices and cults (cf. Kearsley, 1992e). Against this multifaceted relationship, we encounter Paul’s concern for the unity of the two groups.

For the most part, it is unlikely that Gentiles gave a first, let alone second, thought to ‘the Jew-Gentile problem’. The Jews’ peculiar beliefs and practices, and isolated occurrences of extremism, did not weigh heavily on Gentile minds. Gentiles had long since rationalised Graeco-Roman superiority with an intellectual and religious preference for pluralism (though there is also plenty of evidence for dogmatism and intolerance, eg...

\textsuperscript{10} There is some debate as to whether Jews actively proselytised or whether gentiles were attracted to Judaism without active Jewish effort. For an outline of the issues, see Meeks (1983, 32-39, 152-153) and Blue (1994, 178-183).

\textsuperscript{11} For an outline of the debates surrounding the term sebomenos ton theon, ‘God-fearers’, see Blue (1994, 178-183).
Acts 19:28; cf. Moritz, 1991, 89-92). On the Jewish side, even those who had attained prominence in Graeco-Roman cities might at times feel alienated by their peculiar heritage. The likely response was twofold: assimilate further, and/or maintain the distinctives within the safe confines of the synagogue community. Thus on the Gentile side, we encounter curiosity, indifference, and animosity; and on the Jewish side, anxiety, opportunity, and pride. But the matter loomed larger for Paul.

The weight of Paul’s concern fell on the Jewish side, yet his perspectives were innovative within both terms of reference. His gospel incorporated the Gentiles not by ignoring Israel’s priority in God’s plans (“to the Jew first”), but by drawing the Gentiles into the one new people created around the Jewish Messiah. The very distinctiveness of Israel brought the Gentiles into the picture. God had chosen one nation to bring blessing to all nations (Gen 12:1-3). Now that the blessing had come, the standing of the Gentiles had to be resolved. Paul’s answer was to simultaneously uphold the priority and advantages of Israel and tolevel all racial distinctions under the one common Lord. Moreover, he did so with an uncanny eye to the relevance of his ‘solution’ for those issues which did weigh on Jew and Gentile alike. Such was Paul’s response to the fear and fascination of Ephesian Christians for angels and powers and their manipulation in the syncretistic cults of Ephesus and Asia Minor.

Life in Ephesus revolved around Artemis and her cult. The account of Paul’s confrontation with the followers of Artemis (Acts 19) bears out Moritz’ verdict in this respect:

On all levels of social existence failure to support the cultic system would entail repression. The basic motivation for compliance with the cult was no doubt the individual’s existential fear of the evil powers who needed to be manipulated by the goddess. Compliance with the demands posed by the cult was clearly a matter of social survival and hope for the future. (1991, 92; cf. Kearsley, 1992e, 205-206)

The mystery rites of Artemis offered protection from the ever-present evil powers and demons. But there had been a major Jewish presence in the city since Hellenistic

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12 There is no certainty that Ephesus was the destination of the so-called letter to the Ephesians. Arnold reviews the arguments for and against and helpfully lifts the issue to the larger matter of the place of the city in the life of Asia Minor (1989, 5-6; cf. Kearsley, 1992c, 201-202).

13 The following remarks on Ephesians draw in part on Arnold (1989), Moritz (1991), and Kearsley (1992b,c,d,e). Paul also addresses this issue in several other letters, including lengthy treatments in Romans 2-4 and 9-11.

14 Arnold has argued that the notion of evil powers and demons was not a second century development, but is well attested for the first century. He demonstrates the hold of these powers in the mindset of the time (1989, 19-40).
times, and Jewish magic had become renowned in the first century (cf. Acts 19:17-19), so that there were also distinctly Jewish elements in the “asceticism, immoral indulgences, esotericism, spiritism, astrology, divination, sacred calendars and magic” which made up the religious and superstitious environment of Ephesus (Moritz, 1991, 89). There was also a live Jewish-Gentile conflict (ibid, 94; cf. Acts 19:32-34). This is the background to Paul’s presentation of the unity of Jew and Gentile in the purposes of God.

At the outset, Paul moved Christ to centre stage—he will sum up all things in himself (Eph 1:10). This uniqueness of Christ precluded all syncretism. What counted was being “found in Christ”. It did not matter whether one belonged to the people who had hoped beforehand (1:12), or to those who had not even known of the mystery of their inclusion (3:1-11). The Jews had long held the promises and privileges of the covenants (2:12). But these had become a wall of hostility and alienation to the Gentiles (2:14). And though these aliens too were heirs to the promises (3:6), the law had sealed their fate to drift in the hopelessness and futility of their darkened minds (2:15, 4:17-19, 5:8) at the mercy of those dark powers of the kingdom of the air (2:2-3, cf. 1:20-21, 6:12). But the wall had been torn down through the death of Christ (2:14-17). Gentiles could now be “fellow-citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household” (2:19). Thus the inclusion of the Gentiles was no after-thought, but an intrinsic aspect of the divine plan (3:1-11, cf. 1:9-14).

Paul insisted that the mystery of redemption had always been to recreate the image of God in a new people without racial or any other distinction: “his purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two” (2:15, cf. 4:22-24). Ethnic distinctions, therefore, no longer held privilege before God. Nor could they provide an inside path to the secrets of the heavenly courts, for Christ had already completed the heavenly journey (1:20, 4:9) and guaranteed this same place for all his people (2:6, cf. 1:14, 20). Moreover, he is superior over all powers (1:20-21, cf. 2:4-7, 3:10, 4:8-10, 6:10-11). The Ephesian Christians had only to see the truth which they already possessed (1:17-23, 3:14-19, 4:14-21). There was thus no need for the kinds of visionary-mystical experience found in Gentile cults, nor for the Torah observance, asceticism, or exorcism of much Jewish mysticism.\(^\text{15}\) The gospel of Christ had placed both groups on the same privileged footing, secure from all powers, and beyond the need of cult and magic. For Paul, the gospel had discredited the walls of social separation and now demanded that they be torn down from within the gathering of God’s people.

\(^{15}\) On the elements of Jewish mysticism which are likely to have been familiar to the Ephesians, see Moritz (1991, 97-99), Arnold (1989, 29-34), and Kearsley (1992b, 194; 1992c, 202; 1992e, 206-209).
Paul was everywhere working to shift his converts' sense of their place in the world. As Sampley puts it, "whereas their legitimation formerly came from others and the opinions of others guided their actions, now believers are secure in Christ: they know they are accepted by God and therefore are freed from the world's clutches" (1991, 16). Those clutches were social, and not only psychological and intellectual. Paul expected and laboured to bring transformations to social relationships as a fruit of the gospel. No true authority attached to Jerusalem or to Jewish (or Gentile) identity as the source of a believer's legitimation—or the lack of it—in the world. The one seed of Abraham ensured that ethnicity, sex, culture, and social rank no longer defined the person (Gal 3:16, 28). Likewise, the divisions and hostilities of humanity were abolished in the one new person (Eph 2:15). A similar portrait emerges in Romans.

2.2.3 The reorientation of social relationships within the ekklêsia

Suetonius' explanation that Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome (AD49) "because they were persistently rioting at the instigation of Chrestus (impulsore Chresto)" (Claudius 25:4, trans. Judge) is routinely taken as evidence of the existence of a substantial, well-organised, and independent Christian community at Rome from earliest times, probably planted by Roman converts from the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10). This being the case, commentators often gloss over the apparent lack of a clear catalyst at Rome for the themes of the letter and thus resort to treating it as some kind of theological handbook. But if hoi epidémountes Rōmaioi (Acts 2:10 NIV: "visitors from Rome") is better translated "Roman residents" (i.e. residents of Jerusalem with Roman citizenship-cum-connections), who are "both Jews and proselytes", and if Suetonius' "Chrestus" is not Jesus Christ but some passing messianic contender, then we might reconstruct a very different social setting for Romans.16

It may be that at the time Paul wrote from Corinth to Rome he knew of no organised Christian community in the city but only of household groups associated with his own personal networks (Rom 16), loosely related to one another perhaps, and still meeting under the auspices of the synagogue. Given his strategy to not build on another's foundation (15:20), and his deep desire to preach the gospel at Rome (1:10-15), it would seem that there had been no previous apostolic ministry at Rome. In a sense this turned back the clock for Paul. Having left his earlier strategy of working from the synagogues to then focus on Gentile audiences, Paul now faced the possibility that the synagogue might

16 My reconstruction builds on the work of Judge and Thomas (1966) who cite the work of other historians to much the same effect. Note also Judge, 1993b, 87-88. Their hypothesis has not met with universal acceptance (cf. Cranfield, 1975, 16).
again be his point of entry for the gospel (Acts 28:15-28). But his experiences in the east would have forewarned him and perhaps hardened his resolve to shape a community independent of the synagogue and along the lines of his other ekklesiæ. At the same time, his experiences in Corinth may have led him to anticipate further factions and elitism (cf. 1 Cor 8:1-11:1 and Rom 14:1-15:13; cf. 1 Cor 12-14 and Rom 12:1-21).

If this reconstruction holds, then a rationale emerges for Paul’s lengthy treatment of the Jew and the Gentile (Rom 1:4, 9-11, 15), his portrait of a new body unified in the grace of Christ (12:1-21), his advice to respect the authorities and maintain benefactions for the welfare of the city (13:1-7), and his plea for respect and understanding between social factions (14:1-15:13). His experiences elsewhere had taught Paul to anticipate opposition from the Jews, Gentile confusion about Jewish traditions and the gospel, and divisions within the ekklesiæ which mirrored the structures and conventions of society (16:17-20).

Thus he wrote ‘to get in first’ (Drane, 1980, 213).

What Paul wrote was not an axiomatic system. Neither was it an agenda for revolution and anarchy. Nor again was it an ideological prop for the status quo. Paul expected his converts to maintain their social station (Rom 13:3-4; cf. 1 Cor 7:17-24). But this was neither quietism nor resignation (on 1 Thess 4:11-12 see Winter, 1989b). Rather, Paul’s gospel led him to provocative social implications. His exposition of the grafting of the Gentiles into the divine plan for human history (Rom 9:1-11:32) lead him not only to doxology (11:33-36), but also to repudiate the basis of conventional social structures as he urged the believers to allow their new mindset to transform everyday relationships (12:1-21).

Having understood that the impartial mercies of God had condemned the social structures of this world, Paul aimed his critique at the heart of the ideology which propped up the system. In his appeal to no longer be conformed to the world (mê suschêmatizeste to aiôni toutô, 12:2), he echoed “the term that embodied the ideal of the culturally ‘well-informed’ person...(the euschemon) who is entitled to social respect because of cultivation” (Judge, 1983c, 31). Whatever their station in life, believers now had to lay hold of a new self-estimation, and a corresponding reorientation of their social priorities

17 For a discussion of Romans 13 as implying that Paul urged wealthy Christian converts to continue their patronage and benefactions to the city, see Winter (1988c, 1989a, 1994b). See also Harris (1991) on Paul’s concern for the public reputation of the ekklesiæ.

18 A great deal of fruitful work has been done on ‘the strong and the weak’ in 1 Corinthians as indicators of rival groups based on social position and influence, rather than as purely ideological or psychological indicators. See Marshall (1983, 1987), Meeks (1979, 1983, 1987), and Theissen (1990).

19 If Paul wrote Philippians from Rome, then his fears eventually materialised in the capital (Phil 1:12-18, 27-30; 3:2-6, 19).
based on the mercies and grace of God (12:3-4). In a world which honoured the self-reliant man, and largely dismissed unmerited mercy as unworthy of both gods and men (Harris, 1986, 98-102), Paul had inverted the norm. The body no longer existed for the individual. Instead, each member had been endowed with the Spirit and gifted for the good of the body (12:4-8). Paul was clearly stepping away from convention. This was particularly clear in his use of the building as a metaphor for the new community.

Faced with a community of believers fractured by elitism and dissension (1 Cor 1:10-17), Paul unleashed a devastating attack on those who sought to escape or to tame the power of the gospel. Neither the tertiary scholar, nor the nobly born, nor the grand orator could discern or reveal the mysteries of God in the gospel (1:19-20, 26, 2:4-5, 6-16; cf. Marshall, 1993, 26). Nor could they convey the power of the gospel. Rather, God had exposed the impotence and frailty of their wisdom, social pretence, and eloquence. Only the power of the Spirit could serve as a foundation for faith (2:4-5). Thus Paul preached the scandal of the cross knowing it would be dismissed as foolish and unimpressive (2:1-5). Moreover, he introduced an innovative image of the relations to which the gospel called them (1 Cor 3:10-15; cf. Judge, 1984, 5). They were a building of which Christ was the foundation and Paul the architect. The metaphor allowed no room for partiality. Here the strong must disregard their claims to the freedom of the privileged and act with new responsibility towards the weak as those for whom Christ also died (6:12, 8:9-12, 10:23-24). The death of Christ had brought inestimable freedom. But not as a means for individual licence or prestige. Rather, for the building up of the other.

In all of this we note the ease with which the social parameters of Paul’s thought presumed and led into his sense of the personal and the historical. His heritage, experience, and passion were never far away. The arguments which he crafted to prise open the grip of Jerusalem, ethnicity, and social status rang with the authenticity and congruency of a man who “counted it all nothing” as he stepped down in the world in imitation of his master. Likewise, his labours to unburden his communities of religious and cultural anachronisms were energised by a much larger vision of history and humanity.

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20 On the identity of the strong and the weak, Forbes notes that “‘Weakness’ and ‘strength’ never indicate simply psychological states... ‘Weakness’ is the state of those without power or status, and ‘strength’ is the state of those who do have status. ‘Weakness’ connotes humiliation in the eyes of others, rather than inadequacy in one’s own” (1978, 108-109; cited in Marshall, 1993, 24).
2.3 PIVOTAL HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES IN PAUL’S THOUGHT

2.3.1 “In the fullness of time”

Paul articulated his relationship with God as centred in the events of Christ which formed his ‘gospel’—the story of immense good news which he proclaimed throughout the nations. This story was Christ’s story. It focused in him (Rom 15:19) and Paul had received it directly from him (Gal 1:11-12, cf. 1 Cor 15:2-7). But it was also Paul’s gospel in the sense that he identified his life with its central character and with his commission to make him known (Rom 2:16, 16:25, 1 Cor 1:17, Gal 1:10-17, Eph 3:7; cf. Eph 6:19). Moreover, he was only too aware of how it could be perverted into “another gospel” which was “no gospel at all” (Gal 1:6-9). This sense of opposing messages was to play a critical role in shaping Paul’s perspectives. It brought home to him the weight of the responsibilities he bore not only to Christ, but to those who heard the message. He laboured to offer the gospel without deceit, pride, or empty eloquence (1 Thess 1:5, 2:1-6; cf. 1 Cor 2:1-5, 2 Cor 1:24-3:3, 4:1-3, Phil 1:15-18, 27, 1 Thess 2:9). He suffered for it (Phil 1:16, Phm 13), and believed his trials would advance its cause (Phil 1:12). As it produced fruit all over the world (Col 1:6, 23), it brought him into new relationships of ‘fatherhood’ (1 Cor 4:15), partnership (Phil 1:5) and oversight (Phil 1:27, Col 1:23).

Paul’s use of evangelion appears congruent with the use of evangelizein in LXX Isa 40:9, 52:7, 60:6, and 61:1, and shows some awareness of their broader contexts (cf. Rom 10:14-20). He was also likely indebted to the traditions of Jesus’ own proclamation of the kingdom (1 Cor 15:1-8; Rom 14:17, 1 Cor 6:9, 15:24, Col 1:13; cf. Acts 20:17, 28:22, 31). At the same time, Paul was also working with a pattern of understanding quite discernible to those who had no heritage in the Jewish scriptures. In a discussion of the term in a second century AD letter responding to news of a wedding, Horsley cites a wide range of mostly Hellenistic texts using evangel- words (Horsley, ND 3:10-15, all trans. his):

You filled us with joy when you announced the good news of most noble
Sarapion’s marriage. (P. Oxy. 3313, 13-4)

...a slave coming to bring the good news of his victory and success... (P. Giss. 27)

...since I have become aware of the good news about the proclamation as Caesar
(as Gaius Julius Verus Maximus Augustus)... (SB 1, 421.2)

Honours for an individual “giving (largesse) magnanimously at the festival for
good news” (JGR 4, 860)

Among his texts are those for festivals instituted to convey news concerning the imperial family, including an inscription from Sardis proclaiming that a son of Augustus
had taken the *toga virilis*. Horsley particularly notes that the word group was associated with royalty and victories, and with the benefactions, festivals, and sacrifices offered on such occasions. In an interesting innovation, the NT writers consistently employed the neuter singular noun rather than the normal plural. Horsley concludes that:

...this specialised usage was the result of conscious choice. Yet we should not lose sight of the relatively widespread occurrence...of the neuter plural...with a specialized meaning whereby it related to news frequently connected with royalty...While the NT usage is distinctive, therefore, it cannot be divorced from the larger context of the *koine*, within which one other equally distinctive application was widespread, one which provides the stem from which the NT usage took root. Whether or not the theological basis can be traced to the OT, philologically and socially it would have been perfectly comprehensible to those living in Graeco-Roman cities in the Roman period. (Horsley, ND 3:14-15)

This marriage of OT hopes, Hellenistic word use, and imperial context suited Paul’s purposes. His gospel was the proclamation of a great occasion marking the long-awaited coming of the royal Son of David, now crowned as the Son of God at the most auspicious of moments, the very “fullness of time” (Rom 1:2-4, Gal 4:4). From this perspective we readily see the logic of the diverse hopes which Paul attached to his gospel. The promises announced to Abraham were so intrinsic to the message of Christ, that not only was the patriarch’s faith a prototype for believers in Christ, but Paul understood that the gospel had actually been preached to Abraham (Gal 3:8; cf. 3:6-4:7). The law and the prophets testified to the gospel as a new revelation of the righteousness of God (Rom 3:21-22). This gospel had brought Gentiles into the position of Abraham and David (Rom 4:1-5:5, 15:8-12). Moreover, the final event of the gospel, the return of Christ, carried the hopes of the prophets’ great day when the Lord would triumph and be crowned (Phil 1:10, 2:16, 1 Thess 1:10, 4:13-5:11, 2 Thess 1:2).

Closely related to Paul’s use of *euangelion* was his use of *mustérion*, especially in the sense of the gospel as a proclamation of what had been hidden for long ages (Rom 16:25-27; Eph 1:9-10, 3:2-13; 6:19, Col 1:23-27, 4:3). On occasion, Paul used *mustérion* as a summarising term for the kind of exposition which elsewhere he tagged with *euangelion* (1 Cor 2:1, 4:1, Eph 3:2-10). This mystery is the inclusion of the Gentiles within the people of God (Eph 3:6-9, cf. 2:11-22, Col 1:27). Yet Paul pushed its timing back beyond the patriarchal and prophetic promises, even beyond creation (1 Cor 2:7). Looking in the other direction, the work of Christ had now lifted the veil of mystery from the grave (1 Cor 15:51). It had baffled the best minds and strongest hands of human history (2:7), and could only be known as God granted the Spirit who enlightens (2:10-16). It was nothing short of
the revelation of God’s grand scheme for human history, a plan reaching back beyond creation, reconciling Jew and Gentile, and opening up the goals of creation and humanity before the startled audiences of the heavens (Eph 1:9, 33-9). Yet, once more, Paul’s heart lay not with a system—neither axiomatic nor historical—but with a person. Thus for Paul the mystery of God was “Christ (himself), in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3-4).

Like his use of euangelion, Paul’s use of mustērion seemed to span Jewish perspectives, Hellenistic vocabulary, and Graeco-Roman cultural contexts. In Dan 2:18-47, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, dreams of the events which are soon to determine the course of human history and the fortunes of the exiled people of Judea. But the dream remains a mystery to the king and to Daniel until God reveals its meaning to the seer. The connections to Paul’s use are clear. A similar use of the term emerged in the Jewish literature of the Hellenistic period and gained some currency beyond Jewish audiences (eg. 1 Enoch 163, 103:2, 104:10, 106:19). Moreover, it is now recognised that Paul’s mystery is not based on the Graeco-Roman mystery cults and that the characteristics of these cults should not be read into his use of the term (Wiens, 1980, 1261-1265). Yet Paul’s use may not have been isolated from these cults.

In a manner reminiscent of his use of euangelion, Paul almost invariably used the singular mustērion whereas the word is always plural in the Graeco-Roman cults.²¹ Whereas Bockmuehl and Caragounis²² use these statistics to distance Paul’s use from the cults, it may be that Paul was once again innovating slightly in order to plunder the word for his own use. Perhaps he sought to place the gospel of Christ alongside the cults in order to pre-empt their claims. In any case, Kearsley concludes, at least in relation to Ephesians 3, that “while the notion of μυστήριον in Ephesians generally appears to arise from the writer’s Semitic background (see Deut 2:19 [sic: read Dan 2:19]), uninfluenced by pagan religion, yet the passage in Eph 3:9 where stewardship of the mystery (hē oikonomia tou mustērion) is referred to may represent an attempt on the part of the author to draw a deliberate contrast between the ‘new mystery’ (that revealed in the NT) with the Lydian-Phrygian mysteries and to counter their influence within the Christian churches of the area” (1992c, 202; cf. Horsley, ND 2:92).²³ It thus seems reasonable to believe that Paul had

²¹ Paul’s use of the plural generally departs somewhat from the heavily historical orientation he consistently gives to the singular, though it retains the Danielic sense of divine disclosure (1 Cor 13:2, 14:2).


²³ A. E. Harvey reads the use of mustērion in Ephesians in a similar manner: “it does not follow that the writer did not intend, and the reader did not pick up, some echo of the Greek mystery-metaphor” (cited in Kearsley, 1992c, 202).
deliberately used this "pre-eminently cultic word" in a non-cultic manner (cf. Horsley, ND 4:34). If so, then Paul dared to suggest that the open proclamation of the events of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ had eclipsed the esoteric mysteries of Graeco-Roman religion.

Paul placed the identity and events of Jesus Christ at the centre point of human history, giving meaning to all that had gone before and shape to all that was to come. Time and again he nestled his more immediate concerns within a schema of human history as a whole (Rom 1:4, 9-11, Gal 3-4, Eph 1-3, cf. Rom 1:2-4, 1 Cor 15:21-28, 2 Cor 3:7-4:6, 3:21-26, Col 1:15-20, 2 Tim 1:9-10, 2:8-13, Tit 3:3-7). On its grandest scale, his vision stretched from creation to new creation, even as it narrowed to two men.

2.3.2 Adam, Christ, and the shape of human history

The prophets had looked to a decisive event which would forever turn the fortunes of their people. As they wove together themes of judgement and promise, they increasingly crystallised this two-sided picture into an expectation of a great day—the day of the Lord—when Yahweh would deliver Israel from their enemies and a new era would dawn. That expectation was hammered out in the traditions of Israel's story.

When Moses and Aaron confronted Pharaoh, their message was to become the model for every subsequent prophet: Yahweh was king over the whole earth, Israel was his special people, and the nations would be judged for oppressing his people and for their sins against him. Their celebration of victory at the sea drew on their own traditions and on wider ancient near eastern themes to create a model for salvation: Yahweh had fought for his people; he had subdued the forces of chaos; and he was leading his people towards his enthronement on the world-mountain in a new creation (Exod 15:1-18; cf. Dumbrell, 1984, 100-104). The Psalmists invoked Zion as a nexus of the themes of the exodus, holy war, and new creation: Yahweh was universal king and warrior and Zion was his throne from which he would rule over the nations on behalf of his people. In 1 Kgs 20:28, an unknown man of God prophesied against Ben-Hadad, the king of Aram. The prophet announced victory for Israel and decried the taunt of the Arameans as a denial of Yahweh's universal rule over creation. Isaiah developed this theme when he drew together the ancient holy war traditions and the theme of the nations' arrogance under the banner of the day of the Lord (Isa 13:1-13). Moreover, he extended this to cosmic

24 On heaven as an aspect of Paul's anticipation of the future and a source of the present life of believers, see Lincoln (1981).

25 This survey of the theme of the day of the Lord in part follows my brief discussion of it elsewhere (1989, 119-121).
proportions (chaps 24-27). In “that day”, Yahweh would come as the ancient warrior to destroy the earth and his enemies, and to restore his people (cf. Joel 3:9-16, Ezek 30:1-4, Zech 9:14-17). Thus the day of the Lord emerged as a symbol of the time when Yahweh would conquer all his enemies and renew the creation. It would be the end of one era and the beginning of another:

Figure 5: The prophetic expectation of a decisive turning point in history

Paul was no stranger to this expectation. His portrait of Christ’s victorious ascension in Eph 4:7-9 drew on Psalm 68, a hymn of praise to Yahweh the warrior king. Likewise, Longman (1982) notes numerous other echoes in Paul of the themes of divine coronation, holy war, and re-creation (cf. Phil 2:6-11, Col 2:15). All of this enriches what we have noted repeatedly: that Paul placed Christ’s death and resurrection at centre stage in God’s plan for history and humanity. Moreover, Christ’s return would be the day of the Lord (Phil 1:6, 10, 1 Thess 5:2; cf. Acts 2:20). In an important sense, then, the future had begun already. We are now at a place to see how Paul reworked the prophetic schema in the light of the events of Christ.26 The single decisive day of the prophets became two days, creating an overlap in the ages:

Figure 6: The gospel events reworked the prophetic anticipation of the turning point of history27

As the prophets had anticipated a day of judgement and salvation, Paul pictured the identity and events of Jesus Christ as the revelation of both the wrath and the righteousness of God (Rom 1:17-18, 3:21). In this revelation, Christ had sealed the future of the world and of his people. The gospel events assured Paul that Christ had been crucified and resurrected on his behalf and that God had now declared him justified on the basis of

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26 This reworking is not necessarily Paul’s own innovation, given that the model fits the ‘now-not yet’ schema which shapes Jesus’ preaching of the kingdom in the Synoptic Gospels. The question of dependence between Paul and the Gospel traditions has long exercised NT scholars.

27 This diagram is adapted from Vos (1930, 38). For an elaboration of this model in relation to the possible worldviews of the Ephesian converts, see Arnold (1989, 145-158), which includes a variant diagram (154).
this event (5:9-11). The resurrection of Christ guaranteed that Paul would likewise be raised from the dead (6:5, cf. 1 Cor 15:20-23). Moreover, the future had begun because Christ had entered into the experience of the new creation in his own resurrection—he is the new man (1 Cor 15:45). This brings us to the heart of Paul’s innovation in his understanding of the two eras.

I have already noted his propensity to encapsulate history within a single figure. In his reworking of the place of Jerusalem, the law, and the distinction of Jew and Gentile, it is the ‘one seed’ of Abraham, namely Christ, who draws believers of all sexual, social, and cultural distinctions into the one new identity (Gal 3:16, 28). Christ stands at the centre of God’s designs for history and humanity as ‘the one new man’ in whom Jew and Gentile find a new common identity (Eph 2:15). Likewise, Christ in his willing obedience and humiliation, Christ had reversed the hubris of the first man, received the glory and honour due to the image of God, and become the focus of imitation for those who would live as the Creator intended (Phil 2:5-11; cf. Hooker, 1990, 88-100).28 Paul developed a similar encapsulation of history and humanity in his letter to the Romans.

In anticipation of the social tensions likely to exist or develop in and around the believers in Rome,29 Paul immediately moved from his summary of Christ’s fulfilment of Israel’s history (Rom 1:2-4) to locate Christ as the new and entirely sufficient revelation of the divine arrangement (1:16-17). What follows is a lengthy clarification of the respective and common lots of Jew and Gentile (1:18-5:11; cf. 3:19-31). This clarification begins and ends with Adam (1:21-23, 5:12-21; cf. Hooker, 1990, 73-87). Given his agenda to pre-empt the priority of Jerusalem and of social ranking, and to show their irrelevance and redundancy in his gospel, Paul began his exposition of the revelation of Christ with the common accountability of all people before God. Moreover, his portrait of the pitiful state of mankind succeeded both in representing the known social realities and in portraying these as analogous to the original fall of Adam. At the other end, Paul discerned a divinely ruled history moving towards a telos of unparalleled relationship, the final revelation of “the grace in which we (now) stand...the hope of the glory of God” (5:1-11). This future was now guaranteed by the work of the second man just as surely as the first man plunged humanity into its present state (5:12-21).

Regarding Adam as the prototype of Christ, Paul thus characterised the two periods of history by the two men who stood at the head of each: Adam and Christ (Rom 5:12-21;

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28 Paul is also likely to have had other antecedents in mind as he wrote or incorporated the hymn, particularly the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, perhaps even the tradition of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet (John 13).
29 See my earlier comments on the occasion of the letter.
cf. 1 Cor 15:20-58). The actions of the two men had established the identity and experience of those whom they represented: either disobedience, sin, condemnation and death; or obedience, righteousness, justification, and life. Thus the two men characterise not only two eras of history, but two corresponding mindsets and patterns of human experience, those which Paul dubbed ‘the flesh’ and ‘the spirit’ (Rom 6:1-8:17). Accordingly, those who are in Christ are led by the Spirit to see themselves and their world from the vantage point of their new identity and the place Christ holds in the purposes of creation. Sharing in Christ’s status they now wait for the final revelation of the new creation (8:18-39). In this new creation believers regain (surpass?) the original honours of Adam: they now await “the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:21, my trans). This same schema had provided the outline for Paul’s portrait of the future of humanity in 1 Cor 15:12-57.

Jesus was “raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:20). Paul drew the metaphor of firstfruits from Israel’s ancient tradition of presenting the first portions before Yahweh as a representative portion of the harvest. The imagery suggested that the first portion was offered in guarantee of the whole (Lev 23:9-14). The harvest which Paul envisaged was the resurrection of all the people of God at the great day of Christ (1 Cor 15:23-28). Christ himself had been raised as the firstfruits—the guarantee—of all those who would rise from the dead because of him (15:20-23). He had become not only the pattern of their resurrection, but the guarantee.

Once again Paul moved to locate humanity and history within a single representative: “For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (15:21-22). As the Christ, Jesus represented his people. But the parallelism to Adam suggested more than this. Jesus was now the second man, the new image of God, characterised by heaven and the Spirit (1 Cor 15:45-49). The new identity of Christ locates believers within

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30 Several scholars have suggested that Paul’s treatment of Adam and Christ especially in 1 Cor 15 owes much to Philo’s understanding of two Adams in Gen 1:26-28 and 2:7, though few would argue for any literary dependence. While there are lexical parallels, and it may well be that Paul knew of this tradition (whether from Philo or another source), Paul’s own model differs considerably in places. Horsley (1978a, 216-229) discusses Philo’s two Adams pattern and notes its heavily metaphysical orientation over against Paul’s historical perspective. His identification of Philo’s pattern, or one like it, as a likely prop to the spiritual elitism of the strong at Corinth resonates with my own comments in this chapter and the next on elitism at Corinth. In terms of Paul’s use of the Adam-Christ pattern, in both Rom 5 and 1 Cor 15, I am more persuaded by the view that Paul has reconstructed the OT expectations of a decisive historical turning point. See Evans (1992, 84-86) for a survey of the issues and bibliography. At the same time, Adam was a favourite subject for Jewish commentators. Paul may reflect this heritage quite independently of Philo. Indeed, there is evidence within the OT itself of an interest in Adam as a symbol of a primal fall and as ‘the eschatological man’ (eg. Ezek 28:11-19; cf. Strom, 1983). As a further example of the use of this motif, see my study (1985) of the influence of Ezek 28 on Luke’s portrait of the death of Herod (Acts 12:20-24).
a new era of human history and a new creation. They are, in effect, a new humanity patterned after the order of the new man: “And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven” (15:49). The model proved to be as provocative as it was reassuring.

The social impact of Paul’s model was to undercut traditional expectations and conventions. It undermined the logic of the discrimination, comparison, pride, and self-sufficiency so critical to the social pyramid. This is clear in the objections which Paul had encountered elsewhere and which he anticipated at Rome: “So, shall we go on sinning that grace may increase?...Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?...Is the law itself sin?...Or perhaps that which is good became death for me?” (Rom 6:1, 15, 7:7, 13). The progression of the challenges indicates Paul’s move at every turn to cut off the escape route from his gospel to the law. Locating the standing of believers in Christ as their representative had put Paul out on a limb, away from the security of the conventional canons of morality and piety. If the rank of a believer was tied to the identity and history of Christ, then what was to hold the believer’s behaviour within the confines of acceptable conventions? The traditional answers turned around law and reason, piety and self-control. Paul’s didn’t. Instead, he turned his slanderers back to the person of Christ. The only strategy congruent with the new relationship was a grateful reaffirmation of one’s new identity, destiny, and master (6:2-14). In Paul’s terms, believers must continually “reckon” (logizomai) themselves as in Christ (6:11), and live by the promises of God alone (4:3-6, 8-11, 22-24). If, Paul maintained, a profound regard for Christ’s mercies did not bring transformation (12:1-2), neither would anything else. The believer’s identity and history thus resides in Christ, and the old maxim is radically reworked: I know myself in the merits of someone else.

2.3.3 “In Christ”

The old era will remain until the triumphant return of the heavenly man and the ensuing judgement: the new era will then begin (1 Cor 15:24-28, 2 Thess 2:1-8). Yet Christ has already inaugurated the new order of creation by his resurrection (1 Cor 15:23). Thus Paul argued for a radical new perspective:

“So then we no longer think according to the flesh. Certainly we had regarded Christ according to the flesh, but we no longer know him this way. So then, anyone in Christ is a new creation. The old has gone—the new has come!” (2 Cor 5:16-17, my trans).

Central to this affirmation is the significance of that tiny phrase, “in Christ” (or “with Christ”). The phrase functioned for Paul somewhat like ‘gospel’ and ‘mystery’. It
was, in other words, a shorthand term which could carry one or more of the patterns of Paul's thought on the implications of the identity and events of Christ for history, for believers, and for Paul himself. It enabled him to draw into one place Christ's representative role and the juxtaposition of the two ages. Moreover, it gave a deeply personal orientation to these essentially historical perspectives. As their representative, Christ had guaranteed the blessings of the new creation for his people even as they lived in a world enslaved to the old order (Rom 8:17-21). Paul experienced his new identity within the tensions of these two ages, so that every accomplishment of Christ on Paul's behalf was both 'now' and 'not-yet' for him (cf. eg. Eph 1:7, 14). Thus the resolution of this tension lay in Christ's own experience. In other words, what was not yet for Paul, was already now for Christ.

As the new man, the heavenly man, the man in full possession of the Spirit, Christ fully experiences the arrangements of the new creation even as he represents Paul and his associates. Thus Paul had received all of Christ's accomplishments on his behalf "in Christ" (Eph 1:3). All of the benefits of the new order are located with Christ, and he holds them for Paul. The phrase, then, neither spoke of a mystical union, nor of an ideal for piety or morality. At the same time, the intent was neither simply forensic, nor intellectual, but profoundly personal. As the Psalmist saw himself sheltered from the ravages of life by the near and tender companionship of Yahweh, Paul exulted in Christ as the one who would hold him secure until the final day (Col 3:1-4; cf. eg. Ps 16:1). This was not an intellectual sleight-of-hand, as though Paul were saying "I'll act as though you are with me even though I know you are not". Rather, Paul understood that the Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, made Paul's union with Christ as existential as it was legal and propositional. The Spirit communes with Paul's spirit to keep his heart and mind in Christ—in the identity, fellowship, and blessings of the new order—even while he lives within a world which will pass away (Rom 8:14-17, 22-27, Gal 4:6, 5:5, 2 Cor 1:22, 3:17-18, 5:1-5, Eph 1:13-14).

Once again, we note how Paul's perspectives meshed together: the historical spilling over into the social and the personal. The reshaping of history and humanity in Christ brought a new orientation to Paul's life and thought. His experience was now characterised by faith and hope—the constant personal transformation and reorientation as the future became present in his anticipation of the full experience of his inheritance as a child of God.

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31 Note for example the wide range of benefits associated with the phrase in Eph 1:4-13, 2:4-7, Col 2:9-15.
2.4 PIVOTAL PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES IN PAUL'S THOUGHT

2.4.1 The antithesis of flesh and Spirit

Adam and Christ established the identity and experience of those whom they represented (Rom 5:12-21). They therefore characterised not only two eras, but two corresponding mindsets and patterns of human experience. It is these which Paul dubbed the flesh and the spirit (6:1-8:17).\(^{32}\) Despite the dualistic sounding language, these are not metaphysical categories in Paul. They do not denote matter versus spirit, or the sensual over against the intellectual (Dihle, 1982, 84-89). Rather, flesh and spirit are metaphors for two epochs and their opposing ways of living: sin or righteousness; slavery or freedom; foolishness or wisdom; futility or hope; justification or condemnation; death or life. The language of Platonic or Philonic dualism may have come across to Paul, but the system did not (Judge, 1975, 194).\(^{33}\)

I noted earlier how Paul developed his understanding of the two ages from his awareness of the hopes of Israel’s prophets. Similarly, Paul’s characterisation of the ages as flesh and spirit may also derive from the prophets. Quite possibly, Paul had reasoned backwards from what was for him the only adequate description for the new era headed by the second Adam: to live in “the fullness of time” could only be to live in the age when Yahweh had poured out his Spirit upon his people (Joel 2:28-32; cf. Acts 2:16-21). Paul probably saw his own antithesis in the prophets’ ministries. As men and women of the Spirit thrown into conflict with their hard-hearted contemporaries, the prophets had longed for a day when Yahweh would grant his Spirit to all (Num 11:26-29, Ezek 36:24-27, 37:13-14; Isa 44:3, 59:21; cf. Isa 11:1-3, 42:1). Moreover, the Spirit was an integral part of their wider hopes (Joel 2:28-32, Isa 34:16, Ezek 39:29). Thus for Paul pneuma was a natural choice to characterise the people of the new era and, perhaps in keeping with

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\(^{32}\) It is difficult if not impossible to achieve consistency in the choice of ‘spirit’ or ‘Spirit’ for Paul’s use of pneuma since the one slides easily into the other.

\(^{33}\) Throughout this discussion of flesh and spirit, I do not mean to imply that Paul had a developed metaphor in mind whenever he used sarx or pneuma, such that the terms meant the significance of the metaphor. There were numerous occasions when he used both in their everyday senses (eg. Gal 4:13, 2 Cor 12:7, Col 2:1, 1 Thess 5:23). Moreover, Paul often conveyed one side or other of the tension without using either of the two terms. Neither is there any need to press Paul’s terms into any precise anthropological system such as positing sharp differences between sarx and soma. See Silva (1983, 18, 172, and passim) for a critique of these linguistic fallacies. I am focused on the pattern of Paul’s thought which he just so happened to articulate in several contexts through the language of sarx and pneuma: I am nowhere suggesting that the terms equal the metaphor.
contemporary usage, sarx served equally well to capture the life of the old. A further feature of Paul’s use makes this background more likely, and moves us to a clearer understanding of what he intended by the antithesis.

On several occasions, Paul used the contrasting pair to highlight the absurdity of pursuing Jerusalem and the law now that the Spirit had come: “Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by the flesh” (Gal 3:4, my trans; cf. 3:1-4:7 and the proximity of the law to his further remarks in 5:1-12, 24-26, 6:8). Moreover, he explicitly contrasted the old way of the law to the new experience of the Spirit (2 Cor 3:4-18), and credited the Spirit with creating the one new man of those who were previously separated by the law (Eph 2:18, 22). I have already noted that Paul saw Jerusalem and the law as made redundant by the gospel, and that he regarded any ongoing attachment to them as constituting ‘works’, the very antithesis of faith in Christ. Moreover, such an attachment indicated one who still grasped at self-justification. Given his choice of Adam as the representative head of the old era, it was thus a short step for Paul to combine Jew and Gentile under the common verdict of self-righteousness:

Sarx (flesh), as opposed to pneuma (spirit), denotes rather the empirical condition of man, in which all his activity, including his religious, intellectual, and moral endeavour, finds its ultimate goal in himself. Pride and self-assuredness, for instance, characterise the fleshly existence. The proud man has forgotten that he is a creature of God whose life and salvation depend entirely on the grace of the Creator...The main factor of the life kata sarka can be seen in man’s strong feeling of independence by which he separates himself from his Creator. The most notable result of that separation comes in man’s striving for ‘his own righteousness’ or justification. (Dihle, 1982, 84, my transliteration)

All sin, therefore, whether of the Jew or the Gentile, is an individual’s choice to break faith with God by inverting the Creator-creature relationship (Rom 1:18-32). Unlike Plato, for whom sin was metaphysical, Paul uniquely located the problem within the individual’s pretension to autonomy and the subsequent rupture in relationship. This same autonomy was at work in the Jew and the Gentile (2:1-3:20). Justification before God, however, stood on the sheer mercy of God in the death and resurrection of Christ (3:21-4:25). God justifies the sinner and cancels his identity in Adam for a new identity in Christ.

34 Paul’s choice of sarx to complete the pair was a little ironic given LXX Ezek 36:26: “I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit (pneuma) I will give you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh (sarkes) and I will give you a heart of flesh (sarkind) (my trans.).” This is why I referred to Paul working backwards from the appropriateness of pneuma to characterise the new era. Given the use of sarx in LXX Ezek 36:26, Paul might have chosen another term to accompany pneuma. Most likely his choice of sarx simply reflected a common pairing of the terms in his own day.
(5:1-21). Flesh-spirit were thus not metaphysical or moral categories, but alternate identities in relationship. According to Paul, then, one who is in Christ is correspondingly in the Spirit, and a slave of righteousness. This is a given. He or she is not in the flesh (Rom 8:9). The reverse holds for someone who is in Adam, and who is therefore in the flesh and a slave to sin and death.

Those who are in Christ, however, may foolishly choose to characterise themselves and to live as if they were in Adam. As I noted earlier, Paul’s comeback for them was to reaffirm the character of the relationship (Rom 6:2-10). The law could not effect transformation, only the Spirit (7:4-6; 8:10-17). Thus Paul placed an on-going choice before his converts: to believe the truth about their new identity, or to believe the lie of their old identity (6:11-14). If they believed the truth, they would know life and freedom; if the lie, then death and slavery. Or, more correctly, either slavery to Christ which is freedom, or to sin and death which is bondage (6:15-18). Paul had moved to a decisive turn in the argument.

Believers were previously “free from righteousness”; that is, they had no share in the righteousness of God revealed in Christ (Rom 6:20). But now they are “slaves of righteousness”; that is, bound in relationship to Christ (6:18). They are not under law and therefore sin will not be their master; that is, their identity will remain in Christ (6:14; 7:1-6). Thus the law was never the problem. Rather, it fuelled an individual’s own inclination to rebellion (7:7-13). Paul believed this was still a real possibility. ‘Whenever I focus on the law’, Paul says, ‘I experience again the curse of self-justification’. This is the bitter irony of the law: open rebellion and exacting obedience both lead to an imprisoned and tormented conscience (7:14-25). Paul did not say this from the safety of theory. This had been, and likely at times still was, his own experience. As Judge notes: “There is in my

35 Throughout Rom 6-8, the NIV persistently renders ἁμαρτία as “sinful nature” and frequently supplies the phrase “controlled by” for ἐν and κατά. It thus gives the impression of Paul saying that believers have two natures: a fleshly nature and a spiritual nature. This is particularly irritating and misleading in 8:9 where Paul simply says “However, you are not in the flesh but in the spirit, if the Spirit of God lives with you” (my trans.), while the NIV has “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you”.

36 Once again, in Rom 6:20, the NIV gratuitously supplies “the control of”, tilting the meaning towards moral categories and away from the antithetical contrasts Paul is making between identities based on Adam or Christ.

37 I take Rom 7:25a (“Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord”) to be parenthetical. Thus the parallelism of v25b is roughly synonymous (“in my mind a slave to God’s law... in my flesh a slave to sin and death”) and continues the line of v24a (“What a wretched man am I!”). Verse 24b (“Who will rescue me from this body of death?”) is then a cry of despair, not a glimmer of hope. In other words, Paul maintains his tormented portrait until the very end of v25. The real change of tone occurs in 8:1. This reading of the text removes any need to determine the precise identity of the ‘I’ in 7:14-25. It is the tormented experience of anyone who seeks to live by the law or any moral code. On the broader questions of will and conscience in Paul and Graeco-Roman thought, see Dihle (1982, 84-89).
view no writer of antiquity who exposes himself so ruthlessly to direct human contact and reveals himself to others with such candour and directness as does St. Paul” (1975, 193).

Paul’s clarity about the dynamic of law and conscience tightened his insistence on the end of the law in Christ. Again without impugning the law, Paul simply stated his case for the futility of pursuing it. The flesh overpowers the law and negates its good intention (Rom 8:3a). God, however, worked in Christ’s self-sacrifice to achieve what could not be done through the law (8:3b). This sacrifice once-and-for-all condemned all attempts at self-rescue (8:3c). Ironically, Christ’s sacrifice gave believers the very status—that of law-keepers—which they could never attain through the law (8:4a). The law could not create purity of walk and conscience, but the Spirit does (8:4b-5). Thus all attempts to please God through a mind fixed on his law were now doomed (8:6-8). It is the Spirit, then, who brings the power of the sacrifice of Christ to life in the believer’s experience. Where the law could only reinforce the flesh’s futile cycle of self-justification-cum-condemnation, the Spirit brings his witness of legitimacy, reassurance of inheritance, personal intimacy with the Father, hope in suffering, and meaning and strength in weakness (8:9-27).

The Spirit, then, enables believers to reckon themselves as in Christ. He works to embed the understanding and experience of their changed identity in relationship. Personal transformation, then, is the reorientation of life and thought from the flesh to the Spirit; it always works from “the mercies of God” (Rom 12:1). This exposure of the vestiges of the old mindset not only brings immorality to light, but roots out the futility of those religious and morastolic patterns by which one maintains one’s status in the eyes of the world (12:2). Nothing provoked Paul at this point like the image of the dying and rising Christ.

2.4.2 Dying and rising with Christ

The dying and rising of Christ was nothing less to Paul than the decisive turning point of human history, and was thus foundational to his life and thought. Indeed, the event became for Paul a critical paradigm for understanding human experience. His grasp of the significance of the event developed in several directions.\(^{38}\) It was: (1) the most critical moment in human history; (2) the moment of Paul’s union with Christ; (3) the explanation of his life since his encounter with Christ on the Damascus road; (4) the pre-eminent

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\(^{38}\) For an extensive discussion of the texts associated with this theme see the seminal work of Tannehill (1967). See also Marshall (1993).
pattern and motivation for his on-going life; and (5) the guarantee of his own future bodily resurrection. Each of these points warrants some clarification.

First, Paul was convinced that the event had occurred in recent history (1 Cor 15:1-8). Indeed, faith is a sham without the resurrection (15:12-20). Paul consistently anchored his proclamation of Christ on this event even in the face of disbelief and ridicule (Acts 13:30-37, 17:3, 31, 22:6-8, 23:6, 26:12-15, 23, Rom 1:4; cf. Acts 24:21, 26:8).

Second, when Christ died, rose from the dead, and ascended to the Father, so had Paul. That is, Paul was crucified, raised, and ascended with Christ (Rom 6:4-11, Gal 2:19-20, Eph 2:5-6, Col 2:12-13, 3:1). This is the crux to much of Paul’s subsequent thought about the dying and rising of Christ. The death and resurrection of Christ had transferred Paul from one order of existence to another (Rom 6:3-5). Paul located his personal death and resurrection with Christ not simply at the moment of his own dramatic conversion, but at the historical moment of Christ’s experience. This is critical to Paul’s understanding of the security of his relationship with God in Christ (8:28-39).

Third, Paul subsequently saw the dying and rising of Christ as a pattern evident in the suffering and joy which had shaped his life since the encounter on the way to Damascus. Paul’s ministry had been a public spectacle of one being led to death in the arena by Christ in his triumph (1 Cor 4:9, 2 Cor 2:14, cf. Col 2:15; Hafemann, 1990, 12-34). The dying and rising of Christ was an ever present reality giving shape to Paul’s experience: “we always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body” (2 Cor 4:10). His sufferings, persecutions and hardships were a constant dying (2 Cor 11:23-33). The pattern of the dying and rising of Christ worked itself out in Paul’s weakness and strength, suffering and joy (2 Cor 12:9-10).

Fourth, the dying and rising of Christ had become the paradigm and the motivation for Paul’s continuing life. For Paul, to imitate Christ (1 Cor 11:1) could mean nothing less than the self-conscious choice to conform to his humiliation and exaltation: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection of the dead” (Phil 3:10-11; cf. 2:1-11, Eph 5:1). Moreover, Paul extended the theme beyond himself to give shape to a new experience of community shaped around a mutual sharing in the sufferings and comfort of Christ (Gal 6:1-5, Eph 4:20-5:21, Phil 1:3-2:18, Col 3:12-17).

Finally, Paul expected in time to rise from his own death because Christ had gone before him to secure his resurrection (1 Cor 15:20-23, 51-54, Phil 1:21-23).
The Social, the Historical, and the Personal in Paul's Thought

The dying and rising of Christ exerted a profound influence over Paul's inner life, and over his experience of social conventions and commitments in relationships. Innovative and often startling juxtapositions and reformulations appear in his ideas: the future has broken into the past; life is a constant dying; dying brings a previously inaccessible life; weakness is the vehicle of strength; and joy expresses meaning in suffering. Marshall captures the spirit of this inversion of traditional expectations:

Death has a positive power. God uses death for good, i.e., uses it transformatively. God has commandeered the power of the old age for his own use and death acts upon the apostle with the contradictory effect of giving and promoting life. Dying as suffering is purposefully related to participation in life for oneself and for life in others. It retains this positive sense through the apostle's continuous participation in dying and rising with Christ as suffering as a power which keeps him from returning to his former trust in himself. Weakness as dying with Christ is the necessary means by which power is brought to perfection. Power and weakness or suffering are no longer polar antitheses but are now brought together in a new relationship as a means by which Paul understands the experiences in his own life and his relationship with others and his world. (1993, 22-23)

The dying and rising of Christ led Paul to step down in the world in terms of personal and social prestige (cf. Phil 3:1-11). It led him to be ridiculed, opposed, and rejected. Some of his own converts were embarrassed and scandalised by his self-conscious repudiation of the very indicators of his status and prominence—such as rhetorical flair and impressive leadership—which they had wanted to laud in order to bolster their own prestige through him (1 Cor 2:1-5, 2 Cor 10:1, 10). The gospel had led Paul to adapt himself in each new context (1 Cor 9:19-23), including the judicious withholding of his personal rights as an apostle (9:1-18; cf. 2 Cor 11:7-12). But these actions only elicited an accusation of inconstancy and fickleness from certain powerful men at Corinth who now brought to bear the conventions of enmity against him (2 Cor 1:12-22, 10:1, 10, 11:7-12, 12:13-18; cf. Marshall, 1987, 281-339). His letters show that this social demise stung him and that he was not accustomed to such mistreatment (2 Cor 6:4-12; 11:1-33). Yet he refused to meet their expectations, for that would be to boast—the quintessential symbol of the life from which Christ had rescued him (Rom 3:27, 1 Cor 1:29-31, cf. 2 Cor 10-12; Forbes, 1986, 22; Judge, 1968, passim).

39 This theme forms a large part of my argument in chapters three to five.
Even the enmity of some at Corinth provided Paul with new means of modelling and urging conformity to the dying and rising of Christ (1 Cor 4:18-21, 10:1-11:15, 12:11-18). By the time Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, this enmity had grown to include a group of pseudo-apostles who happily flaunted the status-indicators of the prestigious. But Paul had an utterly different set of criteria. It was his weakness and suffering that proved his possession of the Spirit and his legitimacy as an apostle (2 Cor 2:14-3:6, 4:7-12, 16-18, 6:3-10, 7:5, 11:1-12:10; cf. Hafemann, 1990, 226-233). He had suffered numerous brutalities. His close associates had deserted him. He had forsaken his apostolic rights to ply his trade in the sweatshop in order to offer the gospel free of charge (cf. Hock, 1980; Forbes, 1986, 24). The Judaisers pursued him. He had been plagued by a “thorn” (12:7). Through it all, he knew the grace which transforms: “That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (12:10). This was Paul’s experience of the dying and rising of Christ.

2.5 CONCLUSION

We have continually encountered Paul’s thought structures as embedded within his own personal experiences. Yet he never marginalised his message by introspection or individualism. Historical and social perspectives were always at hand. Adam and Christ headed up two orders of humanity. Christ fulfilled the prophets by taking into himself the ancient Jewish hopes of a renewed people of God in intimate relationship with God and with each other. The mindsets of the two ages, the flesh and the Spirit, manifested themselves respectively in the perversion and renewal of relationships. The dying and rising of Christ was a hollow ideal unless it meant the inversion of social conventions and the concomitant personal experience of strength in weakness. Paul’s life and thought constantly oscillated between a profound grasp of the historical significance of the dying and rising of Christ, and those personal and social experiences of humiliation which brought new meaning to the gospel.

Like Polybius and other ancient writers (Trompf, 1979), Paul offered a schema for human history. But Paul was not interested in history as such. He was absorbed with a person and with the implications of the identity and events of this person for the present and the future of Christ’s people. Yet even where Paul generalised about humanity as a whole, he did so for the sake of illuminating the meaning of the present circumstances of particular people. It is our perspectives which make Paul an historiographer or apocalyptic seer. The idea of history may serve us well enough as a heuristic for peering into Paul’s genius, but it remains our perspective, not his. Thus I must at this point keep my distance from, even as I express appreciation for, those who speak in terms of Paul’s
eschatological or apocalyptic orientation (eg. Vos, 1930; Ridderbos, 1975; Gaffin, 1978b, 1980; and Beker, 1980). The effect of this approach, I believe, has all too often been to lift Paul out of his social orientation in the Graeco-Roman world. This happens principally in two ways. First, Paul’s terms of reference are located almost exclusively within Jewish prophetic and visionary writings. Second, these heuristics—eschatology and apocalyptic—are virtually reified as another order of history lifted above the mundane and social. The effect of this is to create a polarisation between so-called social history and redemptive history.40

Such subtleties are lost on Paul. He was a Jew schooled in the scriptures and outlook of his forbears. Thus he worked out his understanding of Christ within Jewish patterns of thought. He was also an educated urban dweller of the great cities of Asia Minor and quite conversant with the popular intellectualism of the day. Moreover, like any diaspora (or Palestinian) Jew, he had little difficulty synthesising his Hellenism and Judaism. What we find in Paul then is a masterful adaptation of a history and culture which was at times obscure to Graeco-Roman audiences, so as to present Christ in thought structures and vocabulary (mostly) easily accessible to these same audiences.

The interdependence of these perspectives centred in Paul’s preoccupation with another person, Jesus Christ, whom he encountered on the Damascus road and in subsequent revelations. He claimed to know Christ, not simply to know about him. He claimed a new identity for himself on the grounds of Christ’s personal representation of him. He staked his present and future experience on Christ’s historical fulfilment of the hopes of Israel. Christ, for Paul, was neither an ideal, nor the highest principle of an axiomatic system. Rather, Paul’s experience of Christ in relationship worked around him knowing Christ in the narrative of his life and through the gift of his Spirit.

Thus the patterns of Paul’s thought which I have surveyed—‘Jew-Gentile’, ‘Adam-Christ’, ‘in Christ’, ‘flesh-and-spirit’, ‘dying-and-rising’—did not function as hierarchies of concepts within an axiomatic theological system. Paul was not so artificial. Each was a perspective, a heuristic, a means of centering his particular concern and context around the person of Christ. The perspectives were largely interchangeable. Each could be reworked into the others. Paul did not employ them according to a preset formula, nor as

40 Among evangelicals this can become another version of the tension between everyday reality and primary reality which I discussed in chapter one. In other words, the categories of ‘redemptive history’ are allowed to swallow up the details of ‘social reality’. A case in point is the evident reticence of some evangelical scholars to allow that Paul’s use of vocabulary such as euangelion and misterion may have connected with Graeco-Roman realities as much or more than the OT. At another extreme, evangelicals have attached ideological significance to the language of the NT as a special case (see the refutations of this in Horsley, ND 5:3-48, 67-83, and Silva, 1985 and 1990).
components of a system of theology. He used them to provoke a knowledge of and response to Christ which was at one and the same time unremarkable and yet a surprising inversion of traditional expectations and ideals.
A Meeting of World Views: 
Paul and Four Graeco-Roman Paradigms

3.1 A MODEL OF PAUL IN THE GRAECO-ROMAN WORLD

Our surveys of Graeco-Roman popular intellectualism and of Paul already suggest that the apostle’s thought was quite distinctive. This is not to say that he lived and thought in a vacuum. On the contrary, both Acts and the letters portray him as understanding and interacting with the ideas and conventions of the cities and their inhabitants, among both the educated and the less so. A few episodes from Paul’s travels, and features of his letters, will establish the point.¹

Luke reports that when Paul and Barnabas encountered the rustic Lycaonians they mistook the apostles for Hermes and Zeus (Acts 14:8-18). A little later, in the Roman colony of Philippi, Paul, Silas, and Luke were confronted by local superstition through a fortune-telling slave-girl, and subsequently earned the displeasure of those who profited from her (16:19). Her owners convinced the authorities that Paul and Silas were creating strife in the city and advocating customs unlawful for Romans (16:20-21). Beaten and imprisoned, the illegality of their treatment was not lost on Paul—not on his captors (16:37-39). Travelling on to Athens, Paul’s ‘babbling’ attracted enough interest from certain Stoics and Epicureans for him to be invited to address the Areopagus, where he quoted sources familiar to them as he moved from a point akin to their own natural theology to his proclamation of the risen Christ (17:18-32). No doubt those few philosophers converted on this occasion would have brought new intellectual dimensions into the fledgling ekklesia (17:33-34). Much later, at Ephesus, Paul came into contact with magic, sorcery, a trade association, the cult of Artemis, civic pride and piety, the imperial

¹ The following two paragraphs are only intended to create an impression. I am well aware that not all scholars agree on the character of various social and intellectual conventions of the first century, nor on the proximity of Paul and his associates to these customs and their respective social status. My own conclusions depend in part on the work of the ‘Macquarie school’ (Judge, Harris, Banks, Marshall, Forbes, Horsley, Kearsley, and Winter), the articles by D.W.J. Gill and A.D. Clarke, and to a lesser extent on the ‘Yale school’ of Malherbe, Meeks, Fitzgerald, Hock, and Sampley.
cult, and Roman social policy (19:13-41). The impression grows through each encounter of Paul's familiarity with Graeco-Roman thought, law, social policy, and homespun lore.

Paul's own letters strengthen this impression. His arguments presumed that his audiences were familiar with customary religious piety, moral precept, rhetorical display, and the manner of the sophists. They had access to education, temples, courts, and cults. Furthermore, his associates included not a few prominent men and women, some of whom were members of the local elites and civic leadership. As such they would have made benefactions and received the due honours. Others were accustomed to receiving the dole and to engaging in political intrigues on behalf of their patrons. Paul knew the conventions of patronage and friendship only too well: his self-humiliation had elicited embarrassment, contempt, and enmity from those who took offence at his employment, his refusal of patronage, his disavowal of eloquence, and his unseemly changeableness. He showed a good grasp of the legal and social requirements for widows, marriage, divorce, litigation, slavery and manumission, as well as the privileges and obligations of citizenship. Paul was a man of his times, fully conversant with the social milieu. He was also in touch with the popular intellectual climate. He experienced the common presumptions of the primacy of reason and nature, the abstractions about the gods, the expectations and claims for religious ritual and experience, and the idealism of moral preachers. In other words, he lived in close proximity to conventional social practices, and to the contemporary paradigms of philosophy, theology, religion, and morality.

Paul had formed his own opinions of both the social and intellectual patterns of his day. At times his perspectives reveal his own absorption of Graeco-Roman culture. On occasions, he conformed to these mores. At other times, his perspectives were provocative and critical. On yet further occasions he seems to have charted his own direction:

![Diagram](Figure 7: The dynamics of Paul's thought in relation to Graeco-Roman popular intellectualism)
The diversity of Paul's interactions with Graeco-Roman society and intellectualism argues against any simplistic articulation of his distinctiveness. He was neither wholly absorbed, nor thoroughly original. Nevertheless, he believed he was distinctive in certain respects. This is clear enough in his characterisations of philosophy as foolish and futile (1 Cor 1:18-20, Eph 4:17-19), of theology as ignorance (Acts 17:30), of religion as illusion and slavery (Col 2:16-23, Gal 3:8-10), and of morality as the pattern of a vain elitism (Rom 12:1-4). Many scholarly studies, however, keep Paul tied to the very paradigms which he professed to repudiate. Thus while he may have been an innovator in theology, philosophy, religion, or morality, nevertheless for these scholars Paul remains a philosopher, theologian, pietist, or moralist. This opinion may be warranted where it can be shown that Paul is far less innovative than he may indicate. But it is unwarranted to set Paul's stated aims and practices to one side where they suggest him as an independent thinker daring to break convention. It is especially unhelpful to do so if Paul's own approach may suggest that he had broken with the spirit of these paradigms even where he notionally conformed to them.

It is equally unwarranted to read Paul in the light of the reworking of each paradigm as the two world views converged over the following centuries. Instead, we must allow the hallmarks of his contemporaries to delineate Paul's conformity or non-conformity. Once again, then, we return to Judge's insight that Paul may be best understood as an independent thinker yet located in his surrounding world (1973b, 110). It is from this perspective that I survey Paul's interactions with Graeco-Roman philosophy, theology, religion, and morality.2

3.2 PAUL AND PHILOSOPHY

3.2.1 The rationalist-irrationalist tension of Greek philosophy

The earlier survey of Graeco-Roman popular intellectualism (chapter one) was far from complete in its coverage of classical, Hellenistic, and Graeco-Roman philosophy.

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2 There is also a more modern reason for me to consider these four paradigms. In the final chapters, I will suggest that evangelical theology and social convention shows an at times uncanny resemblance to the Graeco-Roman patterns for each, and that these evangelical patterns frequently fail to reflect the critiques implicit and explicit in Paul's life and thought. I should also make clear that while these four topics would have been intelligible to Paul and his contemporaries, the boundaries which I must inevitably impose on them in a conversation like this are, of course, artificial. Eventually one has to come down somewhere on whether, for example, to treat reason under philosophy or morality, or to deal with theology as a separate topic or as a sub-section of religion or philosophy. I do not pretend objectivity or precision in my choices. What matters in the end of the day is whether I enable the reader to join the conversation, and whether I stay true to the intent of the primary sources.
Nevertheless, it covered many of the features salient to our discussion here: the location of reason in the soul; the role of reason in comprehending nature and the higher orders of reality; and the corresponding predilection for abstraction. I have argued that the Graeco-Roman intellectual experience was to some extent polarised around the constructs of what I called primary reality and everyday reality. In other words, the social experience of the ancient world always threatened to undermine the veracity of abstract delineations of reality, even as those same abstractions could rationalise the experience away as mere illusion. I went on to note the inability of reason 'pure and simple' to deal with the vicissitudes of life, especially in the face of moral failure and personal insecurity. This everyday awareness of the limits of reason and rationality had its sophisticated counterpart in the inherent tension within Greek philosophy of what we may loosely call rationalism and irrationalism.\(^3\) It is to this tension that I turn here.

Confidence in reason was both the genius and the Achilles heel of Greek philosophy. The same preoccupation with exhaustive classification and objectivism gave the world both the beauty and precision of Greek geometry, and the misguided physiology of Greek medicine. In the latter case, the axiomatic system of the four humours of the body required no autopsy for verification. Since reason alone rendered nature transparent, medicine already knew in advance what must be true of the body. To be fair, ancient medicine, and science generally, often lacked the apparatus to test hypotheses by experiment. Nevertheless, the propensity of philosophy and science to become detached from people, “often locked (them) into an abstract cycle of debate in general terms, driven more by the sheer rationality of the tradition than by reference to any actual social situation” (Judge, 1975, 191). Ancient near eastern cultures, on the other hand, located their cosmologies in narratives within ‘historical’ and social contexts, not in abstract systems. These explanations worked from the reality of particulars, not of abstract universals. The sophistication of the Greeks, however, committed them to stepping away from particulars to generalities. In this sense the principle exemplified reality in Graeco-Roman thought. But for all its self-professed rationalism, philosophy could only proceed by what Judge has called a “leap in the dark”:

(\[\text{The philosopher depended upon} \text{ the mere assumption...ungrounded either in experience or in the \textit{elenchus}, that the good exists because he has the call divine to seek it. So indeed many of the other basic positions of the}\\\]

\(^3\) I use these terms as simple indicators of the relative degrees of confidence and authority which philosophers and others placed in reason as logical analysis to explain the phenomena of experience and intuition. For an indication of how this tension was expressed in Graeco-Roman religion, see Fox (1988, 211-212).
philosophical schools are necessarily of this kind; for example, the cosmological theories of the Stoics or the physical hypotheses of the Epicureans, to which their ethical systems are necessarily related, are methodologically a leap in the dark. The intellectual enterprise as set up by Socrates and the philosophers is always dependent upon this creative imagination to provide the framework and the goals which direct thought and criticism. (1973b, 115)

This leap betrayed a nascent irrationalism, that ‘other side’ of Greek philosophy which eventually became so prominent. A profound shift took place between the times of Parmenides and Damascius on the character and power of logos, and on how easily reality yields its secrets to the canons of reason. Silence began to replace discourse as the avenue to the deepest levels of reality. This leads Mortley to conclude that:

...the disease of which Greek culture eventually died is known by many names...scepticism...mysticism...the Failure of Nerve. My own name for it is systematic irrationalism...For the time being the attack was averted—in part by the development of the Socratic-Platonic philosophy; in part, no doubt, by other agencies which escape us, since they did not express themselves in a literary form. But the germ survived, became endemic, and spread over the whole Greco-Roman world as soon as social conditions were favourable to its development. Greek rationalism died slowly (even Plotinus is in many respects a rationalist); but it was already more than half dead when Christianity and the other Oriental religions administered the coup de grace. (1986a, 90)\(^4\)

In chapter one, I noted how logos came to the fore among the Presocratics as the rational account, canon, or touchstone which enabled the enquirer to measure the validity of sense-data and ideas. While this raised an awareness of the process of rationality, the Presocratics remained for the most part absorbed with questions on the nature of reality, not with epistemological subtleties. They sought explanations of the whole order of reality and of the essential stuff which made something what it was. Thus there had been a certain predilection for analogy: the macro and the micro as mirror images. Such was Anaxagoras’ view of cosmic mind: “The functions of planning for the future, and of executing such plans by moving objects, are made into the defining characteristics of cosmic mind, and some of the limitations which ordinarily weigh on the human conceiving of plans and on their execution, are removed for the sake of aggrandising the

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\(^4\) I am indebted to Mortley (1986a,b) for the line of argument which follows, and for several references to primary sources.
cosmic principle" (Mortley, 1986a, 70). Here again a reality other than the everyday took priority. Yet not everyone was convinced.

The Sophists critiqued all such presuppositions of a reality underlying appearances. To them, despite what reason suggested, non-manifest reality simply did not exist or was unknowable. Thus they stripped reason of its objectivity and foundation. In response, Plato reasserted the Presocratic position that there is a greater reality and that the function of reason is to bring it to light:

...if anyone denies the existence of ideas of things, and does not assume an idea under which each individual thing can be classed, he will be quite at a loss, since he denies that the idea of each thing is always the same, and in this way he will utterly destroy the power of carrying on discussion. (Parmenides 135B, trans. Fowler)

The real lover of knowledge will strive for true being; he will not devote his attention to particular instances, but will pursue things until he comes into contact with this essence. Through 'mingling with genius reality, he would beget intelligence and truth'. (Republic 490B, trans. Lee)

Plato’s pursuit proceeded by abstraction and negation: the stripping away of mere appearances as reason moved from the known to the unknown. But while abstraction and negation prepared the way to the summit of reality, something else—something more immediate and independent of reason and speech—was needed to finish the quest. It is this spirit which resonated in Socrates when he spoke of a knowledge "born suddenly in the soul, 'like a light...fired by a leaping spark'...(resulting) not from intense verbal activity, but from continued application and communion with the subject itself" (Phaedrus 341C-D; Mortley, 1986a, 95, his trans). Thus Plato’s ‘Good’ undergirded being and knowledge but was beyond them both. At this point Aristotle seemed to bridge or side-step Plato’s open-endedness by asserting his confidence in the reality of the objective physical world and in the power of logos to apprehend it. Perhaps reason was itself rooted in nature. Logos thus began to take on a reified life of its own.

The Hellenistic age deeply questioned this classical rationalism, even while the materialism of the Stoics and Epicureans upheld the transparency of nature to reason. Both things and the ability to grasp their connections were alike rooted in the ordinary physical processes of reality. But 'alongside' this reality existed those 'seminal principles' responsible for the generation of the material universe. Thus the Hellenistic materialists revealed their own indebtedness to that sense of a split reality so characteristic of Greek
philosophy, no matter how such a dualism may have been an embarrassment in their system (Mortley, 1986a, 31).

Confidence in rationality persisted despite this concession to a principle which was opaque to reason. Platonists likewise held their confidence. Yet the shadowy sense of an 'Other' lurked in the various Platonic revivals. Driven by the old master's intuition that reason would stop short of its final ascent, they developed new options for this last step. Both sides of the tension appeared in Philo who "claims the transcendence of mind over matter: whilst he recognises the possibility of matter's exercising an effect on mind, he also establishes the primacy of mind by attributing to it the ability to dissociate itself from such effects" (Mortley, 1986a, 87; cf. On the Confusion of Tongues 163). As a traditional Jew, Philo saw God was clearly personal and knowable as the Lord of Israel's history and covenants. But as a Platonist, language could not convey the divine essence (ibid, 107). Speech and silence thus stood in antithesis as means of knowing the One. Ultimately, silence alone could enable the most sublime union with the One. Later, Neo-Platonists developed this theme to push beyond mere abstraction and negation to the end of discourse in a wordless experience of primary reality. Mortley notes that it was in this respect that Proclus reduced...

all the immensely complex structures of Greek metaphysics...to mere effects of our state of lack. Discourse does not deal in knowledge or truth: it simply gives voice to our epistemological pain. Discourse is not about knowing, but is simply a sign of the experience of ignorance. (1986b, 244).

Turning to Paul, we do not find any explicit discussion of the character of reason, nor of the tensions between rationalism and irrationalism, nor of the drift from word to silence. Yet, in his own way, Paul showed some intuition for each issue.

3.2.2 Paul and the renewal of the mind in Christ

Although certain features of Paul's life may have prompted others to characterise him as a sophist, Paul would never have described himself thus, nor as a philosopher (Judge, 1960c; Winter, 1988a, 1994a). Paul nowhere developed a cosmology or epistemology as such, nor took a particular stance on the career of logos from word to silence. He was neither intellectualist, nor anti-intellectual. Yet he was deeply aware of the social and intellectual role of rationality in propping up the intellectual autonomy and status of the educated (1 Cor 1:18-32). It is against this background that we note the intellectual dimension of his call to a thorough-going obedience to Christ as Lord, particularly where he was in close proximity to those with pretensions to philosophy and wisdom (Eph 4:17-24, Col 2:2-8). I suspect that his approach would have been inimical to rationalist and irrationalist alike.
Paul’s critique of rationality focused on what he understood to be the autonomous and deceptive spirit lurking in the presumptuous claims and counter-claims of philosophers (Col 2:6-8). Over against the grand ideals of objectivity and precision in philosophy, he saw the enterprise as monumentally futile, failing to deliver the certainty and right behaviour it promised (Eph 4:17-19). The best of human intellectual endeavour was cast in the mould of that inversion of the Creator-creature relationship which made even everyday reasonings foolish (Rom 1:18-32). Eshewing abstraction and intellectual elitism, Paul anchored the mind within the responsibilities and particulars of a life lived before God and one’s neighbour. Nowhere was this clearer than in Paul’s struggle with the intellectual and social conceit of certain prominent members of the Corinthian ekklesia (1 Cor 1:26-31, 4:10-13, 2 Cor 10:1-6; cf. Stowers, 1990, 255-262).

The factionalism⁵ of certain Corinthian believers betrayed an arrogance in respect of social position and intellectual pride: “The Corinthians have treated their teachers as if each represented yet another philosophical school competing to outdo all the others” (Stowers, 1990, 258).⁶ Paul’s censure of their arrogance and conceit may have exacerbated an already delicate situation which he had created by refusing to bind himself to them in a contract of patronage. His refusal had been taken as a snub. The relationship reached its low-point in the alliance between those he had ‘snubbed’ and certain Judaising super-apostles (tòn huperlian apostolòn, 2 Cor 11:5) who had recently arrived in Corinth. These opponents had vilified Paul as:

...inconsistent, and hence as a flatterer (kolax), and possibly also as insincere, and hence as an eirôn (self-deprecator) as well. It also took the form of studied mutual comparisons among the leaders of the alliance, most probably in terms of friendly rivalry and mutual esteem, while the real cutting edge of the comparisons was directed at Paul. (Forbes, 1986, 15, my transliteration)

Paul’s social standing at Corinth had in fact never been ideal given the ‘weakness’ of his plying a trade (Hock, 1980, 35; Forbes, 1986, 14). Moreover, the characterisations in his first letter of philosophy, rhetoric, and education as weakness and folly (1 Cor 1-2) had

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⁵ Over against identifying the ‘strong’ with any single ideological front, Forbes suggests it is better to understand the group as “an ad-hoc alliance, for diverse social and theological purposes” (1986, 15).

⁶ My discussion of Paul and the Corinthians in relation to intellectual elitism in part follows Stowers’ (1990) study on Paul and reason. There are numerous places, however, where I depart from his views, particularly where I judge his reconstructions to be too dependent on tight parallels to formal philosophical schools. Like Forbes (1986), I regard the Corinthian elite to have been much more eclectic in their intellectualism and often unaware of its historical formulation. It is particularly relevant to note that the rivalry between philosophers and rhetors may have been of little account to their audiences who were likely to synthesise ideas without the agenda of any one school. On the social position of the Corinthian elites, see Gill (1993b, 1994a) and Winter (1994b, 179-197).
been a slap in the face to men of means from a mere artisan (Forbes, 1986, 14). These eminent Corinthians now related to Paul in terms of the conventions of enmity appropriate against one who had refused their friendship (cf. Winter, 1994b, 113-115). In their terms of reference, Paul’s all too obvious social disgrace was no doubt now being made worse by his ironic reply (Stowers, 1990, 271).

Paul countered this vilification by attempting to reposition his relationships around the alternative models of a parent and of an ambassador (1 Cor 4:14-16, 2 Cor 6:11-13, 11:2, 12:14-15; 5:20). At the same time he launched an assault against the conceit of those who had dismissed him. While the images of weapons and a fortress in 2 Cor 10:3-6 may reflect Cynic and Stoic self-understanding (Malherbe, 1989, 91-119; Stowers, 1990, 267), they were widely used in Paul’s time without any necessary awareness of their role in the philosophical schools. This cautions against tying Paul into Stoic-Cynic arguments which may have been only peripheral to his intent. Whatever the origin of his images, Paul was convinced that though he lived in the (age of the) flesh (sarx) he was nevertheless not using its weapons (10:3). Rather he used the power of God to take captive all arguments (logismoi) and to demolish the Corinthians’ stronghold of reason.

Moral teachers generally concurred with Plato’s goal of making the ‘good’ invulnerable to life’s vicissitudes (though Aristotle had held that frailty is part of what gives life its value). Stoics and others treated emotions as diseases to be overcome by that reason which guards a man like a fortress: “Know, therefore, Serenus, that this perfect man, full of virtues human and divine, can lose nothing...The walls which guard the wise man are safe both from flame and assault, they provide no means of entrance—are lofty, impregnable, godlike” (Seneca, On the Firmness of the Wise Man 6.3-8, trans. Basore). This view had also found a home in Judaism (cf. 4 Macc 7:4-5, 20, 14:11-16:12).

Paul, however, inverted the intent of the image. Instead of viewing reason as a citadel repelling the onslaughts of emotion and passion, now the knowledge (gnōsis) of God was set to demolish every stronghold of argument (logismoi) to make them obedient to (the gospel of) Christ (2 Cor 10:3-5). It was precisely this point, Paul implied, that his opponents did not understand about the import of the gospel—they had not grasped how the dying and rising of Christ had discredited intellectual and social elitism (1:9-10, 2:14-16, 4:7-18, 6:3-10, 12:7-10). What then were Paul’s weapons for overcoming these strongholds? In what was his authority for building up and tearing down (10:7-11)? There were several strings to Paul’s bow. The most obvious was his preaching of the gospel (1 Cor 2:1-5, 2 Cor 5:11-21). At the same time, Paul alluded to a demonstration of (the Spirit’s) power which he may not have restricted to preaching (2 Cor 10:6, 11, 12:12-13:10; cf. 1 Cor 2:4, 5:3-5). Whatever his weapons, the tone is deeply ironic: the impressive power
of Christ and the Spirit would be manifested in the preaching, ‘punishments’, signs, and wonders of the unimpressive apostle.

Paul presumed a new basis for thought and action: the revelation of God in Christ and the Spirit. Not that Paul pitted faith against reason. Nor did he relegate reason as such to revelation (1 Cor 1:18-25). Rather, Paul was everywhere contending against that arrogant disposition which accompanied the intellectualism of the strong (4:18-21; Stowers, 1990, 256, 258; cf. Fitzgerald, 1988, 117-148). In other words, Paul’s remarks on reason had a primarily social orientation. Therefore, to regard Paul in 1 Cor 1-2 as developing a quasi-philosophical theory of the relation between revelation and reason loses touch with his social intent. Stowers loses too much, however, when he uses this caveat to claim that Paul was not drawing a sharp contrast between autonomous human reason and the Spirit as the means of coming to a saving knowledge of the gospel (1990, 255-256). Likewise, I am unpersuaded by Stowers’ suggestion that the mysteries which only the Spirit could impart (1 Cor 2:6-3:4) were not “the basic beliefs about God and the narrative of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection”, but “something entirely different...and apparently unessential to their Christian life” (ibid, 262, 261). This seems to make Paul’s point lose touch with his stated aim and the general tenor of his dissociation from intellectual arrogance (1 Cor 2:15; cf. 1:18-31).

The transition from 1 Cor 2:5 to 2:6 is not from the gospel to a new message for the Corinthians—not a shift from ‘central’ to ‘peripheral’ matters—but a development of his remark that faith must rest on the Spirit and not on human wisdom. I take Stowers’ point that there is no reason-revelation dichotomy at issue here in the sense that theologians and philosophers subsequently generalised it to be. Yet Paul did present an antithesis here: human (intellectual) autonomy could not attain to that which only the Spirit could reveal (2:14-16). In this sense, Paul did have a distinct perspective on rationality. The gospel had created an entirely different framework for the exercise of the mind. Rather than the arrogance of the self-enlightened, the Spirit created the new norms of faithfulness, cooperation, and edification (3:5-15). To follow these was to choose the path of the righteous sufferer who is “foolish” (1:27-29, 2:3, 4:8-12).7 By placing the mind in relation to the work of Christ, and thus in service of others, Paul had no choice but to spell out the social and personal implications of this realignment to the Corinthian elitists, even to the point of challenging the behaviour of those whose beliefs he otherwise shared.

7 Note the interesting verbal similarity to Seneca: “let some men think you even a fool. Allow any man who so desires to insult you and work you wrong; for if virtue dwells in you, you will suffer nothing” (Epistles 71.7, trans. Fitzgerald). Seneca’s goal was his own personal superiority and independence. The contrast to Paul’s willing endurance for the sake of identifying with the suffering Messiah is clear.
Stowers suggests that 1 Cor 6:12-20 is a dialogue between Paul and an imaginary interlocutor who represents the 'libertine position' (1990, 263). "All things are permitted" may thus be a variation on the Stoic slogan "Only the wise man is truly free". Other Corinthian slogans may have included "it is good for a man not to touch a woman" (7:1). It may be that the strong had taken the intellectualist stance of giving priority to the mind, thus rendering the body irrelevant to moral questions. In such a framework, knowledge and freedom themselves become the desired virtue and goal irrespective of any particular actions and outcomes. According to Stowers, the strong had adopted "a therapeutic model of Christianity"—the use of reason to improve the weak by correcting each faulty belief—a model which "had become a part of the philosophical koine known to cultured and educated people in the empire" (ibid, 274-275). The cure came in the form of logismoi to drive out false beliefs. Stowers hears echoes of these in the "we know" slogans (8:1, 4) and in the "confession" of 8:5-6 (ibid, 275). An example of such therapy may have been to champion the knowledge that an idol is 'nothing' in order to force the 'healing' of the weak from their religious scruples (8:5-6; cf. Gal 4:8-10, 1 Thess 1:9).

Paul, however, sought to demolish the elitism of those who 'knew best'. Yet his confrontation with the pretentious Corinthians and their super-apostles seemed to play into their hands by emphasising weakness in the catalogues of his hardships as an apostle (1 Cor 4:11-13). Whether or not Paul was consciously inverting the philosophers' use of hardship catalogues remains a somewhat open question (Stowers, 1990, 261). What is clear is that Paul understood the 'success' of his ministry not to have come in spite of his hardships and vulnerability, but precisely because of these. His suffering had opened the way for the power of the gospel and the Spirit (1 Cor 2:1-16, 2 Cor 4:7-18). Thus Paul and the strong held vastly different criteria for apostolic authority and authenticity (2 Cor 1:12-14, 10:10, 11:6). Paul's demonstration of this fundamental disagreement between them reached its apex in one of the most perplexing passages in either of his letters (10:1-12:10), a startling self-disclosure which drew heavily on the conventions of irony, boasting, self-praise, and encomium.

The traditional conventions of rhetoric were widespread and well-understood in Paul's day (though not necessarily the more exact formulations of inter-school philosophical disputes). There were clear 'rules' to check the seemliness of comparison, self-praise, and boasting; and equally clear criteria for judging when and how an exception could be made. Speaking specifically of self-praise, Forbes states that "it is fair to say that

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8 This estimation of proclamation will provide an important point of analogy to evangelicalism in chapters six and seven.
the educated Hellenistic world in which Paul moved knew of conventions of self-praise, but believed that they required great delicacy if they were not to be misused, as they led all too easily to *alazoneia* and *huperopia*, which were closely related to *hubris*" (1986, 10, my transliteration). In regard to irony, there is no way to know if the 'rules' were widely known in Paul's day, but it was a topic "of considerable interest for rhetorical writers, and hence, most probably, for students and practitioners of rhetoric" (ibid, 11).\(^9\) The pretentious or boastful man (*alazôn*) was the opposite of the ironic man.

Paul's argument turned on an ironic parody of the self-praise, boasting, and comparisons of his opponents, the super-apostles (2 Cor 11:1-12:10). It was "a ruthless parody of the pretensions of his opponents... (but) while holding to the traditional forms of encomium, and following common topics, he radically inverts the content... he amplifies what he should minimise, and minimises what he should amplify" (Forbes, 1986, 18-19).\(^10\) Having spoken of his relation to Christ, instead of proceeding to the customary delineation of personal honours, Paul then spoke of his humiliations, disgrace, and hardship, culminating in his confession of personal weakness (11:29). This weakness was not primarily psychological, but social—the helplessness of one who had chosen little power or status, and his humiliation in the eyes of those who were honoured. These trials were the test of his work (1 Cor 3:10-15). In all this:

Paul is presenting a case for a radically different conception of apostolic authority through his irony... (he) has taken several steps beyond the Hellenistic tradition in his attitude to self-praise. (Unlike Plutarch) for Paul self-praise is never legitimate: boasting that is not 'in the Lord' is 'beyond measure' and 'senseless'. (Forbes, 1986, 20).

Paul thus radically inverted the place of intellect. He subverted the claims of the strong to be demonstrably superior not by challenging their perceptions of idols *per se*, nor by asking them to comply with the false beliefs of the weak. Nor did he gag dialogue. Rather he urged the strong to be sensitive to the pain of the weak (Stowers, 1990, 282). Love, not ideological precision, must colour all (1 Cor 8:10-11, 13:2, 8-13, 2 Cor 13:11; cf. Rom 14:1):

Those who want a more rational view of religion are not to act as if the goal of life in Christ is to relieve the weak of every irrational belief by means of

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\(^9\) "Without following the entire trail, it is possible to show that the definitions of *alazoneia* persisted down to Paul's time and well beyond" (Forbes, 1986, 13, my transliteration).

\(^10\) Paul must have seemed frustratingly enigmatic to the Corinthians. For example, as Winter points out, "he refused to use rhetorical devices to persuade in his preaching... yet he could make use of rhetorical forms in his letters when it suited his purposes" (1986a, 251).
arguments over arguments. Paul again identifies himself with the more rational. They are right, but he wants to make it clear that the goal of the kind of community that he advocates is not minds purged of all irrational belief. In fact, the point of the section as a whole is that such a narrow view is counterproductive in achieving an inclusive and mutually enhancing community. (ibid, 283-284)

For Paul, the problem with reason was not intellectual—it was personal and relational. The mind cannot be partitioned from sin as the soul is from the body in so many of the philosophers' accounts. Paul never explained sin in dualistic terms as though it were an inherently anomalous and errant source of vice residual in a creation fashioned out of the tension of logos and matter. According to Paul, sin had entered the kosmos through the history of a man (Rom 5:13)—a patent absurdity to Greeks for whom the kosmos was the perfect ordered totality. The dying and rising of Christ located the problem of humanity within the person, and the solution in the hands of the one to whom he was accountable. To be in Christ entailed a transformation of mind as an aspect of the relationship (Rom 12:1-2, Eph 4:17-24, Col 2:2-6). The Greeks, however, were oriented to ontological and moral perfection. The power of Paul's explanation lay in his ability to quarry his own inner man, correctly observing his own self-contradictions and frustrations. For Paul, the common struggle of mankind was intensely personal and relational, not metaphysical or speculative.

3.3 PAUL AND THEOLOGY

3.3.1 Natural theology and the constraint of God

In the mid to late third century, Oenoanda in Lycia boasted most of the accoutrements of a small town eager to show its Hellenised civility (Fox, 1988, 168-170). Earlier that same century one Diogenes had bequeathed the city a sermon of Epicurean wisdom on the gods—a 40m long “vast wayside pulpit of stone” (cf. Horsley, ND 4:73). It seems, however, that the citizens of Oenoanda valued the sermon’s ‘atheism’ far less than its architectural potential. Piece by piece they had dismantled it for building and wall repairs. A new inscription, high over the outer eastern gate of the town, and positioned to catch the first rays of daylight, bore witness to a more reasonable theology. The language was as old as Euripides (Fragment 593), and was well and truly familiar from the hymns and higher theology of the empire:

Self-existent, untaught, without a mother, undisturbed, of many names
although not spreading abroad his name, dwelling in fire: this is God, and we
messengers are a small portion of God. To those enquiring about God, who he is, this is what it (i.e., the oracle) said: that Aither is the all-seeing God, looking to whom pray at dawn as you look towards the east. (SEG 27 (1977) 933, in Horsley, ND 2:39, his trans.)

The oracular setting of the inscription, and the ritual suggested by its final line, bears eloquent testimony that theology was never divorced from popular religious understanding and practice. Indeed, theologoi were frequently located at oracular shrines where they "wrote hymns to the gods" and "made this language the language of the gods" about whom worshippers had come to enquire (Fox, 1988, 152, 260). An epitaph at Rome to one such "expounder of the numinous to others", himself from a town not so far from our inscription, reveals the potpourri of philosophy by which these men gave some substance to the oracles (Horsley, ND 4:32-33):12

To the underworld gods. I was like I was in my speech, spirit, and form, possessing the implanted soul of a person just born, happy in friendship and fortunate in my mind, holding the view 'nothing in excess', and viewing everything as mortal. I came (i.e., into the world), I departed blameless, I did not think about things which I ought not to: whether I had a previous existence, whether I shall have one in time (to come). I was educated, I educated (others), I shackled the vault of the universe, declaring to men the divine virtues which proceed from the gods. The dear earth conceals me; yet what was my pure name? I was Philetos, a man beloved by all, from Limyra in Lykia. (IG XIV (1890) 2068, trans. Horsley)

The inscription at Oenoanda was at least partly an answer from an oracle: "this is what it (the oracle) said...". Great confidence attached to the oracles as manifestations of the divine mind and character.13 It was such confidence that had torn up Diogenes' sermon at Oenoanda. His Epicurean 'atheism' was no match for a dawn ritual and a potpourri of theology. While the philosophical schools endeavoured to keep theological abstraction at a safe distance from popular religion, the community had no scruples about a rapprochement between theological inquiry and religious pluralism. Several other facets of the Oenoanda inscription make the point.

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11 On the points of contact between intellectual and popular models of understanding the divine, see Grant (1986, 54-71).
12 Horsley considers that Philetos' self-description fits that of a theologos, though he does not press the point (ND 4:32).
13 On the complementary relationship of theology and the use of oracles, see Fox (1988, 176-177, 188, 190-195).
The text named God as much by the absence of his name as by the myriad of his
nomen de plume: "of many names although not spreading abroad his name". The paradox
was as old as Heraclitus and "well attested in pagan hymns and theology by the first
century A.D." (Fox, 1988, 170). Less frequently attested was the "motherless" origin of
God (cf. Philo, On the Universe 100; Galen, 9.934). In line 3, angeles hemeis is not likely to
refer to Oenoanda's leading citizens, but to the intermediary gods; those "abstract
divinities" who each form a portion of the one God (Fox, 1988, 170). Following the French
epigrapher Robert, Horsley notes the inscription's absorption of the lesser gods (angeloi)
into God as "a remarkable indicator of the trend towards monotheism" in the second and
third centuries (ND 2:39; cf. also 3:48). However, if the language mirrors something of the
widespread influence of Jewish angel mysticism in western Asia Minor, then the
inscription may not so much attest a monotheistic faith as indicate "an hierarchical
arrangement where one god is proclaimed supreme over others" (Kearsley, 1992e, 208,

If the inscription was monotheistic, the mention of Aither, the One "dwelling in
fire", nonetheless moves us somewhat away from monotheistic self-existence towards the
murkier waters of some primary element in the cosmos which gave shape to reality
through a pervasive intelligence and power. Plato had linked the Demiurge to his fourth
element, fire. Aristotle then added Aither to Plato's fire, and in time the two were
amalgamated as the one principle, especially by Stoics (cf. Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods
1.39). Thus as the worshippers of Oenoanda "prayed at dawn looking toward the east"
their thoughts may well have oscillated between what we would call the more
transcendent and the more immanent: God as self-existent One, and God as (a principle of)
Nature. Both strands of thought were old and well-made.

As noted earlier, Greek philosophy largely worked from abstraction as the key tool
for disclosing the essence of primary reality. Theology reflected the same presuppositions:
(1) reality is layered; (2) understanding proceeds by a conceptual removal of these layers;
and (3) the goal is to uncover the essence of reality (Mortley, 1986a, 161). Thus the
Oenoanda inscription portrayed God by what he was not: "self-existent, untaught, without
a mother, undisturbed" (cf. Plotinus, 6.5.1). This was standard fare, especially for those
with Platonic leanings:

(God is) incorporeal, one, immeasurable, begetter of everything...blessed and
beneficent, the best, in lack of nothing, himself bearing all things, celestial,
ineffable, unnameable, and as he himself says, 'invisible, unconquerable—
whose nature is difficult to find and if found cannot be expressed among the
many'. (Apuleius, *On the Teaching of Plato*, 1.5, trans. Grant; the quote is from Plato, *Timaeus* 28E)

Time and again we have noted the primacy of reason and nature within philosophical thought, including the common subjection of men and gods to the canons of reason (Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 2.27; Seneca, *Epistles* 95.49). This confidence in reason created a split attitude to anthropomorphism. On the one hand, it could be dismissed as mere superstition (Lucretius, *On the Rule of Nature* 1.62-72). On the other hand, if reason was to control the knowledge of God, then theology must be natural theology—the drawing of inferences about God from the character and experience of nature. This meant arguing first from man to God, then back to man with the axioms derived from the first move. Cicero sensed this circularity:

It follows that they possess the same faculty of reason as the human race, and that both have the same apprehension of truth and the same law enjoining what is right and what is wrong. Hence we see that wisdom and intelligence also have been derived by men from the gods. (Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 2.31.78-79, trans. Rackman)

We see the same move in Hierocles:

Nature justly teaches that we should choose what is fitting and in harmony with the condition it has given us...But to us nature gave reason in order that it might explore all other things, and...might explore nature itself so that...choosing what is in harmony with it, reason might cause us to live in a manner that in every way befits nature. (Hierocles, *On Duties* 4.22.21, trans. Malherbe)

Rationalism, abstraction, and anthropomorphism found a home in negative theology. In the first place, only reason could render God transparent (to whatever degree). Second, only reason could remove those layers of matter and faulty reasoning which encased the comprehension of the divine. Third, if reason is the highest faculty of the noblest part of the most divine creature, then theology must begin with man in order to go beyond him. Thus negative theology sought to positively describe God through those very same human qualities which he must surpass. In other words, God was the One who negated the limitations imposed by both the regrettable and the honourable
condition of mankind. Once again, primary reality depended upon everyday reality even as it negated it.14 Rationalism and irrationalism meet again.

The development of philosophical perspectives on the gods and the cosmos had emphasised the conformity of gods and men alike to the order of nature, and to reason as the interpretative key to that order (Pseudo-Aristotle, *On the Universe* 401AB; Hierocles, *On Duties* 1.3.53-54). Nature determines the character of God and man. It was only a short step from here to the divine providence of Graeco-Roman theology and religion.15 At times, the divinity of providence seems to have allowed it to trade by many names, including the largely interchangeable ‘providence/acts of God/Zeus’ (Llewelyn, ND 6:82-86; Grant, 1986, 78-79). To Stoics providence was the most plausible and important basis for meditation, personal piety, and worship, and a model for correcting ignorant superstitions (Cicero, *On Nature* 1.3-4, 117, 2.72):

> From everything that happens in the universe it is easy for a man to find occasion to praise providence, if he has within himself these two qualities: the faculty of taking a comprehensive view of what has happened in each individual instance, and the sense of gratitude. (Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.6.1-2, trans. Oldfather; cf. 3.22.50-51)

Although providence suggested divine favour and care, there was little if any room for mercy in the God of the Stoics. Indeed, despite the lengthy praises of the gods recorded in aretalogies, few noted mercy as a divine attribute, a point Harris has taken as evidencing “the more philosophical accounts of the gods’ activities from the period” (1986, 96).16 Yet, as Harris notes, the tale of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* turned on Lucius’ experience of the familial tenderness of Isis:

> Holy goddess, everlasting saviour of mankind, ever generous in your help to mortals you show a mother’s warm love for the misfortunes of those in distress...you can unravel the inextricably tangled web of Fate, you can calm the gales of Fortune. (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11. 22, 25, trans. Harris)

14 Mortley (1986b) has shown that certain philosophers of late antiquity regarded negative theology as still too ‘positive’ and thus limiting of the One. They sought to push beyond negation to silence. My own conclusions arose independently of Mortley’s, but seem congruent with his discussion, and are no doubt now more coloured by his thesis than I can recognise.

15 It also featured in some Jewish thought. Horsley notes that “its occurrence in Philo suggests...it had currency in educated Jewish circles” by the first century (ND 3.143; cf. Philo, in *Flacc 125*).

16 I am indebted to Harris (1986) for many of the texts and, in places, the line of argument which follows.
The same tenor appeared in aretalogies to Isis, such as the following inscription at Maroneia from the second or first century BC, in which she is praised as the benefactor and saviour of her followers: "I am completely confident that you will come [to my aid] again. For since you came when called for my salvation, how would you not come for your own honor?" (SEG 821, in Horsley, ND 1:11-12, his trans.). But for all this divine warmth, Isis' mercy might not always be quite what it seemed:

I inflict vengeance on those who do unjust things. I legislated for mercy (elean) to be shown to suppliants. I have regard for those who defend themselves with justification (dikaios). (I. Kyme 41, in Horsley, ND 1:18-20, his trans.)

In this inscription, Isis makes justice a regulative principle for social behaviour while also providing for mercy. But the mercy Isis ordains here is for those suppliants who can defend themselves according to justice. In other words, she will defend the defensible—mercy is held within the constraints of justice.

The patent fact that God did not immediately exact punishment on all evil-doers appeared as a theme in religious and philosophical literature since at least the sixth century BC (Kidd, 1992, 239). In On God's Slowness to Punish, Plutarch advances several reasons for the divine delay. First, the more obvious: to provide an example or pattern of curbing passion (Moralia, 550C-551C), to allow time for improvement (551D-552D), to bring good out of evil (552D-553D), and to ensure the most fitting moment of punishment (553D-F). Second, the more philosophical: that God actually is punishing evil-doers, the problem being our inability to perceive this (553F-557E). Somewhat like the sentiment that Isis will defend the defensible, Plutarch pictures God delaying judgement on those whose "innate nobility" may yet be enough to produce repentance and change:

It is reasonable to assume, however, that God takes a careful look at the emotions of the sick minds to which he is dispensing punishment, to see if they have the slightest possible tendency and inclination towards remorse, and that he determines how much time should elapse for those people whose nature is not absolutely and incorrigibly evil. You see, God knows the amount of goodness which the minds bore when they left him and proceeded to birth, and he knows how solid and substantial their innate nobility is...So, because he knows all this, he doesn't hastily impose the same punishment on everyone: he wastes no time in mowing down and removing from life anything which is irredeemable...but he gives time, the chance to change, to people whose sinfulness has probably taken root because they didn't know what was right...
(Moralia, 551D, trans. Kidd)
Most people were more likely to encounter mercy in the political arena—if not in personal experience, then at least in the imperial propaganda of coins (“Clementia Caesaris”) and marketplace inscriptions (Harris, 1986, 95-97). Recalling our earlier comments on anthropomorphism, it is interesting to note the presence of an (admittedly very limited and general) theological perspective modelled it would seem on the imperial rulers and civic leaders: “if the gods, merciful and just, do not immediately pursue with the thunderbolt the sins of the mighty, how much more just is it for a man set over his fellows to exert his authority with a mild spirit” (Seneca, Epistles 1.7.2, trans. Harris). Such at least was one ideal. The reality was far tougher both on earth and in the heavens:

We may conclude that in the mind of ordinary Greeks and Romans of the first century ‘clemency’ was a quality which by and large men of power had arrogated to themselves and their own use. There was a hardness and political realism which left little room for the more humane feelings of pity and tenderness associated with it. (Harris, 1986, 97)

All of this recalls what we noted in chapter one of the inter-relation of social and metaphysical hierarchies. Where mercy was offered, we meet the age-old pattern of divine and human self-sufficiency and personal honour: “Self-interest and the perpetuation of power are the obvious motives for (a display of mercy), beyond any possible reflection of divine beneficence” (Harris, 1986, 98-99). The gods were as bound as the sage to nature and fate, and to the ideals of an undisturbed inner peace. They were likewise as preoccupied as the great men with their own ambitions. Thus pity—that “distress of mind induced through seeing the wretchedness of others, or sadness at misfortunes which one believes are happening to the undeserving”—must be shunned as far as possible in the interests of self-sufficiency (Seneca, Epistles 2.5.4, trans. Harris; cf. Epictetus, Manual 16). Remember, intoned the sage, let nothing be to excess.

There was an exception to prove this rule. In the centre of Statius’ Athens, without image or ritual, stood the Altar of Mercy (Thebaid 12). This was the place of refuge for the wretched. It was not for those noble ones whose lives were shielded from Fate and Fortune, and the capricious whims of rulers (12.503-505). The latter prided themselves on having no need of mercy, divine or human, other than that which befitted their piety and civic virtue. The less fortunate, however, dared to hope for mercy at the Altar and, perhaps, from an Unknown God. As the apostle stood to deliver his message before the council at the Areopagus:

...the idea of divine mercy was not far away...and we may guess that Paul himself knew of the Altar of Mercy in the city, and was aware that the supreme
mercy was among the attributes of the ‘unknown god’ he was now expounding to the Athenians. (Harris, 1986, 103)

3.3.2 Paul and the theology of the Areopagus

Paul was invited to present his credentials before the Areopagus the body responsible for “surveillance over the introduction of foreign divinities” to Athens (Horsley, ND 1:31; cf. Gill, 1994b, 447-448). Quite likely, the Stoics and Epicureans present in the agora had understood him to be introducing two new deities to the city, Jesus and Anastasis (Acts 17:18; Winter, 1991b, 114).

In two recent articles, Balch (1990) and Neyrey (1990) position Luke’s account of Paul’s speech before the council in relation to Stoic and Epicurean thought, helpfully clarifying those aspects of Paul’s speech which show some conformity to Stoic philosophy and theology. Balch emphasises that after Posidonius, Stoic philosophy had reached a rapprochement with popular religion such that Stoics had openly defended the place of temples (Acts 17:23-24, 29; Balch, 1990, 67-72). In Luke’s account, Paul’s disavowal of temples and idols thus makes him the ‘true’ Stoic returning to the original doctrine of Posidonius. Moreover, Paul’s treatment of providence in nature and history, and even of judgement, is said to be compatible with Stoic teaching (17:23, 25-28, 30-31; ibid, 58-67). Neyrey emphasises those aspects of Paul’s message likely to be out of step with Epicurean teaching—his theodicy and appeal to providence—thus portraying Paul as siding with the Stoics and forcing a split between the two groups, just as he would between the Pharisees and Sadducees (23:6-7; 1990, 124-133). But there are severe limitations to these theses.17 Paul’s ‘conformity’ to the Stoics seems particularly overstated, while on the other hand, Winter has shown that in certain respects Paul was not as far away from Epicurean interests as Neyrey considers (1991b, 123-124). Nor do their theses account for the split verdict of the council—some sneered while others believed (17:32)—neither response indicating that Paul has conformed to ‘orthodox’ Stoicism.

Hemer’s studies seem more judicious (1989a,b). While beginning to a large degree with his audience’s perspectives18, even working with their own sources (Aratus, Phenomena 7; Cleanthes, Aristobulus fragment 4.6), Paul’s message was nonetheless confronting (1989b, 247). The whole address was deeply ironic as Paul played the Stoics and Epicureans off each other. The Epicurean God needed nothing; the Stoic divinity was

17 Several of the following points can be found in Winter (1991b). I had, however, reached much the same conclusions before finding Winter’s article.

18 Paul may even have gone so far as to have loosely used a pro forma for theological debate like Cicero’s On the Nature of the Gods (see Winter, 1991b, 118, 122).
the source of life (Acts 17:25). Paul’s God was personal, not the alternatively transcendent and pantheistic force of Stoicism (1989b, 244). The Stoics’ God is not like men, yet they uphold man-made images. The philosophers pride themselves on their superior wisdom, yet they worship an ‘unknown’ God. The ‘babbler’ Paul must enlighten them (17:18). Moreover, the Epicureans, whose God is supremely disinterested, are lumped with those who are wary of the anger of a neglected deity (17:23b). In the heart of Athenian racial supremacy and religious renown, Paul declared that all men are from the one stock and that God needed no temple (17:24-26).

Paul’s allusion to Epimenides (“in whom we live and move and have our being”; Acts 17:28), set his message in close proximity to Athenian tradition. Epimenides was a significant figure in Athenian religion, and entirely apt for Paul’s message, since he figures in the aetiology for the altars to the unknown god[s] as told in the story by Diogenes Laertius (Lives of the Philosophers 1.110-112; Hemer, 1989a, 118). Moreover, Paul’s closing remark called to mind another Athenian treasure. When the Areopagus was founded, legend told, it had been dedicated with the words, “When a man dies the earth drinks up his blood, there is no resurrection” (Aeschylus, Eumenides 647, trans. Winter; cf. Hemer, 1989b, 246). Hemer notes that this declaration “must have been familiar to every cultivated Athenian in that audience and the crucial point of Paul’s encounter with the beliefs of his hearers” (ibid). Beginning with the philosophers’ own poets, Paul had steered his message to his conviction of the place of Christ in human history and in the revelation of the character and purposes of God. Having seemed to begin with natural theology, he ended by effectively disallowing it. Whereas rapprochement with popular piety was a mere self-contradiction for the philosophers, it was an impossibility for Paul (Winter, 1991b, 129).

19 Paul always spoke of God as the Creator and Redeemer whom he knew in close personal relationship. This contrasted sharply with Greek theologies: “Their conception of the divine, even when expressed in highly personal language, never suggests that the supreme being is an individual to whom someone might be related in the manner of an Abraham or a Job” (Long, 1986, 136).

20 Hemer (1989a, 117) cites the sources which imply that spermologos was a piece of Athenian slang.

21 Hemer notes that “we cannot now specify how far Paul’s knowledge of the intricacies of Athenian tradition extended, but it suffices to show that he had struck some significant vein of the richer hidden complexity” (1989b, 246). He also notes in another place that the apparent discrepancy between the plural gods and Paul’s singular Gods is not the difficulty it seems (1989a, 117).

22 I offer as a suggestion that Paul’s portrait of God’s involvement in human affairs (Acts 17:24-28) has only a superficial resemblance to ‘providence’ as the philosophers understood it. Paul never used the common phrase their pronoia (Horsley, ND 5:143, 5:145). His only use of pronoia (Rom 13:14) does not carry the sense of providence. Paul is more likely to have based his understanding on OT sources such as Ps 19. Given the blurring of personality in both the philosophical and popular senses of the term, and Paul’s clear portrait of God as personal, I suggest that ‘providence’ is not an apt term for Paul’s thought. See my remarks on Romans below.

3.3.3 Paul and the free mercy of God in Christ

The themes which Paul had stressed in the ancient capital of philosophy were apposite for his letter to those in the imperial capital. To his Jewish readers, Paul’s understanding of the character and purposes of God would have been immediately intelligible, though his preoccupation with Christ as the revelation of God might have antagonised as much as it enthralled. But his understanding of God would have been highly irregular to many other readers. Perhaps mindful of how both Jewish and Graeco-Roman interests could distort his message if allowed to go unchallenged, Paul began Romans with themes which implied the eclipse of both Graeco-Roman natural theology and Jewish nationalistic theology (1:16-3:20).

As in his speech to the Areopagus, Paul worked around the themes of judgement, religious practice, God’s provision of the necessities of life, his forbearance with human ignorance, and his relation to all peoples (Rom 1:18-2:16). His language at first does not seem far removed from the Timaeus nor from our inscription at Oenoanda. Indeed, the creation yields a portrait of God’s invisible qualities (ta aerata), his eternal power (aidios autou dunamis), and divine nature (theiotés) (1:20; cf. 1 Tim 1:17). Paul’s themes thus have the appearance of natural theology. But the resemblance is superficial. Again, as in the Areopagus speech, Paul’s subsequent handling of his topic, and his wider vision, cautions against any simple identification of his gospel with theology. As Paul had concluded his speech at Athens with Christ the divinely appointed judge of all people (Acts 17:31), so in Romans he pictured both the former and present eras of human history as a divine stay of execution, offering the opportunity of repentance before the day “when God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Christ” (Rom 2:16; cf. 1:18, 2:4, 3:19-20, 25b). Moreover, Paul located the character of God in the person and events of Christ. While nature reveals God to some degree (1:18-20), it is inadequate. It is in Christ that believers know God (1:7, 3:24).

Most remarkably, Paul bypassed both Jewish law, and the Graeco-Roman understanding of nature, to locate the revelation of the justice of God (dikaiosumé theou) in Christ (Rom 1:17, 3:21; cf. 1:18). This is the crux of how Paul harmonised what Graeco-Romans regarded as mutually exclusive—the justice and unmerited mercy of God (3:21-11:32). Having dismissed pity (misericordia) as a mental fault, Seneca sought to preserve a

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24 Morris (1970, 1986) notes the statistical priority of God in Romans. Frequency of word use, however, does not in itself indicate the importance of a theme to a writer, much less the writer’s peculiar perspectives on the theme.

25 An even closer parallel of expression occurs between 1 Cor 8:6 and Marcus Aurelius, Meditations 4.23 who praises Nature with the appellations “all things are from you...in you...(and) for you.”
place for mercy (*clementia*) (*Epistles* 2.7.3; cf. Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 3.20). But just as the wise man or ruler ought not to allow pity to ruin his inner serenity, neither should he allow clemency except where it is in the best interests of the subject. Such discernment clearly lay with the superior man. Moreover, clemency belonged only to those who deserved it (Harris, 1986, 99). The congruence we have noted before between Stoic moral ideals and theology doubtless held here too: God must not compromise his own perfection to pardon the undeserving.

Paul put the matter on an entirely different footing: “for God shows no favouritism” (Rom 2:11).26 God in his mercy had justified the ungodly. Where a man might dare to pay the ultimate cost for a patron of great significance (Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* 32.50), the self-sacrifice of the Son of God revealed the love of his Father towards the powerless, the impious, and the guilty (Rom 5:6-8; Clarke, 1990; Cranfield, 1975, 264-265). God had not set aside his justice in order to grant mercy, but had revealed his justice in the judgement of his Son on behalf of those who would believe in him (1:17, 3:21-22, 25-26). The sacrifice of Christ only deepened the anomaly of God’s purpose for many of Paul’s readers. As Hengel has shown, while the idea of atonement by human self-sacrifice may well have been comprehensible, it nevertheless “must have seemed aesthetically and ethically repulsive to them and to be in conflict with the philosophically purified nature of the gods” (1981, 31).

The same repulsion would attach to the conclusion that those who believed in Christ had lost all ground for boasting (Rom 3:27-31): personally, they could only depend on the mercy of God as Abraham had done (4:1-25); historically, they had been grafted onto God’s Jewish vine (11:11-32); socially, the loss of grounds for boasting was only the first of the changes implicit in Paul’s gospel of God. Paul recorded two responses to this message. First, he praises God, not for the amorphous qualities of an abstract deity, but for the magnitude of his mercies revealed in the histories of Israel and Christ (11:33-36). Second, he called for a personal transformation entailing the inversion of social convention and status (12:1-4). Paul urged the Roman Christians to grasp the personal and social changes consequent on their new standing on the mercies (*oiktirma*) of God.

Our previous discussion of mercy, justice, and social ideals looms large here. Paul, in effect, urged the Roman Christians to base their lives on a God whom the best of Roman theology would discredit. Moreover, they were to resist the unquestionable Roman ideals of personal self-sufficiency and serenity, while maintaining respect for Roman imperial

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and local authority (Rom 12:1-2, 13:1-3a). Putting their normal means of recourse to justice to one side (12:17-21), they were to show mercy in their leadership and benefactions to the less fortunate (12:7-15, 13:3b). But not from the normal presumption of superiority (12:16). Rather, they were to act from the radical self-awareness that, though entirely undeserving, they had received their place in the new social structure of the body of Christ by the mercies of God (12:3-6).

Paul’s distinctive portraits of his God stood in stark relief to Graeco-Roman theology. In this sense it is remarkable how quickly his message was conformed by subsequent generations to the theological paradigms of the philosophers.27 Yet this is the power of a paradigm. It both energises the innovator, and enables others to defuse the innovation so as to preserve the status quo. Remoteness became “the key to the deity” in the generations which followed Paul (Mortley, 1986b, 34). His gospel was wedded to theology and its methods of abstraction and negation. While Justin Martyr and others continued for the most part to present Christ in a manner congruent with Paul’s message, the abstractionism inherent in Greek theology drove upon them a pressing need to discover that essence of Christ which was felt to lie behind the externals of his history (ibid, 250). Little more than a hundred years after Paul, the God of Christian apologia resembled Plato’s Demiurge more than him “who is rich in mercy” (Eph 2:4-6):

We have brought before you a God who is uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible, and infinite, who can be apprehended by mind alone, who is encompassed by light, beauty, spirit, and indescribable power, and who created and now rules the world through the Logos who issues from him. (Athenagoras, Embassy for the Christians 8-9, trans. Grant)

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27 The subject of the early apologists and fathers’ realignment of Paul’s portrait of the character and purposes of God with theology is vast. For the basic themes, see Grant (1986, 84-175). For the Roman perspective, see Wilken (1984). Particularly outstanding are the sections on “Biblical and Related Citations” and “Ecclesiastica” in most volumes of the series New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity (Horsley, 1981-1989; Llewelyn (1992, 1995, and ongoing). The value of the series in this regard lies in the degree to which we can juxtapose the development of popular intellectualism and piety amongst the early Christians with those of their pagan neighbours. To anticipate my own perspectives on evangelicalism, I am intrigued with the ease, speed, and degree to which the early apologists drew on the theological paradigms of the philosophers in their presentations of God, and on the expectations and patterns of Graeco-Roman religion for their piety. It seems to me that evangelical teaching and church life largely maintains these orientations with little if any awareness of their dissimilarity to Paul’s thought (e.g. Berkhof, 1988; Muller, 1991).
3.4 PAUL AND RELIGION

3.4.1 Awe, intimacy, and the presence of the gods

The assaults launched by Epicureans and Sceptics on what they saw as the crudest of religious myth and practice were irregular and had little effect. Most people, humble and elite alike, still preferred to be overinsured with religion than to be caught unprotected and unaided in their struggle against forces larger than themselves. Yet the theologians did leave their imprint. However commonplace, inscriptions like the one high on the city wall of Oenoanda could fire the imagination. At the same time, the ever-present statuary of homes, civic places, and shrines continued to shape the understanding of the gods, and to maintain the sense of their presence.28

It was not only the educated and the elite who pondered and debated the character of the gods. If the all-seeing Aither, the great self-existent God who dwelt in fire, was beyond the myriad of his names, then who was to say which cult solicited and appeased him best? Theology and cult in some senses, therefore, depended upon each other. But what particularly mattered to many philosophers was not so much cultic observance, as the cultivation of a piety congruent with the life of reason:

Now the best and also the purest and holiest worship of the gods, and that which is the most pious, is that we should ever venerate them with an undefiled, undivided and untainted mind and voice. (Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods 2.28.71, trans. Harris; cf. Philo, Principles of Allegory 3.27; Marcus Aurelius, Meditations 5.27)

Such piety neither scorned the cult, nor needed it. Speaking of late Platonists, and the Hermetist groups, Fox notes that they:

...dwelt on the various paths by which people could come to God. They could turn inwards and contemplate their soul, learning to approach God by the old Apolline principle of knowing themselves. Alternatively, they could turn outwards and marvel at the beauty of the world...These two fine paths became the neutral property of educated men. (1988, 94).

We should not conclude, however, that Graeco-Roman religion was fundamentally intellectual and meditative. The nearness and distance of the gods elicited not only

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28 The literature on classical, Hellenistic, and Graeco-Roman religion is voluminous. In my own reading I have found Fox (1988) the most lucid and engaging, and I am largely indebted to him for my choice of topics in the following discussion. For the most part, however, I have worked from the papyri and inscriptions collected in ND volumes 1-7. It is regrettable that so few scholars—including evangelicals—are making use of this marvellous scholarly series.
contemplation, but also awe and fear. The common ground of epiphany, oracle, and cult was the pervasive presence of the gods, the acute awareness of their potential anger, and the constant need to placate them. In this sense, religious experience turned on the tensions of awe and intimacy. Fear and the need for propitiation sponsored various techniques by which one could draw closer to the gods. When the gods did draw near, they could be relied on to be swift to help—or to punish. When they seemed far away, they elicited deep admiration and awe—and the cold dread of their unpredictability and indifference.

The gods inhabited every corner of life. A client bound to his patron no doubt found plenty of incentive to petition the gods on his superior’s behalf. A letter of greeting from the first or second century (provenance unknown) typifies this nexus of piety and social deference:

Herm...[to Sarapion]...greetings, and that you may always remain in good health in your whole person for long years to come, since your good genius allowed us to greet you with respect and salute you. For as you also make mention of us on each occasion by letter so I here make an act of worship for you in the presence of the lords Dioskouroi and in the presence of the lord Sarapis, and I pray for your safe-keeping during your entire life and for the health of your children and of all your household. Farewell in everything, I beg, my patron and fosterer...All the gods here, male and female, greet you... (CPR 19, in Horsley, ND 1:56-57, his trans.)

A client’s opportunities for fraternity, security, and ambition largely rested on his inclusion under the aegis of his patron’s household. This is partly the background to the *kline*, those small private dinners hosted by a patron devotee over which Sarapis presided:

Nikephoros asks you to dine at a banquet of the lord Sarapis in the Birth-House on the 23rd, from the 9th hour. (P. Coll. Youtie 51, in Horsley, ND 1:5-9, his trans.)

The god calls you to a banquet being held in the Thoerion tomorrow from the 9th hour. (ZPE 1 [1967] 121-126, in ibid)

Falling between the family and the state, or body politic, clubs played an increasingly important role in the Graeco-Roman city (cf. Judge, 1960a, 40-48; Ellis, 1989, 126-147). As a focus for fraternity, security, and ambition, they could extend the patron-client relationship, or provide some of the same benefits for those without such an

29 For epitaphs to fellow members of associations, see Horsley (ND 4:17-18).
arrangement. Whatever the case for an individual, religious observance marked the
group’s activities as surely as they did for the family, for civic life, and for the state:

It is decreed that no associations and clubs be tolerated...(however) to hold
meetings for religious purposes is not restricted so long as the Senate resolution
forbidding unpermitted clubs is not thereby contravened. (Marcian, Digest
47.22.1, trans. Ellis)

Those at the bottom of society might hope for a master’s religious good-will at the end:

In this place Chrestos buried aged Italos; he wept for his faithful slave when he
died. In return for (Italos’) good life and industrious servitude (Chrestos)
fulfilled these sacred rites for him as a favour. (I. Bithynia III.12, first century, in
Horsley, ND 3:39, his trans.)

But for those devoid of legal protection, Pythian Apollo might offer the only hope of
manumission:

[When N. N. was archon in the month of] [...] N. N. gave up to Pythian Apollo]
[a male slave by the name of Theophanes, by race...] [for the price of X silver
minae and] [he has the entire price, just as Theophanes entrusted the sale to the
god [on condition that he be free and not be seized as a slave by] anyone for the
duration of his life...Witnesses are the priests] of Apollo... (BCH 105 [1981] 461-
463, inscription at Delphi from first century BC, in Llewelyn, ND 6:72-73, his
trans.)

The gods were present on each of these occasions: at dinners, clubs, funerals, and
manumissions, and at every other family, fraternal, and civic occasion. We should not be
misled by the blandness with which the documents record the divine presence. A late
Hellenistic inscription at Arsada left testimony “for the sake of heartfelt love to the gods”
(ZPE 24 (1977) 276, in Horsley, ND 4:80, his trans.). Love, however, was not the only
emotion on hand. When mortals prayed, fear was close by; even thanksgivings were
“interwoven with ideas of propitiation” (Fox, 1988, 38). While intellectuals inferred that
prayer was a matter of aligning oneself with the logos embedded in the universe, and not
with moving the gods to change things (Seneca, Epistles 41.1; Plutarch, Isis and Osiris 1),
popular religion had never accepted this abstraction. On the contrary, high and low alike
prayed “to strike a bargain with the divinity” (Stambaugh and Balch, 1986, 129).

Intrinsic to these bargains was the need to ensure the due honour of the gods. They
might well be benevolent, but their anger could flare in a moment to wreak havoc and
misfortune. The most tangible safeguard was to take absolute care in ritual. In the case of
the cult of Men, purity depended not so much on abstinence or moral virtue, but on a
careful execution of the prescribed bathings and sacrifices. Failure could incur a sin
beyond expiation, as we read in this inscription at Sounion (Attika) from the second or
third century:

Xanthos the Lykian, slave (/) of Gaius Orbius, set up the temple of Men
Tyrannos—the god having chosen him—for good fortune. And no-one impure
is to draw near; but let him be purified from garlic and swine and woman.
When members have bathed from head to foot, on the same day they are to
enter. And a woman, having washed from head to foot seven days after
menstruation, is to enter on the same day...If anyone violates (these provisions)
his sacrifice will be unacceptable to the god. He is to provide what is
appropriate for the god...and may the god be very merciful to those who serve
in simpleness of soul...Anyone who interferes with the god's possessions or is
meddlesome, let him incur sin against Men Tyrannos which he certainly cannot
expiate... (IG II.1366, in Horsley, ND 3:20-31, his trans.)

Moreover, cultic failure carried the threat of punishment:

Do not harm the sacred fish, nor damage any of the goddess' utensils, nor carry
anything out of the sanctuary to steal it. May the one who does any of these
things be destroyed wretchedly by a terrible destruction, being eaten by fish.
(SIG 997, inscription at Smyrna from first century BC, in Connolly, 1987a, 105-
112, his trans.)

If anyone urinates here, Hekate is filled with wrath against him. (I. Eph. II.567,
in Connolly, 1987b, 175, his trans.; also I. Eph. II.569)^30

The need for ritual precision is further underscored in the following inscriptions of
ransoms for personal sins. Pointing out that the symbolaphroi appear to have had the task
of carrying certain sacred objects in cult processions, Horsley records the possibility “that a
mishap during one such occasion involving these carriers and the three brothers offended
the god, and caused them to seek release from some punishment by public confession of
their fault” (ND 3:73):

To Artemis Anaetis and Men of Tiamos, Alexander, Timothy (and) Glykon,
sons of Bollas, and the symbolaphroi, having ransomed themselves, set up [this
stele]. (CMRDM 1.57, in Horsley, ND 3:72-75, his trans.)

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^30 Gill notes that Hekate was a particular colleague of Pan, often linking up to “instill
irrational fear (literally 'Pan-ic') in travellers” (1991, 78-79).
To Men the ancestral god they all set up this altar, equally and all of them after adequate prayers. [For...] from the friendly home of our kind reaper we all made a vow and gave our hair [...] as is the custom and holy ransom. Markos, Hilaros, Epitynchos, Peitheros, Loukilios. (CMRDM 4, in Horsley, ND 3:72-75, his trans.)

Sickness was frequently attributed to ritual defilement, though the worshipper need not have been aware of the defilement (cf. Horsley, ND 4:135). One wonders how often oracles and divinations returned such answers to those perplexed by ill-health:

I have been punished by the god — enos; however because I was willing (to ask the God which sin I committed) and having received an omen telling me: ‘You are defiled’, after having made a vow I have dedicated this stone. (Pleket 14, in Kearsley, 1992b, 192, her trans.)

The personal devotions of worshippers to their gods was objectified in the sacred places, utensils, rites, and days which demarcated ritual purity. The devout worshipper must approach at the right time, in the right place, and in the manner authorised by the bearers of the tradition:

For good fortune. Summary of an ancestral law: The prytanis is to light the fire... (lengthy cultic legislation follows)... according to the ancestral practices and at which it is necessary to pray on behalf of the sacred senate and the people of Rome and the people of Ephesos... (more cultic legislation)... If any single point of the aforesaid matters is left out by the person serving as prytanis... (penalties follow)... and the kouretes and the hierophant are to make exaction for the failure to mind each single point as has been written above... (l. Eph. Ia.10, in Connolly, 1987a, 106-107, his trans.)

...it is decreed that the entire month Artemision be sacred for all its days, and that... throughout the year, feasts and the festival and the sacrifices of the Artemisia are to be conducted... (l. Eph. Ia.24, in Oster, 1987, 75-76, his trans.)

...A holy sanctuary of Isis, Sarapis and Anoubis. Let anyone who wishes to sacrifice enter the sanctuary upon purification... (BCH 102 [1978] 325-31, in Connolly, 1987a, 110, his trans.)

There were clear limits to religious pluralism when it came to a god’s honour. An inscription at Sardis from the first or second century AD employed a text from the fourth century BC to warn worshippers against polluting their devotion to Zeus through fraternising with another cult:
...(Droaphernes) instructs his (Zeus') temple-warden devotees who enter the innermost sanctum and who serve and crown the god, not to participate in the mysteries of Sabazios with those who bring the burnt offerings and (the mysteries) of Agdistis and Ma. They instruct Dorates the temple-warden to keep away from these mysteries. (CRAI 1975, 306-30, in Horsley, ND 1:21-23, his trans.)

Purity was not the only motive for upholding the honour of the gods. A city's honour rested in part on its major cults (Fox, 1988, 27-63; cf. Horsley, ND 4:81). Likewise, the link between religious benefaction and personal honours was well understood. Equally clear was the sale and use of priesthoods to consolidate social and political control (see Fox, 1988, 52-63, 76-82, 223-229). Note the laudatory conclusion to this inscription from the mid second century at Ephesus:

The proconsul Gaius Popilius Carus Pedo states: 'I learned from the decrees which was sent to me by the most illustrious council of the Ephesians...This is why I considered it necessary, since I also have regard for the reverence of the goddess and for the honour of the most illustrious city of the Ephesians, to make it known by decree that these days shall be holy and the festal holidays will be observed on these days'. (This edict was promulgated) while Titus Aelius Marcius Priscus, son of Aelius Priscus, a man very well thought of and worthy of all honour and acceptance, was leader of the festival and president of the athletic games. (I. Eph. 1a.24, in Oster, 1987, 75, his trans.)

As noted in chapter one, social rank and status provided a nexus between primary reality and the everyday. Ancient civic and religious ideals in part lived on through those wealthy families who ensured the city's renown and custom. Grave markers resounded these honours and traditions. Some recalled the dead as "manifest heroes" or "manifest gods". In such epithets, 'manifest' implied far more than 'distinguished'. Rather, "it meant that these people had appeared in dreams and visions and, in one or two cases, worked wonders to help the living" (Fox, 1988, 132; cf. Horsley, ND 3:68). The gods were also manifest in art and procession and festival. And through a departed loved one. In a second or third century memorial to a woman set up by her family and the members of her cult at Thyatira, the former priestess extended an open invitation to those seeking the truth by dream or vision:

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31 On the broad topic of epiphany, see Fox (1988, 102-167).
To Ammias, her children and the initiates of the gods set up the altar with the sarcophagus for the priestess of the gods as a memorial. And if anyone wants to learn the truth from me, let him pray at (?) the altar whatever he wants and he will get it, via a vision, during nighttime and day. (EG IV.119-120, in Horsley, ND 4:134-136, his trans.)

Ammias’ invitation may well have been “addressed to seekers after truth on a metaphysical level” (Horsley, ND 4:136). Indeed, our inscription high on the wall at Oenoanda offers a glimpse of an intellectual inquiry which may have prompted the god’s reply. But for the most part, oracles answered those everyday questions which articulated a brooding opportunity and dread:32

Am I to remain where I am going? Am I to be sold? Am I to obtain profit from my friend? Is it permitted me to make a contract with another? Am I to be restored to my position?...Am I to profit from the affair?...Am I to become successful?...Am I to become a senator?...Am I to be separated from my wife? Have I been poisoned? Am I to get a legacy? (P. Oxy. 2833, in Horsley, ND 2:43-44, trans. Browne)

Your first wife is not to remain with you. You are to become a dekaprots...You are to finish what you undertake. You are not to get a legacy. You have not been poisoned...You will see a death which you did not wish. You are not to win. Persevere. You are not to inherit...She is to miscarry and she is to be in danger. Lend with a mortgage...You are not to get the woman you want. (P. Oxy. 1477, in Horsley, ND 2:43-44, trans. Browne)

The questions may seem pedestrian and mislead as to their intensity. Likewise, it is easy to infer that the religious life of Graeco-Roman people was simply routine and mechanical. This was not always the case. Fox, in particular, goes to great length in describing the vibrancy and expectation which shaped devotion through palpable experiences of the divine in cult and oracle and dream: “as night fell, they recaptured the lost ideal of Phaeacia and the pre-Homeric past...if we miss this nightly screening of the gods, we reduce pagan religiousness to a ‘paganism’ of cult acts, brightened only by personal cults which appealed to the emotions and made their worshippers ‘new’” (Fox, 1988, 164). Cultic acts and dreams could powerfully rekindle piety (IG x 2255, in Horsley, ND 1:29-31; I. Nikaiia II, 1.1071, in Horsley, ND 4:176). An inscription from North Africa in

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32 For an extensive discussion of the nature and function of oracles in Graeco-Roman religion, see Fox (1988, 168-261). It has been somewhat commonplace amongst scholars to presume that oracles had declined in frequency and importance during this period. Fox demonstrates that this was not the case. Indeed, some shrines had boomed at this time.
the third century conveys the same tone of warmth in a dedication to mark the fulfilment of a vow:

...I Manius discharged by vow and dedicated a sacrifice for the proving of my faith and the preservation of my health. He discharged his vow with a willing spirit. (CRAI [1975] 111-118, in Horsley, ND 1:23-25, his trans.)

Dreams, sacrifices, and vows found poignant meaning in the face of Fate, Fortune, and the stars. Few epithets to the gods held such strength of desire as “(my god) controls Fate” (cf. I. Kyne 41, in Horsley, ND 1:18-21). Alongside reassurances that the god stood ready to help, various techniques flourished to make the divine presence even more secure in the struggle against oppressive powers (Fox, 1988, 260).33 It seems there was no shortage of work for the divinatory artists of the imperial period (cf. Acts 19:13-19). None of this was new. People were no more anxious, oppressed, or uncertain in imperial times than in any other age in which they had anticipated the nearness and danger of the gods.

The ‘rise’ of the mystery cults signalled neither the decline of the old gods and their rituals, nor that paganism was pressing on to its doom. Rather, the religious ‘innovations’ of the Graeco-Roman period were a final breaking through of intrusive elements built up over centuries (Brown, 1978, 1-26). What we see as the rise of the mystery cults was perhaps an elevation of the public prominence of cults long active among the lower ranks. In any case, there was little sense of competition between the older and newer cults and concurrent priesthoods were common enough. Although pluralism held sway, worshippers did not simply swallow any bizarre claim. Admittedly the tendency to laud an unusual event had not died out.34 But it was never a case of anything goes; certain cults and orgiastic rites, for example, were expressly forbidden. Moreover, the marked devotion of some worshippers invalidates the caricature of mechanistic religion. Nor were the cults, not even the imperial cult, merely vehicles of state or elite propaganda and control, though they could be exactly that (cf. Horsley, ND 1.31). Despite the authorised special effects of some shrines, worshippers of this period were no more gullible than those of any other time.35 They did not believe that statues were gods, though in certain

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33 Charms were a means of averting misfortune. But not every charm was prompted by faer: “Bring Ternoutsis whom Sophina bore, to Zosil whom Droser bore, with crazed and unceasing everlasting love, now quickly!” (unknown provenance and date; SEG 1243, in Horsley, ND 2:45-46, his trans.).

34 One particularly celebrated case was the cult which flourished from the death of Antinous, the favourite boy of Hadrian, at the Nile in the second century AD (Grant, 1960, 255-256).

35 Fox (1988) narrates a lively account of the ingenious plumbing of some statues and shrines which gave dramatic effect during rituals. He also demonstrates that for the most part this ‘deceit’ was well understood and expected (see for example, 135-136). Note also Lucian’s account of the charlatan, Alexander (ibid, 241-250).
epiphanic contexts the link was very close. Nor were the mystery cults normally sinister or on the social fringe. Over against such stereotypes we have seen the awe and intimacy of Graeco-Roman devotion to the gods coupled with a fear of their anger and an ever-present uncertainty about those powers larger and darker than themselves.

3.4.2 Paul, local religion, and the imperial cult

Despite these caveats it is nonetheless difficult to align Graeco-Roman religion with the kinds of perspective from which Paul articulated his faith. Any Gentile would have begun a cult as a simple matter of course to commemorate a hero or god (Fox, 1988, 112). But Paul’s adoration and understanding of Christ had moved in a very different direction. Likewise his speech before the council at Athens had left him no room for rapprochement with their religious orientation (Acts 17:22-31, cf. 16, 18). This was neither his first, nor his last, stand-off with Graeco-Roman religion.

After fleeing a combined Jewish-Gentile plot against them in Iconium (Acts 14:4-6), Paul and Barnabas moved to Lystra where they performed a healing miracle for a man crippled from birth (14:8-10). To the rustic Lycaonians, the apostles’ miracle was evidence of an epiphany of Zeus (Barnabas) and Hermes (Paul). Their ensuing reception was unusually welcoming, misinformed, and short-lived (14:11-18) and matches what we have seen of religious awe and the need to propitiate and solicit the gods. Paul’s plea to them to turn to the living God from “these worthless things” (touthn ton matatian, 14:15; cf. Eph 4:17), seems to have had in mind their entire religious orientation (Acts 14:11-13, 17:26-28; cf. 1 Thess 1:9; cf. Winter, 1991b, 129).

Later, at Corinth, certain Jewish leaders sought to escalate their conflict with Paul by having him indicted as in breach of the obligations of the imperial cult (Acts 18:12-13). The Jews themselves were exempt under the status of Judaism as a religio licita. Paul of course could personally lay claim to the same exemption. It seems that the Jewish leaders—and Paul himself—understood his message as falling outside the limits of Judaism, though it

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36 Barton and Horsley’s study (1981) stands out as peculiarly helpful for an understanding of the social character, location, and purpose of these groups. In their analysis of the inscription SIG 985, they highlight amongst other things the interplay between conformity and innovation, and the aptness of the group’s emphasis on egalitarianism and moral rectitude. Their comparisons between the cult and the Pauline ekklēsiai are apposite to my conclusions at the end of this section.

37 On the possibility of a local legend as the background to the Lycaonians’ enthusiasm to make proper propitiation to Zeus and Hermes, see Winter (1991b, 116-117). Note also Horsley (ND 4:241) on shouted acclamations.

38 Gill and Winter note that the episode also “raises the question of how far Paul was encountering people in the Roman eastern provinces whose worship of natural features, such as rocks and plants, derived from a much earlier period” (1994, 79). They survey the evidence for local cults and superstition at the places visited by Paul and draw tentative conclusions as to the likelihood of his encounters with these religious elements (ibid, 80-92).
was itself a highly diverse and complex religion. Much to the Jews' dismay, Gallio ruled that the dispute only involved matters related to the Jews' "own law" (18:14-16), and thus effectively reaffirmed the protection of Paul (and the local Christians?) under Judaism's legal status (see Gill and Winter, 1994).

Whether or not this ruling was mirrored or applied in other localities of Paul's travels remains an open question. Yet the alliance between Jewish leaders and Gentile men and women of prominence in order to hound Paul shows that the Jews wanted to dissociate themselves absolutely from Paul and the new group. It also shows that the Graeco-Roman civic leaders had no thought of calling for the status of religio licita to be extended to the Christians (Acts 13:50-14:19; cf. Judge, 1993b). Winter suggests that this may shed new light on the ways both Jews and Gentiles could use the obligations of the imperial cult as a means of harassing the Christians:

Given the exclusion from the Jewish synagogues, how would rank and file Christians cope with the cult? It is being suggested that, from within the ranks of the Christian communities in Galatia, there were Jewish Christians who counselled evasive action. They sought to place all Christians, whether Jew or Gentile under a Jewish, as distinct from a synagogue, umbrella. Some may even have been tempted to portray the house church in which they met as a Christian 'place of prayer' (proseuchē). There was, in the end, a clear way for the Christian community to escape the obligation of the imperial cult viz. by appearing to be wholly Jewish. (Winter, 1994b, 136, my transliteration)

If Winter's reconstruction holds, and I am inclined to think it does, then those 'from' Jerusalem may have used the pressure of obligation to the imperial cult to press their own interest in Gentile conformity to circumcision and the Sabbath. At the same time, those who had taken the drastic step of circumcision (an outrage and crime to most Graeco-Romans) would surely have welcomed the ideological foundation for their new religious conformity—a foundation which Paul sought to dismantle (Gal 3-4).

The pervasiveness of the imperial cult must have caused Paul to consider the likelihood of some kind of confrontation. His comments on religion at Athens would have touched political sensitivities given that the Areopagus was part of the "effective government of Roman Athens and its chief court" (Gill, 1994b, 447). The agora was the site for numerous dedications to the imperial family, and Paul's view entering the agora and from the hill as he spoke might well have included several prominent shrines and statues to the emperors (Acts 17:23; Hemer, 1989a, 117). Gill also suggests that sebasmata (17:23) "resonates with the worship of the imperial family, usually in a Sebasteion" (1994b,
447). The close links between the imperial cult and those of other deities at Ephesus (19:11-23) clarifies the risks Paul faced in his 'irreligious' stance. Paul found himself thrust into controversy with a highly esteemed symbol of Graeco-Roman religious life: the temple and cult of Artemis. He was also embroiled in the powerful networks of political and economic life which were inextricable from the glories of the goddess and the city (19:24-41).39

Initially, Paul's exploits, though dramatic enough, did not specifically touch on Artemis. Against a background of widespread beliefs in divine healing, sorcery, and demonic powers, the apostle's miracle working elicited awe and fear from the Ephesians (Acts 19:17).40 Amongst those who believed (cf. 17:34) were sorcerers who now willingly and publicly repudiated their previous religion and arts by burning the parchments of their trade.41 The value of the books indicates reasonable wealth on the part of their owners, and thus some prominence of social position. Whatever impact Paul had on local religion, his message now touched the nerve of the "strong and expansionist cult" of Artemis, and the pride and wealth of Ephesus, the guardian (neokoros) of the goddess (Trebilco, 1994, 336). Earlier I cited an inscription showing the importance to the Ephesian city officials of setting aside an entire month of holy days in honour of Artemis. Of particular significance in this context is the strong link it made between religious and civic pride and success: "...with the improvement of the honouring of the goddess, our city will remain more illustrious and more blessed for all time" (1. Eph. Ia.24, in Oster, 1987, 74-82, his trans.; cf. Kearsley, 1992d, 204).42

39 Several discussions in ND 4 clarify the connections between the issues. First, Kearsley's discussion "Some asiarchs at Ephesus" (46-55) clarifies that this role ought not to be confused with that of the archiereus who presided over the imperial cult. Nevertheless, there is clear documentation in at least one case, the career of Aristio, that the two roles were held by the same person, though not concurrently. Given the designation of Paul's friends as asiarchs, we can only wonder at the potential for complications in his relationship to these leaders and to other leading members of Ephesian society. Second, Oster's discussion of the inscription I. Eph. Ia.24 (74-82), which I reproduced in part earlier, notes that there "was often joint veneration of the Emperor and the Ephesian goddess" (76). Third, Horsley notes the same kind of link in relation to the mystery cult of Demeter (94-95). And, finally, the inscription I. Eph. II.251 on the base of a statue from the first century BC, underscores the connection of the veneration of emperors and local deities: Julius Caesar is "the god manifest from Ares and Aphrodite, and the general saviour of human life" (148, trans. Horsley). Note also Stoops (1989) on the political implications of the near-riot.

40 Kearsley notes that while "at several points in both the gospels and Acts, magical belief impinges on the miraculous nature of healing by both Jesus and the apostles...none of the characteristic features of magic is found in the actions of the apostles themselves or the beliefs expressed in the NT documents and it is through the reactions of others to the miracles of healing performed by Jesus and the apostles that the element of magic enters the NT world" (1992b, 195-196).

41 Trebilco notes other instances of public book burnings, often in contexts of perceived threats to the political and religious stability of the empire (1994, 315). Normally this was involuntary on the part of the owners of the works.

42 On the inscriptionsal evidence for Artemis and Ephesus, see the summary article by Oster (1987, 74-82). For a fuller treatment in relation to Acts 19, see Trebilco (1994, 312-357).
Three further features of Luke’s account stand out. First, Demetrius claimed that Paul had denigrated the idols as man-made and therefore as no divinities at all (Acts 19:26). The pattern of Paul’s speeches at Lystra and Athens makes it likely that he had again decried the local idols and their attendant religious paraphernalia as empty and futile. Second, the clerk refuted Demetrius’ serious charges: Paul was guilty neither of sacrilege (hierosulous) nor blasphemy (blasphēmountas) (19:37). Third, the town clerk appealed to the divine origin of the image of Artemis. In itself this was a standard enough claim for any cult (Trebilco, 1994, 351-353), but perhaps intended here to counter Demetrius’ accusation (just in case). What are we to make of this discrepancy? The town clerk’s ‘defence’ of Paul and Artemis suggests that, while Demetrius had probably exaggerated Paul’s ‘crimes’, the clerk could not simply afford to ignore the suspicions attaching to Paul. What mattered to the clerk was civic order, the good will of the Romans, and the reputation of the city and goddess (19:38-41). What mattered to Paul was the proclamation of his gospel and the well-being of the ekkēsia (19:30, 20:20, 17-35). In Paul’s eyes, the nexus of religion and social prestige not only created upheaval for him when he preached publicly, it also threatened the cohesion of the ekkēsia.

3.4.3 Paul and the presence of God in Christ

The conformity of Gentile Christians in the Galatian ekkēsiai to Judaism may have been indirectly aided by elements of religious syncretism. Leisured festival days were a feature of Graeco-Roman religious and civic life. At the same time, the Jewish Sabbath was well-known, and even admired by some. Moreover, both Philo and Josephus had used the terminology of cultic festival days (ekecheiriai) to characterise the Sabbath. But this common preference for sacred days found no equivalent in Paul’s gospel. As Oster concludes, “since nascent Pauline Christianity regarded holy days at best as adiaphora (Rom 14:5-12) and at worst as antithetical to the Gospel (Gal. 4:8-10; Col. 2:16), a Christian living in the shadow of Paul’s Gospel would have little hope of finding an equivalent to this regulated component of his previous piety” (1987, 78). The ease with which Paul moved his indictment of religion from a Jewish frame of reference (Gal 3:6-4:7) to a Graeco-Roman one (4:8-9) underscored his common verdict: both were an enslavement (3:1-5, 4:9, 5:1-12); both were incompatible with the gospel (4:12-20). Over against all such religiosity, Paul emphasised the role of the Spirit in transforming the community gathered in Christ (3:2-5, 4:6, 5:5, 13-26). The presence of God was no longer available to the Galatians through ritual observance, neither Jewish nor Graeco-Roman. Rather, God was present with his people by the Spirit who made himself known in their fellowship.
This displacement of the cult by the fellowship of believers also appears as a theme in Ephesians. Whereas Graeco-Roman religion employed cult, oracle, epiphany, dream, and magical technique to access the presence and will of God, Paul located these in the person of Christ, in whom God had come to dwell with his people (Eph 1:3-14, 2:21-22). His will was now revealed in the identity and history of Christ (1:3-14, 3:2-11). There was no further presence or will to attain or discern, only a deepening experience of awe and intimacy grounded in what had already been made present (1:15-23, 3:16-19). In the same way, the believers’ security from the darker forces allowed no room for ritual or magical technique to honour, placate or manipulate these powers (2:1-10, 3:10, 6:10-18). Nor were they an appropriate means to honour Christ. Without shrine or image, the gathering retained none of the standard religious features of an association. The emphasis fell instead on Christ having gifted his people to ensure clarity of understanding and love amongst themselves (4:1-16). The contrast to the futility of Graeco-Roman belief and practice was stark (4:17-19). Similar themes were at work at Colossae.

The syncretism of Col 2:16-23 provides a fascinating portrait both of the struggles of this ekklesiа, and of Paul’s repudiation of religion. His indictment again covered both distinctively Jewish (2:11-14) and Graeco-Roman themes (2:8), and the many areas of their intersection (2:15-23). Referring briefly to 2:18, Kearsley notes that the Hellenistic synthesis of the Jewish theme of angels into their own worship, typified in the cult of Hosios and Dikaioı, may well illuminate the fascination some Colossians had with angels (1992e, 209). This fascination was part of a potpourri of religious legislation (2:14-19, 23) asceticism (2:20-22) and wisdom-cum-philosophical interests (1:9, 19, 28, 2:2-4, 8-9, 22-23). Paul’s verdict was sharp: the traditions appeared wise and valuable, but were actually useless. There was no place for religious practice and elitism when every legitimate goal—wisdom, freedom, security, intimacy with God, certainty, fulness, hope beyond the grave—had been guaranteed by the death and resurrection of Christ (1:12-20, 2:9-15, 3:1-4).

Mention of elitism draws us back once more to Corinth. There was a religious dimension to the elitism of ‘the strong’ within the Corinthian ekklesiа. But unlike the ekklesiа at Galatia, Ephesus and Colossae, the Corinthian elite had partly inverted Graeco-

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43 I do not mean to gloss over those places where Paul’s language sounded similar to conventional deference to the will of the gods (eg. Rom 1:10, 15:32, 1 Cor 4:9; cf. Horsley, ND 1:51-54 for the Graeco-Roman side). But even in these contexts Paul’s use seems tied to his more frequent appellations of the will of God as the plan of salvation and re-creation revealed in Christ. In this sense, will of God and gospel were virtual synonyms for Paul.

44 Arnold (1989, 51-59) provides a succinct summary of the supremacy of Christ over the powers in Ephesians. It should be noted that no consensus exists about the identity of these powers. Over against the interpretation of them as social and political forces, which is the plainest sense of the vocabulary (archai, dunamais, exousia) I find myself drawn to reconsider them in terms of both Jewish and Graeco-Roman beliefs about demonic powers.
Roman religiosity, rather than simply accommodating it. Seizing on the powerful desacralising of life in Paul’s gospel, they had coined the slogan “we know that an idol is nothing” (1 Cor 8:4). They had also seen through the erroneous assumption of the divinity of those “so-called” ‘gods on earth’ among them, the past and current emperors (8:4-6). But this ‘irreligious’ elite was not attuned to the dying and rising of Christ. Nor did they recognise that the religious pluralism of Corinth threatened their allegiance to Christ, even as idolatry had brought Israel down in the desert (10:1-22; cf. Winter, 1990, 215-219). Paul no doubt upheld their repudiation of idols, but the implications they had drawn had again lost sight of both the exclusive claim of Christ’s lordship, and of the equality of their brethren (9:1-27, 10:22-11:1). It was more than a fallacy to move from the radicalness of the gospel to indifference about the impact of one’s behaviour—it could destroy one for whom Christ had died (8:11). The issue largely concerned invitations to a kîne (10:22; idem, 1991b, 130-134; cf. Horsley, ND 1:5-9). Such invitations inevitably would have involved the Christian guest in standing by while the hosts performed the customary libations. Apparently, Paul was not afraid of this and saw no reason to cut contact because of it.45 But what did preoccupy him was the possible loss of reputation for the gospel with unbelievers, and of the security of the faith of the ‘weak’ (10:28-11:1).

The ‘irreligion’ of the strong did not dissuade them from mimicking the social prestige attached to cultic piety and leadership. In this regard, Gill (1990, 247-248) notes that Paul’s argument against men covering their heads during the gatherings was likely directed at their imitation of the stance of an officiating priest in the local cult (1 Cor 11:4-10). Social rank was once again the issue since priesthoods were “frequently named alongside other civic positions of authority in public inscriptions” (ibid, 248). In other words, the elite continued to claim the conventional marks of religious leadership in order to parade their status over the have-nots. Forbes (1987) argues that the divisions and disorder evident in the Corinthian assemblies (1 Cor 11-12, 14) were likewise about social elitism and exclusivism. Contrary to the consensus opinion, he demonstrates that there is no evidence that Christian glossolalia had parallels in the prophetic or ecstatic practices of Graeco-Roman cultic and oracular shrines. Paul’s concern was not about Christian versus Hellenistic models of prophecy or ecstatic speech—but about elitism. Although the Corinthian ekklēsia was decidedly devoid of the standard religious conventions, it nonetheless had socially prominent members willing to turn prophecy and the other gifts

45 Note however that Witherington (1993) argues that eidololathoton in both Acts 15:29 and 1 Cor 10:19 refers to meat sacrificed and eaten in the temple precincts. He deduces from this that both passages were intended to prohibit attendance at pagan festivals and banquets. Witherington may well be right about the matter of attendance at the temples, but 1 Cor 10:27-30 still left the way open for Corinthian Christians to be guests at private meals (which could of course be in the temple dining rooms) at which their pagan hosts would observe customary religious practice.
given by the Spirit for the well-being of the body into new indicators of their own religious and civic status.

Finally, our discussion presses the question to what extent it is accurate to view Paul’s gospel and εκκλησιαί as religious. Judge has argued that to do so is to mislocate them under an “unhistorical rubric” (1980a, 212). By this he drew attention to the redefinition of religion as one legacy of the rapprochement between the Christian message and the classical heritage in late antiquity. In that the Christian emphasis on a body of belief became absorbed into pagan religious experience, the West inherited a conflated definition: religion equals ritual plus belief. Given that it is a simple matter to find the beliefs in Paul, the scholar disposed to see Paul as religious has only to locate the ritual. Baptism, and the meal in 1 Cor 11 are, of course, traditionally the prime candidates. It is in this sense that Meeks insists, contra Judge, that Paul be understood as religious: “Christianity did not yet have a cultus of the sort that most established cultic associations practised...(and) differed in significant ways from the initiatory mysteries...(but) it did have an initiatory ritual...a ritual meal central to its common life, and rapidly growing traditions of other sorts of ritualized behaviour” (1983, 84, cf. 140-142). But the argument seems to load the term ‘ritual’ with the weight of Graeco-Roman religion. I do not dispute that Paul’s εκκλησιαί had ritual practices in the sense of routine events carrying ideological and social significance. So did other Graeco-Roman non-cultic groups, not to mention civic occasions. But I maintain that to use the presence of a routine event to identify Paul’s εκκλησιαί with Graeco-Roman religion begs too many questions about both phenomena.

On the Graeco-Roman side, even the more contemplative and moralistic expressions of piety did not exist in isolation from cult. On Paul’s side, the communal meal (1 Cor 11:17-34) might be seen by analogy as some kind of extended κλίνη held at the standing invitation of Christ, at which it may be inferred that prayers of thanksgiving were made. But while that may appear religious to onlookers of later generations, it would at best have been a very inadequate religious expression in the eyes of Paul’s contemporaries. Indeed, if the resemblance to a κλίνη was at all clear to Paul and his εκκλησία, and that is mere conjecture, this would only affirm that they had so radically reworked their expression of the presence and worship of God as to appear irreligious to a Graeco-Roman outsider. As Horsley notes:

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46 It is interesting to note how some scholars who are otherwise aware of the Graeco-Roman intellectual and social milieu readily import into their discussions of Paul the language and conventions of the post-Pauline churches; namely, liturgy, eucharist, sacraments, ordination, worship services, ecclesiastical offices, and the like. The circularity of these studies suggests that a hermeneutic is at work which has little to do with the canons of historical scholarship. I will return to this in chapters six and seven.
“those to whom cult associations...were the norm must have found the Christians distinctly peculiar in their religious habits, if not downright irreligious. Where were their specially set-aside cult centres, their statues of the god, their cultic acts (mysteries, sacrifices, etc.), and their official hierarchy?” (ND 1:23)\(^\text{47}\)

Paul’s \textit{ekklēsiai} struggled with the lingering impact of the paradigms of religion and their attendant social implications. His gospel, however, left no room for rapprochement. Religion, in any form, was the suppression of the truth through the inversion of the Creator-creature relationship (Rom 1:18-25). It was a captivity to the elemental spirits (\textit{stoiχeia}, Gal 4:9, Col 2:20). It was the futility of a world passing away (Col 2:20-23, Eph 4:17-19). Paul typically avoided religious vocabulary except where he could use it in marked contrast (cf. Horsley, ND 1:14). The worship which Paul envisaged was a transformation of everyday experience aided, in part, by a refusal to conform to the religious patterns of the present age (Rom 12:1-2). It did not take long, however, for religion to reassert its hold.\(^\text{48}\)

3.5 PAUL AND MORALITY

3.5.1 Moral philosophy and the progress to perfection

Idealism pervaded the intellectual and social paradigms of the Graeco-Roman world. This was made clear in our earlier discussion (chapter one) of the theoretical and personal interdependence of social and metaphysical hierarchies. Philosophers were predominantly men from positions of social privilege in close touch with civic and

\(^{47}\) For a detailed comparative study of a cult and Paul’s \textit{ekklēsiai}, see Barton and Horsley (1981). While showing certain links between the groups in terms of morality and fraternity, they spell out clearly the “remarkably non-cultic character” of Paul’s groups (30; also 33, 39). The existence of a private group of Christians would not have been out of the ordinary for a pagan visitor, only what did and didn’t happen (32; cf. Banks, 1985b). They conclude that the non-cultic character of the \textit{ekklēsia}, together with the emphasis on apprehending true knowledge, tends to reinforce Judge’s portrait of the Christian groups as “scholastic communities” (40; Judge, 1960c, 125, 137).

\(^{48}\) Like the drift into theology in the early church, the subject of the resurgence of religious conventions is vast (see Fox, 1988, 263-681). Again, see the sections on “Biblical and Related Citations” and “Ecclesiastics” in most volumes of the series \textit{New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity} (Horsley, 1981-1988; Llewelyn (1992, 1995, and ongoing). Particularly relevant are the numerous examples of the adoption of religious language and conventions in the first few centuries after Paul, such as charms, holy places, relics, imprecations on epitaphs, providence, ritual purity, Fate, rites for healing, etc. The religious formulae of Christian and pagan papyri are so close as to make difficult their respective classification (cf. Horsley, ND 1:64). Llewelyn provides a succinct summary of the shifts in his comparison of the use of \textit{leitourgia} in Paul and Clement (ND 7:105-111).
political affairs. Understandably, then, whether deliberately or otherwise, they articulated ‘the good’ as largely consistent with prevailing social expectations and ideals. Nature and reason revealed the propriety of rank, vindicating both the lofty stations of superior men, and the vast gulf separating them from their inferiors. In practice, the adornment of soul so prized by the moralist was as close as the eulogy of a powerful, independent man, sterilised of his everyday passions.

The ideal man, the goal of the moral philosophers, was truly free, without fear, doing nothing to excess, the epitome of self-control, in total mastery of his inner self, clothed in virtue, and safe from assault (Seneca, On the Firmness of the Wise Man 6.3-8). This is the man “who lives as he wills, who is subject neither to compulsion, nor hindrance, nor force, whose choices are unhampered, whose desires attain their end, whose aversions do not fall into what they would avoid” (Epictetus, Discourse, 4.1.1-2, trans. Oldfather). His superiority is assured (Dio Chrysostom, Oration, 49.11). Such a man is in full possession of the salvation which philosophy alone can offer (Malherbe, 1986, 60).

Not that all philosophers agreed on the goals and means and efficacy of philosophical enlightenment. Plutarch sought the truer experience of being, beyond the changing and temporal, in conformity to God, who “as Plato says, offers himself to all as a pattern of every excellence, thus rendering human virtue, which is in some sort an assimilation to himself, accessible to all who can ‘follow God’” (Moralia 550D, trans. de Lacy and Einarson). Stoics likewise looked to be conformed to the divine. But whereas Plutarch’s ideal kept a place for the emotions (Moralia 440D), Musonius’ man had so contemplated the divine and nature as to have eliminated emotion along with all ‘externals’: “Therefore, as God, through the possession of these virtues, is unconquered by pleasure or greed; is superior to desire, envy and jealousy; is high-minded, beneficent, and kindly (for such is our conception of God), so also man in the image of Him, when living in accord with nature, should be thought of as being like Him” (Fragment 17, trans. Lutz).

Few if any Epicureans pursued the kind of hedonism with which they were maligned. Although they preferred their communities to public life, and disdained the

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49 Dio echoes the virtue of a long history of family benefaction to a city which is commonly attested in honorific inscriptions: “Now with reference to my father, there is no need for me to tell whether he was a good man, for you are always singing his praises, both collectively and individually, whenever you refer to him, as being no ordinary citizen...Again, no one could say of my grandfather either that he disgraced the city or that he spent nothing on it out of his own means. For he spent on public benefactions all that he had from his father and his grandfather, so that he had nothing left at all” (Orations 46.2-3, trans. Clarke).

50 I am indebted to Malherbe (1977b, 1986) for my initial awareness of the literature of the Graeco-Roman moral philosophers, and for many of the primary sources referenced in this short section.
philosophic self-image of hardship, the pleasure they sought was nonetheless austere:
"When, therefore, we maintain that pleasure is the end, we do not mean the pleasures of
profligates and those that consist in sensuality...but sober reasoning, searching out the
motives...and banishing mere opinions" (Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers
10.131, trans. Hicks). Their pleasure was not unlike the tranquility and moderation which
the Skeptics sought in conformity to those customs and laws of antiquity (Sextus
Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism 3.235-238). Diogenes, the Cynic, would have had
nothing of this. Nature has been so obscured by convention that the one who seeks self-
sufficiency (autarkeia) must steel himself for a rigorous life: "Poor soul, there is no harsher
burden for you than the ways of your forefathers and of the tyrants...you need a whip and
an overlord and not someone who will admire and flatter you" (Pseudo-Diogenes, Epistle

Though the moralists' views of the ideal life were diverse, a certain unity showed in
their understanding of the role of reason and nature. Likewise in their social agendas.
Each cultivated a stable and serene inner life in accord with nature. None had any serious
agenda to subvert the structures of society; neither the small communities of Epicureans,
nor even the shameless, idealised Cynics (Meeks, 1986, 60-61). The common task was to
adorn the soul through reason, lifting it above those internal and external forces which rob
it of its power and serenity (Musonius Rufus, Fragment 16; Dio Chrysostom, Orations 78.37-
45; Epictetus, Discourse 3.22.38-49). Armed by reason and rigorous self-examination
against every vice and passion, the philosopher was the model of the ideal and noble
character (Dio Chrysostom, Oration 17.1-11, 32.7-12; Julian, Oration 6.200-201; Plutarch,
Fragment 148).

It was axiomatic in the philosophers' world that the perfect is unchanging and thus
cannot be improved. The sage was thus unmoved in his inner man no matter how he was
buffeted from without. In this paradigm, change of character indicated the baser passions.
But the sage was an ideal few philosophers claimed to have attained. Rather, they
emphasised progress in the virtues of the philosophic life (Seneca, On the Firmness of the
Wise Man 6). Such progress was focused on self-development and usually entailed a strict
regime (Epictetus, Discourse 1.4.18-21). Indeed, moral progress was the philosopher's
righteousness (Seneca, Epistles 52.1-9; Dio Chrysostom, Oration 77/78.37-45).

51 The image of Cynics as generally vulgar and repulsive "reflects a view presented in many
of Lucian's satires; but that view hardly comports with Lucian's view of Demonax, or with the
writings of Dio Chrysostom, who, even during his Cynic period, could hardly have been accused of
vulgarity" (Malherbe, 1977a, 49).
Plutarch’s essay, *On Being Aware of Moral Progress*, encapsulates many of the perceptions of progress held in common by intellectuals of the first century. Beneath progress stand the twin pillars of reason and that “exalted, divine state” of absolute detachment (*Moralia*, 83E, trans. Kidd).\(^{52}\)

...people who are progressing, and who have already ‘fashioned a fine foundation’ for their life (as if it were a home for the gods and kings), do not admit things chosen at random, but use reason as a straight-edge by which to apply and fit every single part together. (*Moralia*, 86A)

And there is the story about Pyrrho that once when he was endangered by a storm at sea, he pointed to a piglet which was happily tucking into some barley that had been spilled, and told his companions that anyone who did not want to be disturbed by events should use the rational mind and philosophy to develop a similar detachment. (*Moralia*, 82F)

In the same way, people whose irrational aspect has been tamed and civilized and checked by reason find that it loses its readiness to use its desires to act outrageously and unconventionally...If as a result of training, detachment can gain control over even the body...then naturally this increases the plausibility of suggesting that training can take hold of the emotional part of the mind and, so to speak, smooth it and regularise it by suppressing its illusions and impressions at all levels, including dreaming. (*Moralia*, 83BC)

When reason and detachment have their way the arduous journey towards progress becomes easier:

...the path ceases being steep or excessively sheer: it becomes easy, level and manageable. It is as if repeated efforts levels the path, as though the journey creates a light and a brightness in philosophy, to replace the perplexity, uncertainty and vacillation which students of philosophy come across at first... (*Plutarch, Moralia*, 77D)

The philosopher’s success as a guide depended on the state of his students. In the story of the conversion of Polemo, his aptitude for philosophy was taken to indicate a natural endowment of wisdom. His progress simply began the transformation which put him back on the path of his true nature (*Lucian, The Double Indictment* 17; cf. Musonius Rufus, *Fragment* 2). Yet “not all who listen to philosophers go away enraptured and wounded, but only those who previously had in their nature some secret bond of kinship

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\(^{52}\) The following translations from Plutarch’s essay are each by I. Kidd (1992).
with philosophy” (Lucian, Nigrinus 37, trans, Harmon). The student only moves forward when he becomes serious about the task: “it is only when students of philosophy stop using arguments for display and affectedness and turn to the kinds of argument which have an impact on the character and the emotions that they begin to make genuine, unassuming progress” (Plutarch, Moralia, 79B).

Generally, the more ‘private’ philosophers were optimistic about the human condition, while the experience of the masses made the more ‘public’ ones pessimistic (Musonius Rufus, Fragment 2; cf. Dio Chrysostom, Oration 13.13; Malherbe, 1986, 26, 40-47). The Cynic was convinced that only the tough would progress (Pseudo-Diogenes, Epistle 29.4-5). In an image recalling Plato’s famous cave simile, Maximus of Tyre vividly contrasted the slavery of all men and that goal of freedom which had led the Cynic to choose a life devoid of commitments (Discourse 36). Stoics tended towards the middle ground: one might move from vice to virtue, but it was unlikely. In this spirit, Seneca offered a typology of the progress men make and of the likelihood of them going further (Epistles 52.1-9; also Plutarch, On Listening to Lectures 46D-47D). The upshot of this was that “one must not talk to a man unless he is willing to listen...(unlike the Cynics) who employed an undiscriminating freedom of speech and offered advice to any who came in their way” (Seneca, Epistles 29.2, trans. Gummere). A man must face the prospects of the challenge and make every effort without being disheartened by his slow progress (Plutarch, On Listening to Lectures 46D-47D).

Vice, however, turns progress into a fight. To the Cynic, a man’s vices showed the absurdity of his life (Dio Chrysostom, Oration 4.83-96). Eschewing such an extreme, the Stoic armed himself with reason to face irrational matter: “some things are high above us, as though they had come forth from the purest substance and are moving evenly while all things in them are accomplished according to the principles of nature...but others are earthly exactly as if they had sediment and mud as the substance of nature” (Hierocles, On Duties 1.3.53-54, trans. Malherbe; cf. Plato, Timaeus 42D-43C). Self-control was thus paramount to imitating the perceived order amongst the gods and the universe (Malherbe, 1986, 88). Accordingly, moralists produced lists of vices and virtues to ground morality in the order of nature, particularly in the realm of the household relationships.53

Working from a “popular moral ideal of reciprocity” such as the Golden Rule, philosophers focused on the order of nature to be discerned and emulated within social relationships (Malherbe, 1986, 93; Hierocles, On Duties 4.27.20-23). Nature itself showed

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53 On the Haustafel, see the texts and discussion in Malherbe (1986, 85-104, 124-129). Also, Llewelyn (ND 6:18-23) discusses a koine paraphrase (P. Haun, II.13) of the Letter of Melissa, a well-known exhortation to feminine piety and virtue from the Pythagorean corpus.
the propriety of governor-to-governed in social relationships (Hierocles, On Duties 4.22.21-24). Likewise, a man’s leadership of his household revealed his potential for civic affairs (Plutarch, Advice to Bride and Groom 144CD). Thus for most philosophers, withdrawal from public life was the way of all ignorant men (Seneca, Moral Epistles 68.3-6). Once again, the social position of the philosophers was always close at hand. Indeed, while many moralists applauded a limited amount of personal labour by the teacher as an exemplar, nonetheless they frequently held labours, trades and merchandising to be irrational and undignified (Musonius Rufus, Fragment 11; Philodemus, On Edification 23; Cicero, On Duties 1.150-151; cf. Malherbe, 1977a, 24-25). This verdict was no different than one would expect from those of privileged ranks and their peers.

The call to progress by imitation necessitated the highest integrity on the philosopher’s part. There must be the utmost congruence between his word and deeds (Pseudo-DioGenes, Epistle 15; Julian, Oration 7.214; Lucian, Icaromenippus 29.311). He must speak without affectation (Seneca, Epistles 75). He must have keen discernment for the timing of a word (Plutarch, How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend 73C-74E). His speech and writing should be dignified, measured, and “capable of effecting change” (Malherbe, 1986, 68). The wise man will not work the crowd as the sophists do, but remain wary of public admonition which may only harden the audience (Seneca, Epistles 40.1-8, 13-14; Plutarch, How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend 70D-71C). He will genuinely seek to aid his hearers’ progress, yet exercise due caution lest this commitment cause him to adapt too far to his audience (Dio Chrysostom, Oration 77/78.37-45). In the end, commitment and community must give way to independence and self-development.

Nowhere was the moralist’s integrity more critical than in the face of hardships. The wise man does not choose hardships, nor does he flee them, but engages them for his progress and to justify his superiority. Hardships are the real opponents for the philosopher to conquer as he furthers his quest for happiness and virtue (Dio Chrysostom, Oration 8.9-16). Moreover, it was adversity which tested and revealed the wise man’s virtues and glory, and showed “what sort of person a man is who follows the will of nature” (Epictetus, Discourses 3.20.13, trans, Oldfather; cf. 3.10.11). Of such were the moralists’ ideals of progress and perfection.

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54 On the place of hardships in the moral theories and self-understanding of the Hellenistic and Graeco-Roman philosophers, see Fitzgerald (1988, 33-116).
3.5.2 The social structure of honour, obligation, and virtue

The broad themes of this moral idealism were well known through the preaching of sophists and other popularisers of philosophy. Yet only a relative handful of people would have constructed their lives on the ideals of the philosophers. For the majority, high and low, morality was shaped by their experience of obligation and virtue within social relationships. Indeed, this held true even for the intellectually elite. Thus, for example, what mattered to Pseudo-Isocrates was that one “do honor to the divine power at all times, but especially on occasions of public worship; for thus you will have the reputation both of sacrificing to the gods and of abiding by the laws” (To Demonicus 13, trans. Norlin).55 Turning from the ideals of moralists to the everyday realities of urban behaviour, it becomes clear that the moral ideology of Graeco-Roman cities was maintained first and foremost in those traditions which upheld the stratification of society.

The chief means of regulating this ideology were the traditions of benefaction and patronage, the conventions of reciprocity, and the associated inscriptions of honour and virtue (Horsley, ND 2:106). Benefactions and honours maintained the good order of society. While liturgies provided the basic infrastructure for city life (cf. Llewelyn, ND 7:93-105), much of the cost and oversight of major public works was carried by individuals through their public benefactions.56 Over and above the concerns and structures of economic and physical well-being, a city’s social health depended in no small way on its civic pride and spirit. Love of honour marked “a very fine man” as one in whom the whole city could find reason for pride and emulation, even as “of first rank in the state” (IK 8.32, in Horsley, ND 4:172, his trans.). In this way the public largesse of the civic elite perpetuated their prestige and power. Moreover, they were confirmed as the carriers of tradition. Indeed, a benefactor’s faithfulness to his family’s reputation of generosity toward the city was a critical indicator of his virtue (Llewelyn, ND 7:239).57 Likewise, a great man’s gifts validated his piety; the gods loved a cheerful giver with an eye to cultic proprieties. Benefactions for sacrifices, banquets, public spectacles, and festivals

55 The close connections of philosophers and sophists to civic affairs is underscored in honorific inscriptions which variously praise them as benefactors in the more usual sense, and also for their ‘gifts’ of philosophy to a city. For a discussion of several of these texts, with passing comments on the proximity of the teaching of the more ‘formal’ philosophers to that espoused by the popularisers, see Horsley (ND 4:67-73; also 4:40-46).

56 A mid third century inscription from Ephesus honours one M. Aurelius who “oversaw the most important tasks of the state” (T. Eph VII 1.2071, in Horsley, ND 4:172, his trans.). For an in-depth study of inscriptions to benefactors, see the texts in Dunker (1982, 57-316) and his discussion of the character of public benefactions (ibid., 393-416). See also Kearsley (1994, 233-241).

57 In the Graeco-Roman period, the lauding of ancestry and tradition was widespread. Speaking in particular of an epitaph text of the mid-second century (P. Oxy. 3283), Judge’s comments are apposite for other features of Graeco-Roman city life: “It is certain that the whole cultural tradition underwent a process of crystallisation during the first century of our era. Classicism now emerged” (1982, 18).
galvanised not only the donor’s piety, virtue, prestige, and power, but also the due order of society (cf. Llewelyn, ND 7.238). Likewise, the honours returned by the city ensured its own pride and reputation. Both the donor and the recipients received what they paid for.

A society needs a means of enshrining its pride and moral code. The Graeco-Roman city canonised its morality in public inscriptions to the honour, piety, and virtues of its benefactors. These inscriptions demonstrated their affairs on earth as the replica of the divine order. Just as the divine was the source of virtue in the moralists’ schemes, so the honorific inscriptions of notable citizens mirrored the gods’ benefactions to mankind. While reason indicated God-likeness to the philosopher, public largesse communicated the same lofty status to a far wider audience. Indeed, few actions so clearly demonstrated the ‘divinity’ of a great man as his gifts. His magnanimity was fixed in stone as the hallmark of piety and virtue.

Benefactions and inscriptions underscored the respective roles of the greater and the lesser and, accordingly, secured the inherent moral rectitude of the courtesies and obligations of the social hierarchy. Indeed, a man only needed to pass through the markets and temple precincts to know his place. If the formal inscriptions escaped his attention, he could always read the graffiti:

Greetings, Eulalios, a revered person desired by the gods. May you live forever, and forever let your life increase. For you provide friendship to everyone, with good foresight, together with the gifts and joyous banquets of the ambrosian (plenty) which you possess. (I. Eph. II.555, in Horsley, ND 4:153, his trans.).

Graveyards preached the same homily. On the tombs of great and small, epitaphs declaimed the sentiments of popular philosophy, piety, and morality: “as you look at this image reflect upon your end and do not treat life as though you had forever to live” (Pfuhl/Möbius I.847, in Horsley, ND 4:43-44, his trans.). If not in life, then in death, the public would take note of one who had conformed to that order which marked a cultured Hellenistic city:

...since Theophilos...is of very noble ancestral stock, having contributed all good-will towards his country...being amicable to the citizens and in concord with his wife Apphia...it is resolved that Theophilus be honoured with a painted portrait and a gold bust and a marble statue...and that this decree be read aloud (published?) so that all may know that such people who exercise their life on behalf of their country meet with such a testimony. (75/76AD, AE 808, in Horsley, ND 2:58-60, his trans.)
Here lies Valeria, daughter of Marcus, of free-born status from Caesarea in Mauritania. She was kind, affectionate, dignified, blameless: (side 2) she loved her husband and her children, and was faithful to her marriage... (Cairo, first or second century, SEG 1536, in Horsley, ND 3:40-43, his trans.)

At the same time, an epitaph made sure that passers-by noted the piety and virtue of the living who had fulfilled their obligations and extended due courtesies to the last:

...Out of respect and love for what is good her husband, Lucius Dexios from Herculaneum, buried her. (ibid)

In this place Chrestos buried aged Ita... (and) fulfilled these sacred rites for him as a favour. (first century, i. Bithynia III.12, in Horsley, ND 3:39, his trans.)

Morality was more than the obligations and courtesies of rank. For many it was inextricably intertwined with the piety, ritual exactitude, and fraternity of small cultic associations, those extensions of the oikos which had become a feature of imperial times. In these groups, devotion to the gods and to the fraternity of members bound the initiate to household and civic obligations and scruples which exceeded those of outsiders (Barton and Horsley, 1981, 19-21, 35). Yet a person’s rank was his or her morality in the profoundly important sense that the vast bulk of expectations which shaped public behaviour were nested in a person’s social place. Indeed, if the small cultic fraternities at all indicate a growing failure of the oikos and the polis to adequately satisfy a man’s sense of purpose, it was not because his behaviour was less structured by patronage and rank, but because these mechanisms continued to define his moral experience, albeit unsatisfactorily. Indeed, as Judge has noted, “one of the critical steps towards breaking the original family domination of Greek society had been the defining of rights of spontaneous association” (1960a, 40).58

Everyday realities were nowhere near as fixed as the theorists’ models of a greater reality. This was equally true of the social hierarchy and its morality. In this respect, benefactions and inscriptions not only marked the rigidity of rank in the Graeco-Roman world, but also the dynamics of status. Following Judge,59 we may define rank as a social (and usually legal) position which carried responsibilities and obligations to others, especially to those of other ranks. Status, on the other hand, was the prestige of a rank without its obligations. Ambition was generally applauded, and where it flourished,

58 On the function and influence of the republic, the household, and the ‘club’, see Judge (1960a, 18-48).
59 The delineation and distinction of rank and status in the Graeco-Roman world has been a hallmark of Judge’s perspectives on the social identity of Paul, his associates, ekklesiai, and opponents (note especially 1960a,c, 1968, 1972b, 1975, 1980a, 1982, 1984, 1993a).
status tended to convert itself into rank. Rank thus tended to be the fossilised status of the past (1982, 9). In this sense, honorific inscriptions and graffiti recorded the evolution of social order. They portrayed both the aspirations and means of ambition and, in due time, the public endorsements which had in effect created new rank from status.60

Honorable and eulogistic inscriptions portrayed the ideal of the well-rounded man—good family, dignified manner, strength of character, just, pious, ambitious for honour, moderate in everything—progressing in stature:

...embellishing by his dignified behaviour the progress towards betterment which Fortune has bestowed. (I. Eph. 1a27, in Horsley, ND 4:36, his trans.)

...and good bearing, treating them with respect...with understatement and moderation...hating the bad and loving the good, in nothing neglectful of what relates to honour and fame for the sake of the memorable and praiseworthy establishment of his existing preference for the best...guiding everyone to become emulators of excellent deeds, delegating men to bring forward a proposal for the honours...And the people, being familiar both with the man's love of fame and with his justice... (I. Eph. 6)61

...in family and worth distinguished...displaying a good disposition...to adorn with his seriousness of character, both piously and proudly... (I. Eph. 27)

[(This honours) Heraclides, priest] of Artemis, and benefactor of the people, for his own comprehensive virtue and for his piety towards Artemis and for his scholarly power and trustworthiness and for his public goodwill...and honours his wife) for her own moderation... (I. Eph. 683 A)62

The sage and the great man were hewn from the same rock. It was not as though the philosophers' man was the individualist; he was the city's man, the one motivated by social concern. The sage took seriously his divine commission to guide; and no one flinched at the benefactor's love of personal honour.

Nothing conveyed this spirit of self-interest within social harmony more simply and clearly than those punchy little imperatives, the maxims cherished by elite and folksy

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60 MacMullen notes the profound influence of status and ambition over the society of Paul's day: "Philotimia...No word, understood to its depths, goes further to explain the Graeco-Roman achievement" (1974, 215).

61 This and the following texts are from the seminar notes by Judge (1993c, d). Judge's translations are deliberately stiffened in order to preserve the sequence of ideas: "A fluent translation only breaks up the pattern of thought, vital to the impact of a eulogistic text" (ibid, 19).

62 Although honorific inscriptions for wealthy women benefactors often used the same vocabulary as those for men, the contrast in this text captures the broader cultural realities well: the husband's success; the wife's moderation.
alike. While addressing themselves to the person as an individual, for the most part independently of rank, the maxims nonetheless echoed the social world of men of honours and the obligations and opportunities of friendship.\textsuperscript{63} One should “obey” and “honour” the “good man” and “yield to the just”. At the same time, a gentleman “loves friendship” and is quick to “grant” and “return a favour”. Moderation is paramount to one who pursues “nothing in excess”. And harmony. The tempered man guards his speech, keeps anger, envy, and strife in check, and is careful to “speak well of all”. He is able to look within himself without accusation or regret; for as much as he must “fear what contolls” him, and “think as a mortal”, he knows to “grieve not at life”, “neither worry about everything”. Indeed, a right knowledge of oneself is not introspection, but to “pursue glory” and to “respect oneself”. From the cradle to the grave, his life is held in check: “As a child well behaved...in youth restrained...in middle life just...in old age prudent...at the end not worrying”. Self-interested, self-protecting, moderate, courteous, harmonious: the quintessential family and civic man.

The moral traditions should not be divorced from one another, but seen for what they were: namely, complementary perspectives on the same paradigm. While we must not blur their individual emphases, the differences between them lay not so much in the character of the morality they propagated, as in the means by which they articulated the twin ideals of conformity and progress:

\textsuperscript{63} The quotations of maxims which follow are from Judge (1993a). The specific texts are Stobaeus, Eclogae III 1.173, I. Kyzikos II 2, the Al-Khanum stele, and P. Athen. Univ. 2782. The translations are by Judge.
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Figure 8: Three complementary traditions of Graeco-Roman morality

The ‘good’ of ethical theory translated itself into the social parameters and systems of rank, friendship, benefaction, reciprocity, and honour. Or, perhaps more accurately, the philosophers largely abstracted the mechanisms of society as the rough shape of their own moral ideals. Maxims distilled these ideals. Or was it the reverse—the ideal giving voice to a sapiential tradition of greater antiquity? Likewise with the relationship between aphorism and social structure. On the one hand, maxims provided a ready reckoner for obligation and prestige. On the other hand, they expressed that ancient moderation between ambition and courtesy which the great sons of the polis had mastered.

Each perspective recalls those hallmarks of primary reality which we have noted in other contexts—serenity, order, immutability. They made the rectitude of the social system self-evident: a system simultaneously able to hold the have-nots in their place, while trading status as the currency of new rank.

### 3.5.3 Paul and the crux of Graeco-Roman morality

An intelligent, experienced man who spoke and wrote on topics of personal and social behaviour would inevitably echo the mores of Graeco-Roman household and civic life, those “widespread sapiential traditions” of his day (Malherbe, 1977a, 42). Paul did. Indeed, he is easier to fit here than in any of the other paradigms. He seems far closer to the bearers of Graeco-Roman moral tradition, than to the metaphysicians, theologians, or religious practitioners.

The question of Paul’s proximity to the intellectual and social paradigms of his day must always be guided by the observable phenomena of interaction. First, what can we discern of the audience’s responses to Paul’s teaching and lifestyle? Second, from which mental constructs was an audience likely to draw in order to make sense of Paul? Third,
who or what might seem to the audience to offer an analogy to Paul? Fourth, how did Paul’s life and thought correspond to the analogy?

Our survey of Graeco-Roman morality cautions us against indentifying Paul with any one tradition, let alone with any one philosophical school. Private and public morality was not sustained by axiomatic systems, but by the exhortations and aphorisms broadcast from ornaments, gymnasia, festivals, city walls, statues, graveyards, and the sundry paraphernalia of daily life. The philosophy most people encountered was eclectic, blending Epicurean realism, Platonic vision, Stoic austerity, and more (cf. Horsley, ND 4:42-46, 67-73). The interdependence of the traditions alone makes it both pertinent and potentially misleading to compare Paul at any one point with the philosophical schools (Judge, 1973a, 110). Likewise, Paul’s preaching and itinerant lifestyle raises questions about his proximity to rhetoric and the sophists. But again we must note the overlap of traditions. While the rivalry between those who styled themselves as either philosophers or rhetors could at times be bitter (cf. Dio Chrysostom, Orationes 77/78.27; Epictetus, Discourse 3.23.19-32), it is doubtful how far a reasonably educated Greek or Roman would distinguish between them. All the more so when numerous, if not most, philosophers accepted forensic and occasional declaration as a civic obligation. Notwithstanding these

64 Notwithstanding Judge’s caution, it is important to take note of something of the vast literature comparing and contrasting Paul to the moral philosophers. Some of this material falls prey to Judge’s criticism. Others are extremely insightful. I have chosen to indicate my awareness of these discussions through a sampling of my own reading. Hopefully one long footnote which the reader can choose to ignore is better than a tedious sprinkling of cross-references and hedged comments.

I have already noted that Paul at the Areopagus is supposed to have aligned himself with the Stoics (Balch, 1990) over against the Epicureans (Neyrey, 1990). In the same volume, Holladay (1990) has noted that Epictetus’ use of personal example offers a close parallel to Paul’s plea in 1 Cor 13 and elsewhere. Garratt (1990) draws on Jewish apocalypticism to supplement Fitzgerald’s (1988) account of Paul’s hardships as akin to the testing and refinement of the sage in contemporary philosophical tradition. While Sevener (1961) argued for keeping some distance between Paul and Seneca, Stowers (1981) regards the Stoic’s style as instructive for understanding Paul’s Romans. Fiore (1990) teams Paul with Plutarch, notwithstanding the apostle and the Platonist’s differences, over against an overt or nascent Epicurean influence at Corinth. Fitzgerald (1990) in part concurs with Betz’s linking of Paul to Socrates—or at least to those Cynics who had idealised Socrates (cf. Judge, 1973b). At heart, it is claimed, Paul was identifying himself with (another) true philosopher over against the pretentious rhetors. More convincingly, Alexander (1993) shows the parallels between Paul and the popular Socratic narrative structure in Luke’s portrait of Paul. Finally, although Paul knew the contemporary philosophical traditions “first hand”, Malherbe argues, he nevertheless “used these traditions with as much originality as his contemporaries did” (1989, 8). From this platform, Malherbe goes on to discuss Paul in relation to Plutarch, the Epicureans and, particularly, the Cynics. For the broad similarities, see Malherbe (1977a, 20-28).

65 Letters were a major source of philosophical instruction and propaganda, and moralists made heavy use of literary and rhetorical conventions. On Paul and the use of paraenesis, see Roetzel (1982, 29-49), Meeks (1986, 124-136), and Malherbe (1986, 124-125). On the proximity of Paul’s letters to Graeco-Roman literary style, see Malherbe (1989, 25-33) and Stowers (1981, 1986). On the specific issues of self-praise and irony as relevant to Paul’s relations to the Corinthians, see Forbes (1986). My own approach, and Forbes’, follows Judge’s caution noted above: namely, Paul freely employed the conventions and vocabulary of philosophy and rhetoric where these suited his purposes of communicating the gospel, and the reorientation of social relationships which it brought.
caveats, the eclecticism, itinerancy, and subject matter of the sophists were likely to suggest to audiences that Paul may have belonged to this tradition.

At Corinth, a city which Dio noted for its oversupply of aggressive sophists (Oration 8.9-12), Paul had alienated certain parties in the ekklesia by his refusal to play the part of a professional leader and orator operating under their patronage.\(^6\) He had neither arrived, preached, profited, or assumed airs like a sophist, yet had ironically fallen under the close scrutiny, comparison, and rejection of other sophists (1 Cor 2:1-5, 2 Cor 10:10; cf. 1 Thess 2:1-12; Winter, 1994a; Forbes, 1986, 14-22).\(^6\) Instead, Paul deliberately had taken steps from the outset to distance himself from the Corinthian sophistic tradition by which they continued to judge him.\(^6\) Where oratory was central to success, rhetorical skill was "power, whether for good or for ill" (Gempf, 1993, 260, emphasis his). Paul knew this (Forbes, 1986, 18-24). Thus his renunciation of persuasive oratory defied the normal codes of sophistic ambition and excellence.\(^6\) Moreover, his choice to labour with his hands\(^7\) was an affront earning him the formal enmity of the aggrieved powerbrokers.\(^7\) Their offer and request had been entirely unexceptional—patronage with the usual expectation of honour returned. This would would have provided Paul with a platform for his own ambition in exchange for his professional services to them and his support of their elitism. But, in Paul's mind, conformity would have been to refuse to identify with the crucified

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\(^6\) In some of his earliest work, Judge showed the possible parallels and reversals between Paul and the sophists in the apostle's self-understanding and public presentation (1966c, 1968, 1972b). While several studies have since expanded, qualified, and corrected Judge's work, the essential portrait holds of Paul appearing to both accept and reject parallels between his teaching and lifestyle and those of the sophists.

\(^6\) The conventions of the sophists fit the schema I used earlier: *Norm for conformity*—rhetorical tradition, reputation of past great orators; *Goal of conformity*—superior reputation as an orator, independent wealth; *Means of conformity*—oratorical skill, professional deportment, acquiescence to patrons; *Focus for progress*—rising reputation as an orator and tutor; *Means of progress*—career path of more illustrious cities and patrons, links to prominent families via sons as pupils, comparison to other orators, flight from failure; and *Indicators of moral progress*—acclaim, invitations, wealth, status of patrons.

\(^6\) See Winter (1988a) for an extensive discussion of the Corinthian sophistic tradition and the implications of Paul's refusal to comply. Winter has also brought the same perspectives to bear on the Thessalonian correspondence (1993b, 1994a). These articles, coupled with his studies of benefactors in Rome, Thessalonica, and Corinth (1988c, 1991a, 1994b), provide a suggestive portrait of Paul's struggles to convey the gospel in the context of the morality of higher education, wealth, and influence.

\(^6\) In addition to Paul's failure as a sophist, Marshall (1983) notes how the image of the triumph served as a metaphor of shame and social disadvantage in Paul's account of the enmity between himself and the Corinthian elite (2 Cor 2:14-16; cf. 1 Cor 4:9-13). Hafemann (1990) extends this in terms of Paul's suffering and humiliation as the crux of his authenticity as an apostle and bearer of the Spirit.

\(^6\) On Paul's tent-making and Graeco-Roman attitudes to work, see Hock (1978, 1980). I will return to this in chapter 4.

\(^7\) On the relevance of the conventions of friendship (patronage) and enmity to Paul's struggles at Corinth, see Marshall (1987). Given our discussion of the ideals of conformity and stability in Graeco-Roman morality, Marshall's suggestion that the Corinthian elite have charged him with inconstancy is particularly relevant (ibid, 281-339).
and risen Christ (2 Cor 4:1-12). Moreover, oratory would empty the cross of its power to save (1 Cor 1:17, 2:1-5).

Finally, two recent studies on the proximity of the vocabulary of the NT to that of the honorific inscriptions and eulogies suggest that "the Pauline *homologoumena*...have little in common with the eulogistic canon" (Judge, 1982b, 106; 1987, 169-170).\(^{72}\) In particular, there are whole categories of virtue and social courtesy missing, notably the terms for courage, general excellence, and consensus. Similarly absent are the "compounds of *eu-* and *phil-* which often give expression to the prevailing nexus between aesthetic and moral approval" (Horsley, ND 2:106, transliteration mine). Yet all of these occur frequently in their normal usage in early Christian literature.\(^{73}\) What was Paul doing? Certainly he was starting from a different place: not moderation (*sôphrosunê*) and self-respect (*aidôs*), but love (*agapê*). Either he was forcing a deliberate confrontation between values, or else there was simply a lack of congruence between the Graeco-Roman ideals and his own understanding (Horsley, ND 2:106). The latter seems clear enough; the former may well have also been the case. Certainly he put the terms which he freely adopted—*charis*, *dikaiosunê*, *pistis*, *zelos*, *sophia*, *doxa*—to novel use in his portrayal of the person transformed in Christ.

3.5.4 Paul and the transformation of the person in Christ

In his letter to Rome, Paul portrayed the believer as one granted *dikaiosunê* in Christ (Rom 1:17, *passim*). This had considerable bearing on Graeco-Roman morality. We have encountered *dikaiosunê* and its cognates as part of the vocabulary of virtue and moral behaviour in aphorisms and in honorific and eulogistic texts (eg. Stobaeus, Eclogae III 1.173, I. 5, 27, 64, 84, 145; GVI 1693; I. Eph. Ia.6; cf. Horsley, ND 4:144-145). What mental constructs, then, would a Graeco-Roman convert call to mind at the mention that "no one is righteous"; or of one whose "faith is reckoned as righteousness", now "declared righteous", and given "honour" (Rom 3:10, 26, 4:5, 24, 8:21)?

Although Paul was clearly dependent on the OT for his use of *dikaiosunê* and cognates (eg. Gen 15:6, Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17, 4:3), and for the architecture of his thought on justification (Rom 1:2-4, 1:16-5:21, 9:1-11:36), it nonetheless holds that his message was intelligible to a Graeco-Roman audience without the benefit of a Jewish heritage or the LXX. The vocabulary was *not* the exclusive property of Jews. No doubt part of Paul’s

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72 The studies are: C. Panagopoulos (1977), *Dialogues d’histoire ancienne* 5:197-235, and J. de Romilly (1979), *La doueur dans la pensée grecque*, Paris. Both are inaccessible to me and I depend on the summary of their data and the discussion in Horsley (ND 2:105-106) and Judge (1987, 169-170).

73 Note also the papyrus texts in Judge (1982).
strategy was to further enlighten these Gentiles through his use of the Jewish scriptures. Yet even taken at face value, his portrait of justification was likely to have made startling and provocative sense to those who experienced the terms in social and religious contexts of reputation and approval.

Every city boasted those who were publicly and privately lauded for their goodwill and blamelessness (cf. Horsley, ND 4:141). Rome perhaps most of all. The use of dikaiosynē on statuary and graffiti and the like would call to mind those who had conspicuously excelled in civic life and piety. Indeed, it is the critical importance of one’s reputation as good or just which partly explains the rampant litigation of Graeco-Roman city life. In a legal context, a man’s dikaiosynē was his unimpeachability before the courts. In a cultic context, the dikaios was particularly one conspicuous for his blamelessness in the duty and honour which he rendered to the gods (Clarke, 1990, 134). There was thus common ground between those who spoke of divine dikaiosynē, and of that “quality exhibited by a superior (such as a benefactor) to an inferior” (Horsley, ND 4:145). The intersection of these and other social contexts located dikaiosynē as a construct of one’s standing before the gods and men.74

Paul’s message concerning the righteous man, then, could not avoid this complex of ideology. His proclamation that there were none good, righteous, or honourable outside Christ must have appeared deeply offensive to Graeco-Roman sensibilities. Indeed, his gospel intimated a confrontation with the broad spectrum of conformity and honour which delineated personal and social rectitude and self-understanding. It was equally liable to provoke the disdain of intellectuals. Greek thought began with man. Yet Paul’s didn’t. In this sense, he may be called radically anti-humanist (Judge, 1975, 191). He was convinced that neither intellectual serenity, nor social reputation, could avert the searching judgement of God’s dikaiosynē (Rom 3:9-20). Likewise, no intellectual, social, or religious progress could secure one’s dikaiosynē. Only one dikaios mattered now (3:21-22). By his death and resurrection, Christ had revealed the dikaiosynē of God as the verdict of justification (3:26, 5:12-21). dikaiosynē and doxa subsequently attached neither to rank nor reputation, but were granted as unmerited favours to those who welcomed the promise of justification (4:1-12). Whereas Graeco-Roman morality assured a place for boasting, it was entirely excluded in Paul’s gospel (3:27-31). Moreover, the gospel unmasked the futility

74 In a personal communication, Brian Powell indicates to me that dikaiosynē “is prominent in both Plutarch and Philo as a social virtue, especially expected of the powerful. It is only a minor virtue term for Epictetus and seems to denote conformity to principle rather than right social action and relating (he is ambivalent about social obligation)”. For a fuller discussion see his forthcoming PhD thesis at Macquarie University on the cardinal virtues in Paul, Philo, Plutarch (Lives), and Epictetus.
and hypocrisy of religious and moral self-development (6:1-7:25). The Spirit alone revealed the believer’s *dikaiosûne* and brought assurance of the adoption, benefaction, and honours which God had irrevocably promised in Christ (8:1-39).

Paul was not in this way seeking to marginalise the Roman Christians. On the contrary, he urged them to maintain social good-will through benefaction and obedience to the authorities (Rom 13:1-7; cf. Gal 6:10), just as he had urged the members of other *ekklêsiai* to uphold the family order (Eph 5:22-6:9, Col 3:18-4:1).\(^\text{75}\) He did not seek to overthrow rank. Yet he was merciless towards status. The hub of Paul’s innovations for behaviour was not an agenda to subvert the social order, but a radical repudiation of elitism and the self-interest which maintained it, and which was so intrinsic to Graeco-Roman morality (Rom 12:3). He thus set himself on a collision course with the contemporary paradigms of personal honours and self-development.

Where virtue was tied to stability of character, personal change was liable to be censured. This is not to say that the moralists and philosophers had no interest in change or progress. We have clearly noted the contrary. For his part, Paul spoke of personal transformation and the renewal of the mind (Rom 12:2). The models sounded similar, but were not the same. Moralists generally presumed that one who showed promise of progress, particularly the young sons of the nobility, had been born with the seeds of reason and virtue, and needed only to be guided towards self-control and mastery of the virtues. Paul, however, began with the assumption of the moral slavery of all (6:1-7:25; cf. Epictetus, *Discourse* 4.1.1-5). He allowed no grounds for value judgements about an individual’s likelihood to make progress. Moreover, he used the common metaphor of the *polis* as a body to invert the conventional priorities of the one and the many. Whereas the moralists regarded the community as the context and means for the *individual*’s honour, Paul urged a radical humility and other-centredness from those whose personal identity now rested on the mercies of God (cf. 12:3-8). The moralists’ ideals of supremacy, serenity, and self-sufficiency gave way to the considerable personal costs of engagement and love (12:9-21).

The revelation of God’s *dikaiosûne* in Christ led Paul to reconceive personal progress. While it is still commonplace to regard Graeco-Roman models of history as cyclical and as lacking a sense of purpose or goal, Trompf (1979) has demonstrated this to be an inaccurate caricature. Nevertheless, it holds that Graeco-Roman morality was grounded in abstract ideals and focused in the individual’s progress towards perfection. History had considerable pedagogical value, but mostly only insofar as it exemplified the ideals. On

\(^{75}\) On the importance of the public reputation of the gospel and the *ekklêsiai*, see Harris (1991).
the other hand, Paul’s moral innovations were inextricably linked to his understanding of Christ as the focal point of human history. This perspective enabled Paul to dispense with progress as such. On the one hand, the ordering of history in Christ made each moment as significant as any other. On the other hand, idealism gave way to relationship. No time was now more sacred than another. No time was loaded with the urgency of ambition and progress. The dying and rising of Christ shaped every moment in anticipation of the justification and honours of the children of God in a renewed creation. This was neither utopian idealism nor other-wordly abstraction. The proof, as we will see, was in Paul’s own experience of self-humiliation.

3.6 CONCLUSION

I have not argued that each of Paul’s perspectives was unique, but that they were distinctive. Others had objected to the status quo and had reworked its traditions. Moreover, Paul was not isolated from these traditions but freely adopted and adapted them in line with his own goals (1 Cor 9:19-23). We have seen definite points of contact between Paul and the paradigms of philosophy, theology, religion, and morality. If not, then the process of comparison would have been at best tedious, at worst pointless. Moreover, these were the perspectives in terms of which Paul’s hearers were likely to have attempted to understand his message and life.

At the same time, the very familiarity of these paradigms to his ekklesiai created confusion for them in relation to Paul, in that his departures from the norm were not always immediately apparent to them. Moreover, the intellectual and social paradigms of their heritage continued to exert a powerful influence over their thought and behaviour. Thus Paul encountered interpretations of his gospel at Galatia, Colossae, Corinth, Ephesus, and Thessalonica which sought to realign it with the conventions which that same message had eschewed.

NT scholarship frequently presumes that Paul largely conformed to these paradigms. Thus many insist that Paul’s gospel was philosophical, theological, religious, or moralistic. Perhaps with considerable ingenuity we might make the paradigms fit Paul a little more snugly. But the qualifications necessary at each point where he appeared to conform are such as to leave little of his innovation intact. To identify him with any of these paradigms is to lose more than we gain. Our conversation about Paul in the first century, and our conversation for the modern context, will only advance as we allow Paul the distinctiveness of his own life and thought.
CONCLUSION TO PART ONE

The conversation began for me as I read Paul and the Graeco-Roman sources side-by-side. It was Paul's dogged habit of articulating and experiencing life as profoundly relational, and of anchoring his reflections in history, that left me with the sense of his departure from the ancient norms. I thus began to reread those sources in earnest. Gradually I came to see a marked tension throughout the classical, Hellenistic, and Graeco-Roman periods between the realities of everyday experience and the presumption that intellectual and social ideals and constructs were somehow more basic and pristine.

We are left with two profoundly different worldviews. Graeco-Roman paradigms presumed a reality which transcended the personal and the everyday, a reality grasped in theoretical constructs, generalisations, and the flight of pure reason or silent contemplation, a reality to be imitated in the models and ideals of intellectual and social life. The educated man sought the perfection of his soul through conformity to those conventions of nature and society which best imitated the 'other' reality. Notwithstanding the profound differences between philosophers, religious groups, and moralists, this perspective pervaded the literary and non-literary sources for the intellectual and social life of Graeco-Roman society.

Paul, however, remained focused on the historical, the personal, and the social. Steeped in the Jewish scriptures and tradition, he brought all questions back to the character and purposes of God as revealed in the history and relationships of his covenant people. Where Paul parted from Judaism, it was not to defer to the abstractionism of the Graeco-Roman tradition, but to ground all of life in the recent historical events of a Jewish messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. To be sure, Paul's thought presupposed that the God of Israel and Christ was not bound to human history and experience. But Paul showed no interest in taking this further through theological abstraction. Consequently, he never developed any image of God-in-his-being in the style of the Graeco-Roman philosophers and theologians. His understanding and proclamation of God remained firmly rooted in the past, present, and future events of human history, particularly as they now hinged on the personal past, present, and future of Jesus Christ. These same perspectives removed Paul's experience and the character of the ekklesia from the paradigms of religion. The gospel discredited all intellectual autonomy and elitism and could not be expressed in cultic form.

Throughout these chapters we have touched on Paul's own desires and personal experience as critical factors in the shape of his distinctives. It was not ideas which
animated Paul, but a person. He was not driven to formulate a tight axiomatic system, but to honour and know and make known Christ. The paradox of Christ’s death and resurrection was not his contribution to the world of ideas, but was the shape of his own suffering and joy. The conversation leads us now to attempt to put ourselves in Paul’s sandals.
Part Two:  
The Character of a New Way
OVERVIEW OF PART TWO

While occasionally I will compare Paul to his Graeco-Roman contemporaries, these chapters deal with Paul somewhat more on his own terms.

In the fourth chapter, I approach Paul's experience of freedom and desire in terms of the social, historical, and personal perspectives used in chapter two. I place particular emphasis on Paul's engagement with God in Christ, with his associates and ekklesiæ, and with the wider society. I conclude with a portrait of his self-understanding. The dominant image which emerges is of a lived paradox—Paul voluntarily submitted to the crucified and risen Christ as the startling expression of his own sense of a new and radical freedom and desire.

In the fifth chapter, I seek to draw together the threads of our conversation concerning Paul's life and thought in the Graeco-Roman milieu. If chapters one to four provide the what and why, this chapter explores the how. My particular concern is with how Paul maintained intellectual focus and social cohesion within his own experience and that of the ekklesiæ. The image emerges of a master craftsman creatively building diverse communities on a coherent message, without artificial constraints, and in the face of the contingencies of everyday personal and social experience. Or perhaps of a master musician improvising on a theme.

My aim is to portray the vitality and interdependence of Paul's life and thought as a point of reference for the final conversation around evangelicalism. My choice of topics and approach thus keeps one eye on Paul and the other on the conventions of evangelicalism. I am particularly interested to explore Paul's experiences of freedom and desire, and his engagements with others, as critical factors in the development and shape of his thought. This will have considerable bearing on our conversation around both the character and methods of evangelical biblical interpretation and theology, and of the evangelical experience of faith.
Dying and Rising with Christ: Paul’s Freedom and Desire

4.1 A MODEL OF AN ENGAGED LIFE

If Paul were a philosopher, theologian, or moralist we would expect him to bear a vision: of the greater reality, of God-in-his-being, of beatific union with the gods, or of the superior sage. But we seem to find none of these. Moreover, it may be that we find in Paul no vision at all in either the ancient sense of a metaphysical portrait of primary reality, or the more modern preoccupations with goals, strategies, and agendas for change. Neither do we encounter ambition in the everyday sense of the will for personal success.

What we do encounter in Paul is desire—deep, personal, and at times almost paradoxical—encompassing the sweep of human history, the experiences of community, the intimacy of faith, and the immediacy of personal heartache and joy. Paul’s confidence in Christ reinforced the hope of his return and the subsequent unfolding of a new creation. Moreover, this same confidence fuelled Paul’s expectation that the Spirit would intervene in the present to transform the experience of those in Christ and their ekklesia. This desire was the counterpart of a sense of radical freedom.

Paul’s expression of freedom was as distinctive as his desire. Whatever the proximity between his teachings and those of the moral philosophers, the apostle’s life was far removed from the serene independence which marked the sage. Paul lived the difference as much as or more than he taught it. I have noted on numerous occasions how his identification with the crucified and risen Christ came at great personal cost to Paul, including physical suffering, emotional anguish, and social ostracism. The last was made worse by his ruthless exposure of his own inner man as he paraded his weaknesses and susceptibility as the grounds of opportunity for God’s grace and power, and as the marks of his authenticity as an apostle and as the bearer of the Spirit. The abandonment of self which marked Paul’s engagement with God and man underscores the immediacy and longing which characterised his relationships. All of this was at one and the same moment the expression of Paul having been made a ‘slave’ to Christ, and of his having been set free
from the bondage of sin and death in its personal and social manifestations. This same slave of righteousness exulted in the freedom of his status as a child of God. His slavery to Christ brought suffering and humiliation; his freedom in Christ enabled him to endure without recourse to self-justification.

These themes of Paul’s freedom and desire have been everywhere implicit in our portraits of Paul thus far. In chapter two, I surveyed Paul’s thought in terms of the interdependence of three perspectives: the social, the historical, and the personal. First, Jerusalem and the law no longer held Paul’s allegiance. Moreover, he was free of all men yet made himself the slave of all in order to establish the ekklēsiai of God without partiality as to race, sex, rank, or culture. He tirelessly worked to proclaim the gospel among his ekklēsiai so that they might be transformed from the enslaving social patterns of the present age. Second, Paul’s freedom was grounded in the history of the Second Adam who had acted on his behalf: the sentence which hung over Paul was no longer death, but life; not condemnation, but justification; not slavery, but freedom. His freedom then was bound up in Christ to whom he was now enslaved. Third, Christ had freed Paul from the flesh to walk in the newness of the Spirit. This new order was revealed in the apostle as he imitated Christ in his suffering and joy, and as he freely contradicted the enslaving paradigms of the old order which was passing away. Paul was now free to desire Christ and the power of his Spirit as he participated in the weakness and strength of his Lord.

In the third chapter, the parameters of Paul’s freedom and desire took clearer shape in contradistinction to Graeco-Roman philosophy, theology, religion, and morality. Paul was not bound to reason or nature. Nor was his God. Nor did God lurk in the shadows of secrets revealed only to the initiated. Rather, Paul stood in awe of the open mystery of God’s plans. He related to God in intimacy and without terror. His identity was shaped neither by his social position, nor his piety, nor even his moral progress. His desire was being freed from self-interest, his mind from futile abstractions. He strove to know Christ and to make him known, not to enhance his own reputation. He desired the perseverence of his ekklēsiai and laboured to that end. He longed to “be found in Christ” on the day of his return.

It is clear that the same threefold pattern—personal, social, historical—may illumine the interdependence of Paul’s experience of freedom and desire. More pointedly, it highlights the embeddedness of Paul’s experience and reflection in everyday interactions. He claimed to know, not simply to know about. He engaged others with commitment and

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1 The summary points of this paragraph and the next simply view the topical outline of the second and third chapters respectively in terms of the perspectives of Paul’s freedom and desire.
hope. His self-understanding and reflection were borne and nurtured in the concrete realities of conflict, enmity, labour, partnership, and affection. His freedom and desire had sprung to life on the Damascus road and had matured in the sweatshops, homes, highways, marketplaces, and prisons of Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia. As he engaged with people, he saw himself anew. As he wrestled with Christ in prayer and proclamation, he saw the world with renewed eyes. As he grappled with his own humiliations, he recreated the meaning of the dying and rising of Christ:

*Figure 9: The personal, social, and historical contours of Paul's experience of freedom and desire*

As I demonstrated in chapter two, there is no necessary priority in these perspectives on Paul’s thought. The same holds for our understanding of his experience of freedom and desire. The conversation thus may become recursive to the point of confusion. This is not unanticipated, nor altogether problematic. I noted this likelihood at the outset of chapter two even as I proceeded to tackle the three *interdependent* perspectives somewhat *independently!* There is less likelihood of pulling off so neat a manoeuvre here. Indeed, the threefold arrangement would likely topple in this chapter under the weight of cross-referencing. Instead, I will work with three spheres of Paul’s interactions with others, each of which reveals his orientation to the personal, the social, and the historical. I begin with his hope for and engagement with the world outside Christ. Next I devote a large portion of the chapter to Paul’s relations with the *ekklēsiai*. From there I attempt to
glean his sense of personal relatedness to God. Finally, I attempt to portray the apostle’s view of himself.²

## 4.2 PAUL AND THE WORLD

### 4.2.1 A harvest among the nations

Paul wrote to individuals and groups who had already embraced his message and to some degree had conformed their lives to its implications. If he wrote to those outside these circles, we have no surviving evidence. Acts provides a more immediate portrait of Paul’s engagement with outsiders. Yet the letters do reflect Paul’s contact with the wider world. Here as much as with any other aspect of his thought, his desires had been molded by the expectations of Israel’s covenants and promises in the light of the appearance of Messiah Jesus.³

Although Yahweh had established Israel as his peculiar people on the basis of his covenant promises, he intended them to be agents through whom he would extend his rule over the earth. Thus the nations figured in Yahweh’s plans. The account of Abram’s call and the promises to him, for example, appear in direct contrast to the curse of Babel (cf. Gen 11:1-9 and 12:3b). Yahweh would eventually regather the scattered nations under his lordship. This theme appears in the narrative and covenant of Israel’s sojourn at Sinai. Yahweh commissioned Israel to represent him before the nations in the knowledge that he was in fact the Lord of the earth (Exod 19:5-6).⁴ Israel’s existence as Yahweh’s people was never meant as an end in itself, and the psalmists and prophets retained this wider perspective in their portraits of the future. Alongside the blessings accruing to a renewed Israel, they believed that Yahweh would gather the nations on the last day (Ps 87:41, Isa 52:10, 15; cf. 1 Kgs 8:60). All the earth would join in the march to Zion, the palace and temple of God, there to acknowledge his kingship over the whole earth (Ps 48:2, Isa 2:2-4, 49:6).

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² I have continued to break somewhat with academic style in this chapter, though this may be more apparent here given the overt focus on Paul’s experience and self-understanding. Scholars tend to write “Paul’s letters portray a man intrigued by the figure of Christ”, rather than the more direct “Paul desired to know Christ”. Where the latter runs the risk of psychologising Paul on slim evidence, the more cautionary style is no doubt to be preferred. But the letters portray Paul as a man who seldom adhered to such caution in his own remarks. My choice to represent Paul in the more direct fashion seems defensible given the intent of the thesis to create conversation, chiefly among those who make a personal claim to both Paul and Christ, and its origin in a school of humanities rather than in ancient history or theology.


⁴ For a fuller account of Israel’s self-understanding and commissioning in Exod 19:5-6 both in terms of the structure of the narrative and its Ancient Near Eastern literary and cultural contexts, see Dumbrell (1984, 84-90).
The writers of the Gospels understood that the images which had defined Israel’s role and hopes now attached to Jesus and to his disciples (Matt 28:19-20, John 15:1-8, cf. 1 Pet 2:4-10). The OT had used the image of a harvest to describe a great day of universal judgement and salvation (Isa 27:12, Joel 3:13-18, Amos 9:13), and the Gospel writers had adopted this picture (Luke 3:9, 17, John 4:36). Matthew’s Son of Man sows the seeds of a kingdom which grows and spreads until the great harvest (Matt 13:33-41). Luke understood the images of baptism and harvest in the preaching of John the Baptist as having anticipated the inauguration of this harvest at Pentecost (Luke 3:15-17, Acts 1:5-8, 2:16-21, 33-36, 38-41, 47; cf. Isa 4:3-6, 41:15-16, Jer 15:7, Mal 3:1-4, 4:1-6). The symbolism of Pentecost portrayed the possession of Canaan and Yahweh’s ownership of the harvest (Exod 23:16, Lev 23:16). Paul took up this image and understood the gift of the Spirit as the event which marked believers in Christ as God’s special possession, the firstfruits of his harvest (Rom 8:23, 2 Cor 5:5). The gift of the Spirit was the decisive indicator of inclusion in this new people of God (Acts 8:14-17, 11:15-18, Gal 3:2).

The coming of the Spirit was a critical aspect of Paul’s argument that Christ had broken down all nationalistic boundaries and had opened up the way for universal peace through his death and resurrection (Eph 2:22). 5 This same Spirit, Paul believed, was powerfully at work in his proclamation to bring unbelievers to submission before Christ (1 Cor 2:4-5, 1 Thess 1:5-6, 9-10). Those Gentiles who embraced Christ were the long awaited children of Abraham linked to their great forbear by his one seed, the Christ, and by their faith. Christ had thus brought to light the full intention of the Abrahamic promises (Rom 4:1-25, Gal 3:6-4:31). Likewise, the Gentiles gathered in by Paul’s preaching of the gospel were the fulfilment of the prophets’ hopes (Rom 1:13, 10:11-21).

As noted in chapter two, Paul recast the prophets’ expectations of a single day of Yahweh into a bifurcation of history between the two Adams. There was thus a profound discontinuity between this present age and the age inaugurated by Christ’s resurrection. Those in Christ belonged to the new. Those outside Christ, to the old. Like the day of Yahweh, Paul’s day of Christ would signal the final division of humanity. The day of Christ, then, in Paul’s estimation was to be the day of reckoning, the great harvest of humanity bringing salvation to the faithful and judgement to the rest (1 Thess 4:16-17, 2 Thess 1:7-10).

As in the Graeco-Roman mystery religions, salvation encompassed more for Paul than what may lie beyond the grave. As his contemporaries sought release from the oppressive rule of Fate and Fortune, Paul offered freedom through Christ from the dark
powers. Yet, in Paul’s estimation, the gods and practices to which his Gentile neighbours looked for salvation were themselves the source of their slavery. He thus proclaimed release not only from their fears, but also from those religious patterns of the world which, in his estimation, compounded terror with futility (1 Thess 1:9-10, 4:13; cf. Gal 4:8-10, Tit 3:7).6

Paul desired to make Christ known throughout the world from Palestine to Spain (Rom 15:17-24; cf. Acts 1:8).7 He thus eagerly anticipated and received news of the increase of the gospel among his contacts (Rom 1:13, Col 1:6, 2 Thess 3:1). This desire for the nations never obliterated Paul’s prior concern for his own people. Although he clearly understood himself to have been called to be the apostle to the Gentiles (Rom 1:5, 13), and he had made conscious choices to shift his ministry away from his countrymen (Acts 13:46, 17:6), he continued to offer his gospel to the Jew first (14:1, 17:19; Rom 1:16). Moreover, the opposition he faced from his countrymen appears only to have sharpened his anxiety for them (Rom 9:1, 10:1).

Paul’s message had a profound social impact even in his own lifetime. The new associations were formed without respect to the hallmarks of social stratification. Paul strongly opposed both Jews and Gentiles who sought to maintain these conventions within the ekklesiai. As noted before, Paul was savage on status, yet he conceded the pragmatic necessity and even divine origins of rank and its obligations. Moreover, when urging the ekklesiai to uphold good order in the family and to obey the civil authorities, he appears to uphold these established authority structures because he believes them to be in some sense God-given (Rom 13:1-7, Col 3:18-4:1, Tit 3:1-2). Paul did not seek to transform Graeco-Roman society. At the same time, however, it seems likely that Paul sensed something of the broader social impact of his message. Indeed, whatever Paul could see at the time, his life and thought was to become “a paradigm of change, a source of social tensions both ancient and modern” (Marshall, 1993, 40). The impact had begun in Paul’s own day (Ellis, 1989, 157). Yet Paul’s emphasis lay in communicating an offer of life to those whom he understood to be dead and dying without hope (2 Cor 4:3-4, Eph 2:1-4, 1 Tim 1:15-16; cf. Acts 17:30-31). He thus gave himself to the life-long task of making Christ known in the conviction that God had entrusted him with the mystery of his plan to

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6 In this regard, Tannehill has argued that Paul understood baptism as a symbol of a radical break with these powers (1967, 7-14, 52-54; cf. Rom 6:1-4, Col 2:9-15). If this understanding is correct, then baptism may have conveyed to new converts implications for personal commitment and group solidarity similar to those expressed in the book-burnings at Ephesus (Acts 19:18-20).

7 Paul was not the only preacher in the empire set on the worldwide expansion of his message. We have previously noted his clash at Ephesus with the expansionist cult of Artemis (Acts 19:23-41; cf. 26-27, 35-36).
incorporate those of every national and social grouping into the new people of God (Rom 1:10-17, 10:5-15, Eph 1:9, 3:1-11).

This emphasis on mission and proclamation was crucial to Paul’s choices and thought. His focus seems to have been turned outwards more than to the establishment of any institution. In other words, though he laboured long and hard to promote maturity within each ekklēsia, and to heal divisions and turmoil among them, it would appear that he was prepared in some sense to walk away from each community in order to establish the gospel in some new context. The same controlling desire surfaced in the instructions to Timothy and Titus (2 Tim 4:5, 9-11, Tit 2:5, 10, 11, 3:12).

4.2.2 Making the most of every opportunity

Paul engaged with the wider world with a conviction born of urgency. Christ’s return was imminent and the time short in which to save some (1 Thess 5:1-4). There could thus be no thought of withdrawal from the world. Instead, Paul sought to “make the most of each opportunity” even as he likewise counselled his ekklēsiai (Eph 4:15-16, 6:19-20, Col 4:3-6). He deliberately placed himself in various social contexts for interaction, whether in synagogues, marketplaces, public halls, private residences, or the places of his occupation. Likewise, Luke noted Paul’s propensity to turn adverse circumstances, such as his imprisonments, court appearances, and harassment by crowds, into opportunities to proclaim his gospel (Acts 14:2-3, 6-7, 16:25-34, 19:30-31, 21:40, 25:9-12, 26:24-29, 27:33-35, 28:17-31; cf. Phil 1:12-18).

Paul’s responses to the elitist members of the Corinthian ekklēsia not only highlight their conformity to the social conventions of Roman Corinth, but also provide windows on his own manner of dealing with the world. Thus, for example, he appears to have been open to dinner engagements with unbelievers (1 Cor 10:27). In such contexts he appears to have been far less concerned about the possibility of any real compromise on his part than about the impact on the reputation of the gospel should his hosts reveal their (misguided) scruples (10:28-11:1).

As Paul sought to engage his audiences with his message, he may well have resembled a sophist. At the same time, Paul was at pains to dissociate himself from the expectations this would raise about the character of his message and mission (Judge, 1960c, 1968, 1972b; Forbes, 1986; Winter 1988a). Specifically, he repudiated their reliance on eloquence and their professionalism. Winter has argued, for example, that Paul’s

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8 On the workshop as the location of Paul’s evangelism, see Hock (1980, 37-42) and Malherbe (1987, 17-20).
recitals of his arrivals at Corinth and Thessalonica were pitched specifically to distance himself from any association with sophistic practice (1 Cor 2:1-5, 1 Thess 2:1-11). Paul went to such lengths precisely because he did appear to resemble the sophists.9 Indeed, as Forbes (1986) has shown, Paul did possess certain of their skills. The point for our discussion here is that Paul was aware how his manner of conduct would embody the message he brought. Thus to resort to sophistic methods would create the image of his gospel as another "peddled" message (2 Cor 2:17-3:1, 4:1-2). On the other hand, to present Christ as crucified, without the 'benefit' of eloquence, may have meant running the risk in some contexts of losing a hearing altogether. Yet he chose the latter course to ensure that those who believed had been moved by the power of the Spirit, and not by rhetoric. This point proved crucial in Paul's later defence against accusations of inconstancy and fickleness.

The public reputation of the gospel was thus critical to Paul the ambassador (2 Cor 5:20, Eph 6:20; Malherbe, 1989, 147-163; Harris, 1991, passim). While he urged obedience to the civil authorities as an aspect of respect for God's ordering of society (Rom 13:1-5), and similarly he urged beneficence as an appropriate expression of the new manner of life (Gal 6:9-10), at the same time he was highly aware of the impact of both on outsiders. Nothing would bring the gospel into disrepute more surely than for believers to abandon what was seemly in private and public life (1 Tim 3:4-7, Tit 2:5). Thus he urged those of means to maintain their benefactions and other expressions of goodwill and good citizenship (1 Thess 4:11-12, Tit 2:8, 10).

4.2.3 "All things to all people"

As noted in chapter two, Paul was loathe to tolerate any sense of obligation to Jerusalem, or to any of his ekklesiā, which would restrict his message or movements and thus hinder his mission. He guarded this freedom jealously. Yet freedom for Paul did not entail autonomy from obligation and authority. On the contrary, he understood his freedom as a corollary of his obligation to Christ to make him known (Gal 1-2, Eph 1:8, 3:1-11). He spoke also of being obligated to his hearers without partiality as to race or social position (Rom 1:14). This interplay between Paul's concurrent awareness of slavery and of freedom turned on his imitation of the dying and rising of Christ. This freedom-slavery in Christ was expressed pointedly in his free choices to 'die' with Christ in order that those without hope might hear his gospel, believe, and so 'rise' with Christ (2 Cor 4:7-12; cf. 1:6, 2:15-16).

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9 Bowers (1980) offers a comparison with the methods of propagandists and wandering preachers. He highlights Paul's distinctiveness in relation to his broad geographical agenda and his practice of establishing communities.
Paul’s Freedom and Desire

Paul had laid aside his considerable Jewish prestige in order to know Christ (Phil 3:3-7). He likewise refused to grasp at whatever status he might attain in the social intercourse of the Graeco-Roman cities of his travels. Having died to what he regarded to be the schemes of the world, Paul considered himself free to cross the traditional boundaries of society. Since he no longer accepted the scruples of Jewish and Graeco-Roman religious and other cultural paradigms (1 Cor 8:4-7, Col 2:21), he believed he could operate in many contexts without raising questions of conscience. The way was open for him to conform or to innovate according to the changing circumstances of his engagement and proclamation. We have noted this, for example, both in his refusal of the sophists’ persona, and in his openness to eating with Gentiles (1 Cor 10:27-30, cf. Gal 2:11-14). Paul considered himself free to operate under the law, or apart from it. He could live as a Jew or as a Gentile.

According to Paul, his freedom in Christ allowed him, in effect, to “become all things to all men so that by all possible means (he) might save some” (1 Cor 9:22b). We will return to this provocative self-understanding, but for now I simply note its basic paradox. Paul understood that “in Christ, one is free to become as anyone” (Hall, 1990, 152). In other words, his understanding of his own position of freedom in Christ, and of his obligations to Christ and his hearers, allowed him to freely adopt the unnecessary and binding restrictions of the scruples of others in order to make Christ known to them. At the same time, he was equally likely to appear scandalously free to those of an opposing religious or cultural group. On top of this precarious juggling of freedom and obligation, he appears to have become weak as an on-going and non-negotiable obligation (9:22a). In other words, Paul’s imitation of the dying and rising of Christ had set him on a path of self-humiliation (Phil 2:6-7) in which he refused to grasp at his own rights (though not in every circumstance, Acts 16:37, 25:10). In a sense, there could be no exhaustive comprehension of this paradox. It challenged the will, not simply the intellect. Thus when Paul’s hearers responded in faith, he not only laboured to assure them of their freedom in Christ, but faced the daunting task of bringing them to act from the radical self-denial so apt to their slavery in Christ.

4.3 PAUL AND THE EKKŁESIAI

4.3.1 Ancient assemblies, prophetic hopes, and the communities of a new creation

According to Paul, the gospel had created a new people of God gathered together in community. This development was not unanticipated. In its simple household based meetings, the ekklésia was living testimony to a tapestry of history, promise, and hope: the
rich heritage of Yahweh gathering Israel to himself in their great assemblies; the prophetic promises of an assembly of renewed people at the day of Yahweh; and the hopes for community carried in the Graeco-Roman polis and clubs.

Paul’s use of the term *ekklēsia* for the new communities and their gatherings was apt in relation to each of these. First, the term denoted an assembly of people. Frequently, it was used of an assembly of citizens for some formal purpose (eg. Acts 19:39). It carried no cultic or religious connotation. Second, “great theoretical significance might be attached” to these assemblies (Judge, 1963, 74). As we will note later, the contemporary use of the term allowed an association between the actual gathering of Christians and the ideals of the Graeco-Roman *polis*. Third, the LXX occasionally used *ekklēsia* to translate *qahal*. Those familiar with the LXX, therefore, could make links between their own gatherings and the assemblies of Israel. This may well have engaged the minds of some in Paul’s *ekklēsia* as to the significance and dignity of their life together.

Whatever importance the term held for Paul, his understanding of the gathering drew deeply from his heritage in the Jewish scriptures. Certainly, he understood the gathering as “not merely a human association, a gathering of like-minded individuals for a religious purpose, but a divinely-created affair” (Banks, 1980, 37). Paul envisaged a worldwide people of God gathered impartially by his grace to fulfil the Abrahamic

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10 For complementary discussions of the term, see Banks (1980, 34-37) and Meeks (1983, 108-109).

11 Winter acknowledges the political connotations of the term (1992, 205). However, he argues that the early Christians were more inclined to attach to the term, and hence to their gatherings, a significance drawn from the OT rather than from contemporary ideals of the *polis* (207-208). His point is taken, but it will become apparent that the two sources need not be traded against each other.

12 It is important to stress that this significance attached to the actual gathering, or group who gathered, not to any ideal or abstracted entity such as a so-called ‘universal church’. Judge’s methodological caution in this regard remains valid: “The difficulty found by New Testament lexicographers in allotting the instances of the term to the two categories ‘local church’ and ‘whole church’ suggests that the categories are themselves false. (The first term does not exist in the New Testament, and the second is used once [Rom. xvi 23], significantly for the so-called ‘local’ church itself.) We must ask whether even the most all-embracing claims made by St. Paul for the church are not being made with nothing more in mind than the church he happens to be addressing, and, of course, each other of the multiplicity of churches in its turn. Or, to put the matter positively, we should expect quite plain verbal indications before accepting the view that he has at any point translated the term from its concrete sense to some supernal parallel.” (1963, 74-75).

13 Especially relevant here are the OT themes of the gathering of the people of God and the Zion motif in the Psalms, prophets, and Israel’s traditions of kingship. I have surveyed these elsewhere (1989, 81-90, 94-99, 240-254). The relation of biblical-theology to history needs to be explored further. Biblical-theologians have drawn together the textual data in rich tapestries of motifs drawn across the entire OT period (my work cited above largely follows this methodology). But the question remains, “Who actually thought this way?” Only first century evidence can establish if first century people believed this way. What is clear in the case of Paul is that his quotations of and allusions to OT sources often work along the lines of broad patterns of promise and fulfilment (eg, Gal 3-4). At least one scholar has recently called on his peers to explore what he terms “the informative relationship between Paul’s social and theological ideas and practice” (Marshall, 1993, 7). This seems particularly apposite for Paul’s understanding and experience of community.
promises (Gal 3:6-4:31; Meeks, 1983, 107-110). Paul’s distinctive contribution was to place these broad themes and hopes for the people of God within a much larger schema: the pattern of creation and re-creation. Paul envisaged the ekkēsia as the model of the new humanity who wait to inherit a new creation. They are the people of the second Adam, the man from heaven and the giver of the Spirit (Rom 8:18-25, 1 Cor 15:20-57).

Paul anticipated a great assembly at Christ’s return (1 Thess 4:15-17). Yet, he understood that believers already belonged to a heavenly assembly (Phil 3:20). Jesus had ascended to heaven and sat down at his Father’s right hand. Those “in Christ” therefore had taken their place in heaven as well (Eph 2:5-6; 1:3; Col 1:13; 3:1-4). They now belonged to the “Jerusalem above” (Gal 4:25-27, Phil 3:20; cf. Heb 12:18-24).

4.3.2 Graeco-Roman desires for community, and the shape of the ekkēsia

Paul’s innovations marked a decisive break with the paradigms and conventions of Graeco-Roman and Jewish moral tradition. They also departed from contemporary social structures. Yet certain aspects of Paul’s ekkēsiai were attuned to the desires of many within Graeco-Roman urban society.

Following Judge, Kidd has argued that “the social structure of the Hellenistic municipalities in the early Roman Empire ought to be conceived of in terms of three overlapping institutions: household, association, and citizenship” (1990, 31-32). These institutions held considerable antiquity. For example, Aristotle had argued that man was a three-fold being: political, familial, and communal (Politics, 1,2). Judge maintains that these translated in the Graeco-Roman world into three spheres (“institutions”) of social contexts: the small republican state, the household, and unofficial associations. Much of the dynamic of first century life, Judge believes, came from the rivalry between these institutions: patriarchal household versus democratic ideals versus money and blood; similarly, dependence on a wealthy household head versus civic affairs (1960a, 31-39). As noted earlier, the right to spontaneous association had been critical in breaking the household domination of Greek society (ibid, 40). These groups catered to a need for koinōnia which the households and republic could not meet.

14 Judge documented this schema as an interpretative model for Paul’s groups in a booklet (1960a) which subsequently became a benchmark for studies in the social history of Paul and his ekkēsiai.
The *ekklēśia* as a simple household based meeting\(^{15}\)—with the significance of the
commonwealth of heaven, and of the new creation—was tailor made for this context:

Comparison of Paul's understanding of *ekklēśia* with the intellectual and social
cclimate of his day emphasizes both the comprehensiveness of his idea and its
appropriateness for his times. Attention has already been drawn to three
aspects in the contemporary scene that were particularly significant: those
aspirations for a universal fraternity which captivated the minds of educated
Greeks and Romans and devout Jewish leaders; the significance of the
household as a place in which personal identity and intimacy could be found;
the quest for community and immortality pursued through membership in
various voluntary and religious associations. In a quite remarkable way, Paul's
idea of *ekklēśia* managed to encompass all three: 1. It is a voluntary association,
with regular gatherings of a relatively small group of like-minded people. 2. It
has its roots in, and takes some of the character of, the household unit. 3. These
small local churches were invested with a supra-national and supra-temporal
significance. They were taught to regard themselves as the visible
manifestation of a universal and eternal commonwealth in which men could be
citizens. (Banks, 1980, 49)

Banks continues:

Only Paul's understanding of *ekklēśia* embraces all three ideas of community to
which people gave their commitment in the ancient world at the time. This
means that, psychologically speaking, Paul's approach had a decided advantage
over its first century competitors, since it offered so much more than any of
them and offered things which elsewhere could only be found by adhering to
more than one religious group. Sociologically, the distinctive element in Paul's
conception was its combination of all three models of community. I am not
suggesting that Paul systematically related each of these models, or even
consciously viewed his idea as the fulfilment of contemporary strivings, merely
that his view was conceptually richer and more socially relevant than others

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\(^{15}\) While some *ekklēśiai* may have occurred in more public locations, for the most part they
were centred and located within households (Acts 2:46, 1 Cor 16:19, Col 4:15, Phm 2; Malherbe, 1987,
11-12). Banks suggests that many such house *ekklēśiai* existed in the larger cities like Corinth (1980,
37-40). He also suggests that these may have formed in some places along occupational lines as per
the same practice with other associations (ibid, 40; cf. Ellis, 1989, 135-138). Most likely, these *ekklēśiai*
gathered in larger meetings from time to time (Rom 16:23, 1 Cor 14:23). The smaller home-based
*ekklēśia* remained the most frequent and influential meeting. In an extensive article summarising his
PhD work, Blue (1994) surveys the archaeological evidence for these house *ekklēśiai*, including the
size of meeting areas, possible group numbers, socio-economic position of the patrons-home owners,
and the later rise of formalised sanctuaries. See also Banks (1980, 40-42).
advanced in his day. In all this, by his use of the quite ordinary term for assembling in the ancient world (ekklesia) and by his setting such gatherings in ordinary homes rather than cultic places, Paul shows that he does not wish to mark off his gatherings from the ordinary meetings in which others, including church members, were engaged...Paul did not see such gatherings as more religious in character than any other activity in which Christians were involved. (ibid, 49-50)

It is important to grasp how Paul’s idea of ekklesia related to the heavenly commonwealth and the somewhat parallel images in Graeco-Roman thought. While Paul’s use of some metaphors implies a concept of a wider grouping of people beyond a specific gathering (eg. ‘people of God’, Rom 9:25-26), he does not appear to have used ekklesia in this way. Nor were the local gatherings a “part of the heavenly one any more than they are a part of any alleged universal church” (Banks, 1980, 47). Rather, the significance which had become associated with the ekklesia, attached to each individual group of Christians and their gathering. Moreover, Paul did not move by analogy from the idea of common membership in the heavenly assembly to suggest that local assemblies should be bound together by an organisational framework. Certainly their common loyalty to Christ and to one another led them to pray for each other, to exchange greetings, letters and gifts, and to commission others to join Paul’s travelling circle (2 Cor 8:11-14, 4:16, 13:13, Rom 16:1). But these intimate bonds were not formalised by any constitutional framework.

4.3.3 Desire and the shape of a transforming community

The new humanity as envisaged by Paul was emerging in the fledgling ekklesiai. In these communities, the power of the Spirit transformed relationships, bringing new patterns of thought and behaviour in keeping with the members’ new identity in Christ and the new modus operandi of love. Several passages succinctly capture his desire for ongoing transformation (eg. Rom 12:1-21, 1 Cor 12:1-27, Gal 5:13-6:10, Eph 1:15-23, 4:1-16, Phil 1:9-11, Col 1:9-14, 3:1-17, 1 Thess 4:1-12). One of these offers us an entry point to Paul’s desire for the life of an ekklesia:

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of

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16 On the call to conversion and change in Paul and the popular philosophers, see Malherbe (1987, 21-33, 36-51).
righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. (Phil 1:9-11)

Several features of Paul's desire are prominent in this prayer. First, he desired that love would characterise their relationships. Second, he desired this love to grow through knowledge, not of the kind which "puffs up" (1 Cor 8:1b), but that which produces a discerning spirit and promotes devotion to Christ. Third, he desired that they make the return of Christ a reference point for their growth and faith. Fourth, he desired that they grasp these changes of mindset and behaviour as the "fruit of (their) righteousness". In other words, that they grasp the personal and social implications of their unimpeachable status in the merits of Jesus Christ. Finally, the loop closed with Paul’s desire and praise of God: God would grant the growth; this growth would entail renewed desire for him and for each other; and these would end in his praise. Several of these desires warrant elaboration from further afield in Philippians and the other letters.

"That your love may abound": the enduring debt to love

Paul understood that the transformative power of Christ was manifest primarily in the interchanges between those who gathered (Marshall, 1993, 38, 40). The gospel gave the new communities their distinctive social form (Phil 1:27-25; Judge, 1983, 31-32; Marshall, 1993, 11-12). The relations between members were the tangible proof of the efficacy of Christ's work on their behalf. Love remained the test of congruence between Christ and the believer (1 Cor 13:1-3). Those in the ekklesia ought to identify strongly with one another, support those who struggle, and ensure the strengthening of all (Gal 6:1-5, Eph 4:11-16). This was the acid test of love: to drop prestige and self-interest for the well-being of those for whom Christ had (equally) died (Rom 15:1-3, Phil 2:1-5).

Nowhere did Paul make this point more forcefully than to the factious Corinthians. In a careful study of 1 Cor 8-10, Hall (1990) brings out Paul's even-handedness toward the strong and the weak: the weak must recognise their responsibility to the strong (1 Cor 8:29b-30); the strong must do likewise (10:28-29a). This did not mean that Paul argued for a middle way. What he urged was far more demanding:

Paul does not take the side of one group against the other, nor does he try to resolve the problem once and for all. Certainly, he does not enunciate a general principle and then apply it to this specific issue. He works instead on relationships. He asks something of both groups which he hopes will make it possible for all of them to move forward together. Paul does not ask or expect

17 I will return to this theme in the section Paul and God.
everyone to agree. What he asks, rather, is that those on each side identify with those on the other side, to become as the ones with whom they disagree. They are not initially required to change their convictions; they are to act on behalf of those with whom they disagree. Paul knows that this is a difficult and complicated thing to do. It is, however, necessary if the eschatological community is to exhibit and proclaim the new creation, even as its members take diverse paths of obedience.” (ibid, 153)

“In knowledge and depth of insight”: knowledge, discernment, and edification

Paul understood the unity of the ekklesia as an established reality founded on the work of Christ; it was also an on-going influence of the Spirit, and a matter for diligence (Rom 12:3-16, 15:5, Phil 1:9, 2:1-4, Eph 4:1-4). He was conscious of the impact of discord on the ekklesia, and of its likely consequences should it spill over into the public arena (Winter, 1994b, 82-104).18 He was aware that his ekklesiai were vulnerable to aping the conventions of the Graeco-Roman paradigms. It was therefore critical to him to establish the communities so that they were able to discern the futility of these mindsets (Eph 4:11-16; cf. Marshall, 1993, 21, 32).19

This need was highly significant for the character of the gathering. Why did the ekklesia gather together? Twenty centuries of Christendom has made ‘worship’ an almost Pavlovian answer. It wasn’t for Paul. Though there were certain OT precedents for defining the meeting as worship in some specifically ritualised sense, Paul never defined the ekklesia that way. His consistent rationale was edification (1 Cor 14:26, Eph 4:11-16; cf. Rom 15:2, 1 Cor 3:10-17). The members met to build up one another by each person using his or her personal endowments of the Spirit for the common good. Thus they prayed, read scripture, encouraged, sang, taught, and prophesied to one another, as the Spirit enabled them (1 Cor 12:4-6, 14:26, Eph 4:11-16, Col 3:15-16). As noted in chapter two, however, worship was no longer an activity separable from any other sphere of everyday life. Rather, it was the disposition and will of one who lived in response to the mercies of God (Rom 12:1-2, Col 3:17).

The meeting, therefore, was for “one another”. It was a richly diverse, extended conversation. Banks captures this clearly:

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18 In this respect, Paul mirrored the concerns of the philosophers (Dio Chrysostom, Orations 39.3). See Winter (1994b, 85-96; also 1992, 208-213).

19 I noted this frequently throughout chapter three in regard to the patterns of philosophy, religion, and morality. I did not address asceticism explicitly in that chapter, but it too came under Paul’s judgement (1 Cor 7:1-7, 8:4-8, 10:23-26, Col 2:16-23, 1 Tim 4:1, Tit 1:15-16).
According to Paul's understanding, participation in the community centred primarily around *fellowship*, expressed in word and deed, of the members with God and one another. It demonstrates concretely the already-experienced reconciliation between the individual and God and the individual and his fellow-men: the gifts and fruit of the Spirit being the instruments through which this is expressed and deepened. This means that the focal point of reference was neither a book nor a rite but a set of relationships, and that God communicated himself to them not primarily through the written word and tradition, or mystical experience and cultic activity, but through one another. (1980, 111, emphases his).

Their common meals clearly expressed both the centrality of relationships in the *ekklesia* and the corresponding rejection of religious and social prestige. The meal was not a cultic ritual in terms recognisable to Greeks and Romans. It seems that the Christians adopted the standard Jewish practice of commencing their meal by sharing bread and ending by drinking wine. They would also pray at both the beginning and the end of the meal. In this regard, no outsider familiar with Jewish custom would have noticed anything unusual. The proceedings also fell somewhat within the expectations of a non-Jewish outsider, though the whole affair would likely have seemed grossly irregular and religiously inadequate.\(^{20}\) In other respects, the meeting would have failed the expectations of Jewish and Gentile observers.

Paul expected them to disregard social distinctions (Gal 3:28). He also urged them to honour the less honourable (Rom 12:3-4, 16, 1 Cor 12:21). Such advice could not simply be intellectualised, but would involve some tangible inversion of the normal conventions of honour. Greek and Jew, citizen and non-citizen, slaves, owners, and freed men might sit together without regard for positions of honour. Perhaps a man of means might take a lowly seat at the meal, or even serve his slave. Certainly Paul expected the meal to break with the normal convention of allocating food and seating according to status (1 Cor 11:17-22, 33-34). No priest presided though there were prayers, singing, and conversations about God and the world. Most importantly, the hosts and regulars saw great significance in their eating and drinking. They spoke openly of the death and resurrection of Christ, of how he had given his life for theirs, and of how they would eat with him one day. The meal expressed the solidarity and intimacy of the group and formed a focus for their conversation.

\(^{20}\) Banks (1985b) makes this point in his engaging reconstruction of these early home meetings.
It was this engagement with one another, and the constant concern about compromise with the world’s patterns, which partly explains the strong intellectual life among the communities. The members of the ekklesia could not afford to delegate the task of the on-going interpretation of their lives in the light of the gospel. It is for this reason that Marshall, following Judge (1960c), suggests that each community was structured in some sense as an informal learning network (1993, 36; Malherbe, 1987, 10-12). Their well-being required them to tread the risky path of remaining open to the learning which the Spirit would bring to bear through their interactions in the ekklesia, and in the wider society (Phil 3:15-16). It seems then that Paul’s desire encompassed a community whose love was expressed in part in the cut and thrust of inquiry and debate. Sampley gives voice to the vitality of this arrangement:

...it is no wonder Paul’s communities had such a liveliness: each individual counted, yet the community’s well-being was always valued. The community is supposed to provide a vibrant, supportive, and corrective context for the maximum development of the individual, and the individual is supposed to contribute to and care for the common good. Little wonder that the pot almost boiled over from time to time. It is a delicate balance — maximising individual expression and development on the one hand and community well-being on the other — but its power may lie precisely in its frailty and vulnerability. (1991, 118-119)

"Pure and blameless until the day of Christ": hope and contingency

The new people of God were marked by hope (1 Cor 15:12). They awaited a final vindication (Rom 5:9-11). Paul urged the Roman Christians to understand whatever trials they may face in the light of their future honour and liberation as the children of God (8:18). This was not meant to understate the present difficulty of living between two ages (8:23). Paul’s own ‘groaning’ iterated the tensions and hardship. Thus, he exhorted them to persevere in the knowledge that Christ would soon come and effect a transformation which would far outweigh the sufferings of the present (Rom 8:17-25, 29, 32, 13:8, 2 Cor 5:1-5, Phil 3:19-21, 4:5, 1 Thess 3:11, 5:5-11).

In the meantime, the transformations presently available did not depend on any one set of conditions. In this respect, it is interesting to note how Paul’s prayer for the Philippians was unbounded by circumstances. In other words, he did not pray to secure the right or ideal circumstances for change. Paul presumed that his desire could be effected in any context. Yet his desire did not transcend circumstances as though he sought something loftier than the everyday. There was simply no one ideal or necessary context in which his desire had to be realised. His own circumstances bore this out (Phil 1:12-14,
20-26, 4:11-13). Thus while he desired and even expected his release from captivity, he expected to know for himself the very things which he desired for the Philippians—whatever his circumstances (1:18-26). Indeed, his own faithfulness to Christ had been confirmed in decidedly unpromising circumstances. Thus he remained confident of God’s power and will to change (cf. 1:6).

"Able to discern what is best...the fruit of righteousness": the end of social stratification within the ekklesia

As noted in the Introduction, Paul’s ekklesiai drew significantly from those of some means and social standing. Those of lower position would likely have been included by their links to the extended household (Judge, 1960a, 35-39; Meeks, 1983, 29-31). This mixture brought vitality: “what set the Christians apart was their bringing together within the same fellowship people who were bound to see life differently” (Kidd, 1990, 68). Add to this our oft-noted comments on Paul’s rejection of the marks of status, and we see the makings of a living experiment in the restructuring of human relations.

Although he was patronised by supporters, and therefore caught up in this world of friendship and its obligations (Judge, 1975, 195-198), Paul avoided the notion and its terminology, and placed no great value on patronal relations. Instead, he drew his vocabulary from the spheres of labour and subordination: he called himself a servant, and his associates, including his patrons, fellow labourers, not friends (eg. Rom 1:1, 16:1, 3, 9, 12, 21). Moreover, he related this self-understanding to the dying and rising of Christ. He sought to “escape the traps of superiority and inferiority by a total subjection of all to a common master who stands above all” (ibid, 197). The flip side of this was his belief that each believer “was given some gift of the Spirit, some endowment by God” (ibid). This endowment filled out Paul’s picture of the body as a community bound together by individual’s use of their gifts for the benefit of others (Rom 12:3-8, 1 Cor 12:1-31).21

The experiment included reworking the conventions of beneficence, honour, and reciprocity.22 Members could still be honoured for their labours (Rom 16:1-2, cf. 23), and for their position in society (1 Tim 5:1-8). But this was not done to imitate or to reinforce those “prominent civic models of benefaction (which) ensured that the honour system remained the central dynamic of city life” (Harrison, 1995, 23). This system depended on

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21 On Paul’s use of the body metaphor, Banks notes that while the image was widely used, “Paul was apparently the first to apply it to a community within the larger community of the state, and to the personal responsibilities of people for one another rather than for more external duties” (1980, 70).

22 This is partly the subject of a PhD thesis recently completed at Macquarie University by James Harrison, Charis in the Inscriptions and Paul. My comments are taken from a prepublication manuscript and an article forthcoming in ND 8. My thanks to Jim for making these available to me.
three practices: maintaining personal honour before peers; promoting competition for honour between peers; and maintaining the elite as the ideals and models for imitation (ibid, 1-6). Paul brought radical new understanding to these conventions by modelling behaviour on Christ as the impoverished benefactor who voluntarily gave all without reserve, even to the loss of his own status and honours (2 Cor 8:9, Phil 2:6-8). The ekklesia accordingly were taught that “in God’s new community... the greater honour was to be rendered to the inferior” (ibid, 23). Paul also exhorted the wealthy in the ekklesia to maintain their benefactions, and the less so to labour with their own hands rather than to stay dependent on the doles: “As a result, they would be liberated from the tyranny of maintaining and reciprocating honour” (ibid, 24). Finally, Paul’s gospel attributed the language of honour from the inscriptions (e.g. timē, dikaiosunē, doxa, pisteis) to all within the ekklesia, a democratisation of the system which must “have appealed to those of marginalised social status” (ibid, 22). The hallmark of maturity, then, was to discern one’s own gifting and to exercise this to the common good without thought for comparison (Rom 12:3-4). The only enduring debt now was to love (13:8).

Paul’s repudiation of social elitism was part of his broader moves away from structuring relationships in the ekklesia by the constraints of cultural conventions, moral codes or law.23 While giving high regard to the law of Israel, he argued that its time had passed (Gal 3:15-25). Moreover, while the law itself was good, the experience of living under law only created self-righteousness or abject guilt between the person and God (Rom 7:7-25). The immediacy of the Spirit now gave the believers what they could not know through the law (Gal 3:1-5). Paul located all behaviour as a response to the dying and rising of Christ arising from the inner person without external compulsion (Rom 6:1-23). This is the sense of the “law of Christ” (Gal 6:2); not a substitute for the law, but the replacement of the shadow of law by the immediacy of Christ and the Spirit (5:1-6; Col 2:17-20). The ekklesia must now walk in the new way of the Spirit, not along the old paths of the written code (Rom 8:1-4, Gal 5:16-18, Phil 3:3).

23 Paul’s understanding of the law and its relationship to his gospel has long been a subject a controversy. The exchange has been particularly enlivened in the last two decades by the views of Sanders (1977, 1983) and Dunn (1983a, 1983b, 1985, 1992a, 1992b). Sanders argued that Judaism’s problem with Paul was not about the historical priority of grace, but about Paul’s emphasis on the primacy of Christ. Dunn locates Paul’s problem over ‘justification by works of the law’ in the context of his rejection of the nationalism inherent in Judaism. Both agree that Judaism has been unfairly and unhistorically typecast as excessively legalistic in the first century. In the broadest terms, both perspectives seem at least partly true to Paul and his struggles with Judaism: his was dogged in emphasising Christ and he did oppose all attempts to orient his gospel to Jewish mores. Moreover, the debate may have become unnecessarily polarised by ignoring the variegated understandings of grace within Judaism. Likewise, Paul seems to portray grace from several vantage points. For summaries of the key issues and the history of the debates, see Barclay (1986) and Clarfield (1991).
Such realignments of social behaviour were critical to Paul's desire. In his estimation, the freedom of the gospel could not be realised in the еkkλеυσια while elitism and law remained. Paul desired for them an unhindered experience of their true freedom—freedom from deceptive paradigms (Gal 4:8-10, 5:1-11), and freedom to forsake their own rights in service of one another (1 Cor 10:31-11:1; Hall, 1990, 149-153). Such freedom was the fruit of the work of Christ, and the corollary of the confidence and assurance which belonged to those who saw their worlds and themselves through the merits of Jesus Christ. Here, Paul argued, there was freedom from fear and from the drive for self-justification (see Marshall, 1993, 28). Within this relationship, personal transformation could take root without the artificial prods and constraints which accompanied the agendas of self-interest, status-seeking, and personal development.

"Able to discern what is best...the fruit of righteousness": the end of hierarchical leadership in the еkkλеυσια

The impartiality of God disallowed social stratification within the еkkλеυσια. There no longer was any room for individual superiority where each believer found his or her righteousness in Christ. This impacted on leadership also. Paul envisaged no feature of life in the еkkλеυσια which was the peculiar domain of any one person. There was no cultus to be performed by any duly consecrated or appointed person (Barton and Horsley, 1981, 38; Banks, 1980, 148-156). There was no 'ordination'. Indeed, there was no room for personal power or office in Paul's understanding of the еkkλеυσια. Judge's assessment goes further: "nor surely is there any ideal or notion of leadership" (1975, 197). While the Corinthians had pushed Paul to assume the role and social presentation of a leader (1973b, 107), Paul had extended the principle of service into all relations. Servile labour had become the dominant metaphor for every expression of talent and position on behalf of others.

Forbes' study of the prophets underscores this point. He argues that the shift of social context from Graeco-Roman divination and cult to Christian gathering fundamentally altered the role of the prophet:

No longer is he the independent figure of power. Now he is one member among many in a community in which all have the same Spirit — and

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24 Meeks (1983, 180-192) provides a stimulating discussion of the interplay of several of Paul's metaphors for the accomplishments of Christ: bondage-liberation (redemption, adoption, inheritance), guilt-justification (righteousness), estrangement-reconciliation (peace, unity), deformity-transformation. He sets each within its social contexts and argues that these aspects of his message were not abstract axioms or so-called timeless truths, but provocative and enduring images of entering into a new life while ensconced within the social structures.

25 On the broad topic of the contrast between leadership in the society and in the еkkλеυσια (at Corinth), see Clarke (1993).
potentially the same gifts — as he has. He has no specialist skills, and no particular privileges beyond a hearing — a critical one — in the gathering of the community. Thus is the power of the prophet/miracle-worker subordinated to the good of the community. (1987, 379)

The personnel of Paul’s mission seem to fall into two overlapping circles (Meeks, 1983, 131-136). First, there were those who remained more or less continually in one location, either as indigenous dwellers or as immigrants (Phil 1:1, 1 Thes 5:12, 1 Tim 5:17-20; see also Acts 20:17, 27-31). For the most part, ‘leadership’ in the ekklēsia would form most naturally as an extension of the patronage of the head of the household where they met (Rom 16:1-2, 3-5, 10; see also 1 Tim 3:4-5).26 At other times there was need for Paul to ensure that some (additional?) believers would shoulder this responsibility (Tit 1:5, see also Acts 20:17-35). Second, a smaller circle were more mobile (eg. Col 4:7-15). Paul frequently referred to the latter as his co-workers or, sometimes, as the brothers (Ellis, 1989, 97). Paul attached considerable importance and affection to these fellow labourers.27 Women played a significant role among both circles (Banks, 1975, passim; 1980, 122-130; Judge, 1984, 17-21). Apparently, they did so without restriction to the character and extent of their ministry. Paul’s only concern was that wives maintain the generally accepted decorum of marriage both in public life and within the ekklēsia. Thus a wife was not to judge her husband’s prophecies nor publicly to teach or exercise authority over him (1 Cor 14:29-35; 1 Tim 2:11-12).28

Paul seemed to envisage no structural orthodoxy or line of authority. He did not appeal to leaders to solve the thorny and near intractable problems of the Galatians or Corinthians. Rather, he maintained his high regard for the competence of each member of the respective ekklēsiai as the bearers of Christ’s Spirit. While he exhorted them strongly, he did not suggest that their foolishness and sin resulted from any lack on their part (1 Cor 1:7, Gal 5:10). Instead, he called them to live up to what they already possessed. Indeed it was peculiarly to these troubled and factional communities that Paul spelt out at length the character of God’s gifting them by the Spirit (1 Cor 2:9-16, 12:1-14:40, 2 Cor 3:6-18, Gal

26 On Phoebe’s role as a patron (prostatis) of Paul and the ekklēsia, see Judge (1960c, 129-130; 1984, 16-23). Paul’s description of Phoebe as a diakonos identified her as part of his retinue of co-workers. The modern ecclesiastical debates over women’s ministry miss Paul’s point in both directions: Phoebe certainly was the patron-leader of an ekklēsia, yet this did nōt warrant any appellation of ecclesiastical office, a concept totally foreign to Paul.

27 On their importance to Paul in his imprisonments (2 Tim 1:16), see Rapske (1991). On their vital role in continuing the nurture of the ekklēsia, see Malherbe (1987, 62-68).

28 The issue of Paul’s instructions concerning the ministry of women is fiercely debated in scholarly and ecclesiastical circles. My own position is neither unique nor well-accepted. I understand the two most debated passages (cited above) to refer to a husband and wife in their specific relationship, not to men and women generically. On this line or argument see Ellis (1989, 65-86), T. Harris (1985), and Barnett (1995a).
3:1-14, 5:13-26). One might imagine a certain inclination on Paul's part—especially in the case of the Corinthians—to impose constraint by way of legislation or enforced leadership. Instead, he trod the risky path of further elaborating their possession of the Spirit and his gifting. What they lacked, Paul implied, was sensitivity to the fruits of the Spirit's presence—the free constraint of love expressed as the will to pursue the well-being of each other (1 Cor 12:39-14:21, Gal 5:13-26; cf. Phil 2:1-5).

Paul avoided the vocabulary of leadership, preferring to draw metaphors from work and the household as images of service and care (Clarke, 1993, 118-127). At Corinth, an *ekklesia* marked by a fascination with power and authority (Meeks, 1983, 117-131), there were some who belonged to the ruling classes (*sophia*, wisdom; *dunamis*, influence; *eugenos*, noble birth; 1 Cor 1:26). Their manner of leadership was to control by virtue of prestige and talent. Paul dismissed their marks and style of leadership in preference to his own: “we have become the scum of the world...therefore, I urge you to imitate me” (4:13, 16). On the other hand, Paul claimed *not* to have lorded over the Corinthians but to have worked *with* them for their joy (2 Cor 1:24). As Clarke explains:

Paul models a paradigm of leadership which he urges the Corinthians to imitate...In distinction to the secular categories of leadership which had been so readily adopted, Paul defines the Christian practice of leadership for them: they are not to rely on boasting or social status to create reputation, not to establish a popular following by recourse to the law-courts, and not to rely on a reputation carved out by oratorical prowess or patronal respect. This constitutes an inverting of the world’s views of leadership. (1993, 125)

The ‘leadership’ which Paul appeared to endorse consisted in taking various initiatives to stop the body from centralising its esteem and ministry. A ‘leader’ must

29 Scholars often presume that the so-called Pastoral letters—itself a highly unfortunate characterisation (Fee, 1987)—portray a later tightening of authority. Thus they see in the letters a drift away from a more open and charismatic leadership within the early Pauline circle. But this reconstruction may owe too much to the disposition, inherited and passed on across the centuries, that leadership operates by giving and withholding imprimatur and by regulating decision-making in the community. But to read the letters to Timothy and Titus alongside the letters of Ignatius of Antioch from the turn of the century, is clearly to pull the former back on the side of the Pauline circle. To be sure, Paul wrote with conviction about the critical links between his co-workers’ faithfulness and perseverance and that of the *ekklesia*. Moreover, he exhorted them to appoint others to continue this ministry. Neither practice, however, exceeded what Paul had already demonstrated in his relationships: to the Philippianians, he recounted the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus as vitally related to the perseverance of those receiving their ministry (Phil 2:19-30); and his advice to Titus to appoint elders in every place need not imply any more than what Paul had known at Ephesus (Tit 1:5; Acts 20:17-35). The uniqueness of the letters to Timothy and Titus lies partly in their being private communications to close associates and co-workers. This alone may account for much of their differences in style, tone, and vocabulary to the undisputed letters. Paul’s exhortations to pay close attention to their teaching (1 Tim 4:12-16, 2 Tim 2:1, 3:11-12; Tit 2:1, 2:3-5) came as a response to those who were undermining family and social relationships and the integrity of the gospel itself (1 Tim 1:13-7, 8-20, 4:6-7, 2 Tim 3:1-7, 4:3-5, Tit 1:10-16, 3:9-11). This does not represent a departure from Paul’s practice as shown in the undisputed letters.
ensure that the gospel and the *ekklēsia* were not taken captive to any special interest group or power base (1 Cor 1:10-17, 1 Tim 1:3-4, 18-20, 4:1-16). There were no mandates to build personal empires, nor to centralise any ministry or activity of the body (Ellis, 1989, 44). Far from gathering up control to themselves, leaders should act to prevent any encroachment on the experience of equality which arose from God's impartial gift of righteousness. Meeks juxtaposes this style of leadership with the new paradigm of authority:

> The impression is one of great fluidity, of a complex, multipolar, open-ended process of mutual discipline. Perhaps this fluid structure of authority in some measure expressed the perception, at least for Paul himself, that the crucifixion of the Messiah marked the end of the time when 'the law' shaped the limits of God's people and the beginning of the new age that would yield soon to his Kingdom. (1983, 139)

### 4.3.4 Engagement as the interplay of desire, esteem, and affection

Paul desired change for the Philippians (Phil 1:9-11, 1:27-2:5, 12, 3:15-17). He did not formulate this change in terms of progress in virtue or social prestige. Nor did he devalue their present lives in any way (1:5-6, 2:12, 3:1, 16). His desire was grounded in his esteem and affection for them as they were at that time (1:3-8, 24-25, 4:1). Rather than presenting lofty ideals, then, Paul expressed the changes he desired for them in the dynamic terms of a relationship: the ebb-and-flow of faith, hope, and love. If Paul held out a goal, it was of a further disclosure of the power of the rising of Christ in the personal and corporate experiences of dying with him (Phil 3:10-16; cf. 2:1-11).

All this stands in contrast to vision in the popular sense. A vision easily translates into ideals abstracted from relationships. The visionary may goad others to rise up to his own level of foresight and competence. Even if the leader's own disposition is not necessarily elitist, his insistence on his own dreams may well devalue those charged with fulfilling them. The visionary inevitably stands at least somewhat apart from the crowd. Not so with Paul. The overwhelming tone of his letters in this regard is of great concern and regard for his *ekklēsia*. In this sense, the warmth of his affection for the Philippians was not exceptional (Phil 1:3-8). No tone of superiority arises within any of his correspondence. Even his ironic boasting to the elitists at Corinth made the same point: while wanting no part in their games, he momentarily appeared to match them only so as to shame them into abandoning their pretentiousness.

Paul's engagement was his own personal embodiment of his prayers and desires (Malherbe, 1987, 52-60). He lived what he desired for the Philippians (Phil 1:9-11), both away from them and among them (1:12-1:26, 2:12-4:20). Thus he insisted on not being a
burden to any *ekklēsia* (1 Cor 4:8-13, 9:12-18, 2 Cor 2:17-3:1, 4:1-5, 11:7-12, 12:11-18, Phil 4:10-13, 17-18, 1 Thess 2:7-9, 2 Thess 3:7-10). We also note the way he relished his partnerships with co-workers and *ekklēsiai.*30 The mutuality of these relationships gave rich significance to such seeming incidentals as trading news of one another’s progress and well-being (Rom 1:11, 16:1-24, 1 Cor 16:1-20, Eph 6:21-24, Phil 1:3-5, 2:16-30, 4:21-22, Col 4:7-18, 1 Thess 3:2-10).

Paul attributed dignity and honour impartially to the members of his *ekklēsia* (1 Thess 1:2, 2:17-20, 2 Thess 1:3). Not, as noted earlier, that he entirely disregarded the honours due to individuals (Rom 16:2, 7, 12, Phil 2:29-30, 1 Tim 5:17). For the most part, however, it was not social position which warranted respect, but labours of love for the *ekklēsiai*. Paul went far further and insisted on honour for the less honourable (Rom 12:3-4, 1 Cor 12:21). Interestingly, in this regard, his direct speech to slaves, to women, and to children was probably without parallel in comparable genres of Graeco-Roman letters (Judge, 1975, 197-198). He regarded his co-workers and the members of the *ekklēsiai* as his equals (Meeks, 1983, 131-136). He solicited their prayers on his behalf (2 Cor 1:10-11, Phil 1:19, Col 4:3-4). While urging them to make good their confession of Christ, he freely and liberally acknowledged what they already had done and continued to do (Phil 1:5-7, 2:12, Col 1:3-8, 1 Thess 5:1, 4). Even the troublesome Corinthians were the proof of Paul’s labours (2 Cor 3:2-3). His affection was warm and generous (Phil 1:3-8, 1 Cor 16:24, 2 Cor 6:11-13, 1 Thess 2:17). He did not write to harass with unreachable goals, but to urge each *ekklēsia* to take hold of what he believed was already within their possession and experience (Lategan, 1990, 322-326; Malherbe, 1987, 68-94; 1989, 67-77, 149-166).

### 4.3.5 The freedom of stepping down

Paul’s engagement with his *ekklēsiai* unavoidably entailed personal cost to him. The dying and rising of Christ so shaped his ministry to them that he described it in terms of continuing or filling up the sacrifice of Christ on their behalf (2 Cor 1:3-7, 4:7-15, Phil 2:18, Col 1:24, 2 Tim 4:6; cf. Phil 1:21). Despite his self-sacrifice, or rather precisely because of it, Paul’s mission and his engagement with his *ekklēsiai* in some quarters brought against him accusations of inconstancy and impure motives (2 Cor 1:13, 16-17, 10:1-2, 10, 11:7-11, 12:13-31).

30 For an extensive discussion of Paul’s partnership with the Philippians based on a comparison of contemporary Roman law and conventions for partnership contracts, see Sampley (1980). Note the qualifications and extensions of his views by White (1990, 210-215; cf. also Horsley, ND 3:19).
18; Marshall, 1983, 313; 1993, 12). Understandably, then, he was deeply perplexed at times (2 Cor 11:23-29, Gal 4:12-20).31

But for all the difficulties his labour caused for him, Paul cherished his independence from financial support (1 Cor 9:1-8; cf Ellis, 1989, 99). It played a vital role in his avoidance of status. It marked his imitation of Christ’s dying and rising (1 Thess 2:1-17; Judge, 1993, 188). And it made clear that his compulsion came from Christ, not from ambition (2 Cor 5:14). There is deep irony in how Paul carried this social humiliation. On the one hand, it weighed heavily on him. On the other hand, he guarded his shame jealously as, for example, when he paraded his financial independence in order to press home the claim that his gospel was neither derived from man nor tainted with the desire to win men’s approval. He coveted the freedom to engage fearlessly with others. While his humiliation branded him with the reproach reserved by the honourable for the dishonourable, it nonetheless enabled him to survive any accusation of self-interest or personal gain. He was no toady, and could prove it. Thus he preserved his freedom to speak forcefully of the hard social choices and consequences which would arise for his converts as they sought to imitate Christ.

The rhythm of Paul’s choices—alternately conforming and innovating—was far from easy to pick up. In Paul’s mind, it seems, the logic was clear: he identified with the dying and rising of Christ. Faced with a new concern or context, his sense of freedom in Christ left him free to go in several directions. If his ekklēsiai at all pursued Christ and the well-being of each other unencumbered by unnecessary constraints drawn from the wider society, then they could largely thank Paul for the freedom they enjoyed.

4.4 PAUL AND GOD

4.4.1 The Spirit, the new humanity, and the liberation of desire

We have noted how the history, covenants, and promises of Israel had shaped Paul’s desire and anticipation of God’s dealings with his people. His earnest expectation was that God drew near to those who approached him on the merits of Israel’s Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. Moreover, Paul understood his intimacy with God to flow from his fellowship with none other than the promised Spirit of God: the ekklēsia was the new temple, God’s new dwelling place (1 Cor 3:16, 12:13, 2 Cor 6:16, Eph 2:22; cf. 1 Pet 2:4-10). Moreover, Paul understood the Spirit’s presence with Jesus in terms of creation and new

31 In this regard, Malherbe (1989, 79-89) argues that Paul’s fight with ‘beasts’ at Ephesus (1 Cor 15:32) may refer to his struggles with those who opposed him and his teaching there (cf. 1 Cor 16:8-9).
creation (1 Cor 15: 35-49). As noted earlier, he argued that Jesus had began a new life which far exceeded what Adam had known. At the same time, this new existence was what God had intended for his people ever since the creation (15:44-48).

How then did Paul understand this new order of humanity? First, idle speculation about an after-life could not comprehend this new order (1 Cor 15:35-41). The model was Christ, not metaphysical or religious categories; the Corinthians would be like him (15:49). Second, the new order involved the presence of the same Spirit who now characterised Christ’s own experience of the new creation (15:45). Paul so closely associated this new order of life with the presence of the Spirit, and with Christ’s own post-resurrection experience, that he appeared at times to identify Christ with the Spirit (15:45; cf. 2:10, 2 Cor 3:3, 18, Phil 1:19, Gal 4:6). His point seems to have been that the Spirit was characterised by the will and work of Christ. This seems close to Jesus’ promise: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth...I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:16-18; cf. 2 Cor 2:9-16). The Spirit brings the presence of the living Christ to his people (2 Cor 3:18, Eph 3:16-17). However, Christ remains in heaven at the Father’s right hand (1 Cor 15:24-27, Col 3:1, 4).

Nevertheless, because the Spirit was his Spirit, his coming signalled the coming of Christ himself to his people.

Adam was not the only reference point of the old order. So too was Israel (2 Cor 3:7-11). Even the great ones of Israel had fallen short of the new experience. In the same passage, Paul juxtaposed the new experience of the Spirit with Moses’ “fading” experience of the Lord’s glory and Israel’s failure to enter into this experience (3:6-18; cf. Exod 33:12-23, 34:29-35). Those who now believe in Christ, and thus have the Spirit, Paul argued, have entered into an experience which surpasses that of Moses (2 Cor 3:8, 11, 18). The new experience of the Spirit exceeds what Moses had known, because it is the experience of being transformed into Christ’s image. Furthermore, Paul went on to link Christ’s experience of the Spirit with God’s new creative activity and with the glory of God (4:6-7). We have already noted the OT link between the creation and the Spirit. Likewise, the glory-Spirit connection had also been made (Neh 9:19-20, Isa 42:6). Evidently Paul associated this complex of ideas with Christ: (1) Christ was the head and pattern of the new humanity, the new image of God; (2) the Spirit was creating the likeness of Christ in Paul; (3) the Spirit effected this change in Paul through the re-creative power of Christ’s resurrection; and (4) the Spirit transformed Paul as he identified himself with the dying of Christ (2 Cor 4:7-18). In this sense, Paul understood the Spirit as recreating dimensions of the human experience which had been obscured by the consequences of Adam’s disobedience (Rom 1:18-25, 5:12-21, 1 Cor 15:21-22, 38-54, 2 Cor 5:17, Eph 4:24, Col 3:10).
Yet, Paul would urge, the Spirit does not simply revive the old: he ushers in a new creation patterned on the new man (1 Cor 15:45, 2 Cor 5:17).

4.4.2 The desire of God and the knowledge of Christ

The vitality in Paul’s sense of relationship to God becomes clearer: the Spirit brought to him the presence of God in Christ such that Paul both knew God and was known by him (2 Cor 3:16, Gal 4:9). Yet Paul rarely if ever directed his wonder towards the Spirit. Rather, his awe for God found focus in amazement at the plan of redemption and recreation. Paul had no need to resort to metaphysical speculation concerning God. His speechless wonder came not from an apprehension of the pinnacle of the Platonist’s scale of being, but of the mastery of God’s ordering of history to reveal his Son and the people chosen in him (Rom 11:33-36). At the same time, Paul’s wonder was that Christ had inaugurated this new state of affairs for him. He marvelling at God’s actions in history and at Christ’s own grace to him since the encounter on the way to Damascus. Accordingly, Paul’s desire to know God led him neither to speculation, nor to an inward path of enlightenment. Rather he hungered to know Christ, the focus of God’s own self-revelation. This was not an either-or choice; not either Christ, or God. Nor does the precision of later trinitarian formulas adequately explain Paul’s conjoint adoration of the Father and the Son. Paul hungered to know God as he had made himself known—to know God in Christ. In his personal communion with God and Christ by the Spirit, Paul’s praise flowed from the one to the other as his imagination plumbed the miracle of unmerited love (Eph 3:16-22). If this sounds too expressive, consider Paul’s own self-description: “we who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love” (tòn agápòntòn...en aphtharsia, 6:24).

Paul’s present delight in Christ did not diminish his hunger to know him yet more intimately. This knowledge to be sure was propositional: he knew about Christ (1 Cor 15:1-8). His reflections on the narrative of Christ’s humiliation and exaltation elicited ever greater wonder from him (Phil 2:6-11). But the perspective of his outburst in Phil 3:7-11 came from the memory of his own past (3:4-6). It is hard to see how simply an increased intellectual grasp of Christ would match the emotional dimensions of Paul’s recollections of his former piety, privilege, and zeal. As now he considered his past to have been empty and filthy, so he considered his present and future to be full and cleansed. As he had turned his back on his former zeal, so now he had turned towards Christ with passion. The clear import of this is that the knowledge of which Paul spoke was profoundly experiential, emotional, and personal. He wanted to participate with Christ in the power of his own resurrection. Yet we have seen enough of Paul to know that he could have had
no slick triumphantism in mind. He knew too well that the experience of power came in
"the fellowship of his sufferings" (3:10). He had already said as much to the Philippians
(1:12-26, 2:17). Paul coveted an intimacy with God born in wonder at the self-sacrifice of
Christ on his personal behalf. But this intimacy could not be grasped by desire alone.
Paul's desire for Christ inexorably lead him to engage with others.

4.4.3 The nearness of God to his people

Paul hungered for full fellowship with the one whom he still only claimed to know in part
(Rom 8:22-25, 2 Cor 1:22, 5:5, Gal 5:15-21, Eph 1:14). In the meantime, the Spirit's presence
assured Paul of his union with Christ and of his intimate relation to the Father. The Spirit
was tangibly present to Paul (Gal 3:2). He brought him freedom (Rom 7:8, 2 Cor 3:17,
Gal 3:2, 5:18). Paul walked in the manner of the Spirit's personality and power (Gal 5:16).
He enabled Timothy to guard the gifts and responsibilities passed on to him from Paul (2
Tim 1:14). Paul's groans and sighs over the brokenness of the present age were caught up
by the Spirit who knew Paul's own inner life and drew alongside the apostle in the
struggles of his long wait for the new creation (Rom 8:23-27).

Paul claimed, then, that his intimacy with God was not merely his desire, but his
present experience. Already he exulted in God (Rom 15:17). His self-expression is replete
with references to the powerful and immediate presence of God in his own life and in the
lives of his co-workers and ekklesiai. He claimed no special status in this. The presence
of Christ by his Spirit was the gift of God to all who believed (Rom 8:9-11, 15, 1 Cor 12:1-13, 2
Cor 1:21-22, Gal 3:2 Eph 1:13-14). Paul thus appears to have had no concept of varying
degrees of the divine presence. Yet one could always draw nearer (Eph 1:17-18). Paul
claimed this as his own experience—he continued to engage afresh with the living God
who had drawn him into fellowship (3:14-21; cf. 2 Cor 12:8-9).

A sense of immediacy thus pervades Paul's language about God. In Paul's
experience, God's presence with his people was certain (2 Cor 13:13). God had established
Paul's converts (Rom 15:25-27). He had granted them comfort and compassion (2 Cor 1:3-
7, Phil 2:1, 4:9, 23). He continued to grant grace to them, not only as his past act of mercy
in Christ, but also as "the present continuing experience of a relationship with God
sustained by divine power" (Dunn, 1975, 203). He gave peace to the troubled (Phil 4:9, 2

32 While his abstract language bears little relation to Paul's self-expression, Dunn still
captures something of the immediacy of the Spirit to the apostle: "The Spirit is that power which
operates on the heart of man—the 'heart' being the centre of thought, feeling and willing, the centre
of personal consciousness, what we might call 'the experiencing'" (1975, 201, emphases his). His
following discussion (202-342) pursues the question, "In what way (was it true for Paul that the
presence of the Spirit 'may be verified'? (202).
Thess 3:16). He strengthened and encouraged the weak (Rom 15:5, 1 Thess 3:11). Paul expected God to work changes in his own experience and in the ἐκκλησία (1 Cor 3:6, 2 Cor 1:18, 1 Thess 1:5). Having begun the process of transformation, Paul expected God to bring this to the goal of his converts’ maturity (Phil 1:6). Paul looked to God to provide tangible needs (2 Cor 9:6, Phil 4:10-20). God would guide his children as they pursued his honour and the increase of the gospel (Rom 1:10, 1 Cor 16:7, Col 4:2, 1 Thess 3:11). They could thus depend upon him to answer their pleas and to come to their aid in times of distress and trial (1 Cor 10:11-13, 2 Cor 1:10, Phil 1:19, 1 Thess 5:23, 2 Thess 3:1-3). The Spirit was their teacher who illumined their minds to comprehend God’s grace and to respond in love (1 Cor 2:9-16, 12:3, Eph 1:17-18, 3:20, Phil 3:15-16, 1 Thess 5:22). While he had to endure the discipline of God in the present (2 Cor 12:7-10), Paul expected to be vindicated at the end (Phil 1:20). At the same time, Paul pointed to the present reality of God’s active rule and judgement in the world (Rom 1:18, 11:22-24, 1 Cor 4:20, 5:3-5, 11:27-32, 1 Thess 4:10, 2 Thess 1:5, 2 Tim 4:14; cf. Judge, 1993e, 196). In the meantime, Paul walked with Christ (Col 2:6, 1 Thess 4:1). Like all Paul’s images, walking expressed the interplay of his life and thought. The metaphor no doubt emerged from his extensive experience of travelling the roads of the eastern empire for his mission. In turn, his experience seems to have suggested to him new perspectives on the life of faith: “His actual walking became a parable of his walking with God” (Banks, 1986, 7).

Finally, Paul lived with the expectation of imminent death and of his long-awaited transformation (1 Cor 15, 2 Cor 5:5, Phil 1:21; Marshall, 1993, 22). He did not view his own death as a radical disjuncture between two entirely separate orders of experience. The new had begun within the old. Paul believed he would continue his relationship with Christ on the other side of the grave (1 Cor 13:9-12). No longer in part, no longer only in downpayment. This I would argue was what Paul anticipated in Phil 1:21: to depart and continue to be with Christ.

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33 I am indebted to Banks (1986) for this suggestion in relation to Paul’s walking. His further study (1987) provides extensive citation of the relevant texts, along with discussions of the semantic field in the OT, LXX, Qumran, and rabbinic sources. There is no value in my reproducing this work here. Banks notes the OT use of the image, and suggests that this would have informed Paul’s choice of the metaphor. But he also insists, rightly in my opinion, that Paul’s own experience of walking has shaped his use of the image (1987, 311-313).

34 While Paul never used περιπατέω of his own travels (he generally preferred ἐρχομένη or προερχομένη; 1986, 311), it seems he used περιπατέω when he wished to contrast the manner and hope of the new life (eg. Rom 8:4, 2 Cor 10:2-4, Gal 5:16, Eph 4:1, Col 2:6) with the futility and destination of the old (Rom 8:4, Gal 5:16, Eph 2:1-2, 4:17, Col 3:5-7). On the everyday circumstances of travels and accommodation which Paul was likely to have encountered, see French (1994).
4.4.4 Freedom to know God in the dying and rising of Christ

In Paul’s experience, his freedom had meant the liberation of his mind and passions in the pursuit of Christ. He claimed to have been granted intimacy with God unmediated by law or by any other artificial constraint (Rom 7:6). All religious and moral conventions and scruples appeared hollow and bound to an age that was passing (Col 2:21-23). In its place he understood his experience as the firstfruits of a renewal of the original intimacy between God and mankind (3:1-4, 10-11, Eph 4:24; cf. 2 Cor 5:17). He exulted in the freedom of one who had seen the glory of God and who had heard his new creative word: “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:6-7; cf. 3:17-18).

This taste of the new creation confirmed for Paul that Christ had sealed the future for the people of God, the new humanity (Rom 5:9-11). Accordingly, the peace of God reigned for those justified in Christ (5:1-3; cf. Phil 4:7). With this hope came Paul’s confidence to stand before God unhindered by accusations either from within or from without (Rom 5:1-5, 2 Cor 3:12, Eph 3:12, 17-18). Paul exulted in the freedom of this new familial and legal status, as one adopted and free from accusation (Rom 8:15-17, 22-23, 29-38). Yet the dying and rising of Christ exerted its hold over Paul here as much as anywhere. The exultation of Paul’s sense of intimacy with God took shape in the anguish of his suffering and humiliation (8:22-27, 35-39). Paul’s ‘dying’ as ever remained the context of his ‘rising’. The depth of Paul’s suffering in part was the measure of his intimate fellowship with God. His identification with Christ followed his profoundly existential realisation that his life was all of grace, and grace was all of his life (Dunn, 1975, 202-205).

4.5 PAUL’S SELF-UNDERSTANDING

4.5.1 “Who is equal to such a task?”

Paul’s sense of the significance of his own times arose from the OT promises, particularly the hopes of the prophets. We have noted how these sources shaped his desires for the world and for the ekklēsiai. We noted the same influences on his grasp of the coming of the Spirit. Much earlier, similar themes emerged in his convictions that God had ordered history according to the two Adams with the goal of making one new humanity without racial or social distinction. His self-understanding in part sprang from the same sources: Paul sensed his place in the sweep of history as the herald of the new kingdom of Christ and his Spirit.
Paul saw himself in the line of the prophets (Acts 26:16-18, Gal 1:15-16; cf. Isa 49:1-6, Jer 1:5, Ezek 1:27-2:2). He showed an affinity with those ancients who had felt the ‘hand of God’ upon them setting them apart for the prophetic vocation (Isa 8:11, 10:10, 28:2, Jer 15:17, Ezek 3:14, 24, 37:1; Gal 1:14-15), and compelling them to fulfill it (Isa 21:3, Jer 4:19, 20:9, Amos 3:8, Mic 3:8; 1 Cor 9:16). He stood in the line of those to whom Yahweh had appeared to reveal his word (Exod 19:9, 1 Kgs 19:9-18, Isa 6:1-13, Ezek 1:1-2:2; Acts 9:11-6, 26:12-18, 1 Cor 15:8, 2 Cor 12:1-4, Gal 1:11-12). Most likely Paul understood his call to make the gospel known among the Gentiles in terms of Yahweh’s call of Isaiah (Isa 6:1-13) and of the Servant (49:1-6).  

Paul also linked himself to Moses, both in regard to his call (Exod 4:10, 2 Cor 2:16b; cf. Joel 2:11), and his ministry (2 Cor 3:3-4:6; cf. Exod 24:12-18, 31:18, 32:15, 34:1). The two were closely related. In regard to his call, Paul echoed Moses’ complaint of lacking sufficient (hikanos) rhetorical skill for the task (LXX Exod 4:10, 2 Cor 2:16b). Yahweh had been angered by Moses’ retort, presumably because it implied his failure to recognize Yahweh’s authority and creative power (Exod 4:11-12). Paul, however, cited his avoidance of sophistic professionalism and eloquence as proof of his unequivocal response to God and of the legitimacy of his call (2 Cor 2:17-3:1; cf. 4:1-2). Furthermore, as with Moses, miracles had attested the veracity of the word of the apostle (Exod 4:17, 2 Cor 12:12; cf. Gal 3:5).

In regards to his ministry, Paul linked himself to Moses by a contrast between the foci of their ministries. Moses brought the law; Paul brought the Spirit. These gifts differed widely in their respective potencies to change hearts (2 Cor 3:6). The contrast extended to the endowments of the glory of the Lord on each man’s ministry (3:7-4:6). Since the Spirit had come through Paul, then his ministry was fulfilling the prophetic promise (3:16-4:1; cf. Ezek 11:9, 36:26). The proof of this was the conversion of the Corinthians and their receipt of the Spirit (3:2-3; cf. Gal 3:1-5). Paul’s own ministry bore an authority comparable to Moses and the prophets: “Thus, just as the authority of Moses was identified with and supported by the law which he mediated to Israel, Paul’s authority is identified with and supported by the changed hearts which come about as he

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35 Kim provides a lengthy survey of the history of scholarship and the exegetical issues involved in linking these passages with both Acts 9 and Gal 1 (1981, 91-99). He also notes the further affinities with Paul’s exposition in Rom 11 of his own place in the final harvest of the Jews and the Gentiles.  

36 A link may lie between LXX Joel 2:11 and 2 Cor 2:16b. Hafemann surveys the history of debate and the exegetical issues and concludes that the link is tenuous (1990, 84-94). His assessment seems somewhat forced and reductionistic. Indeed, when he states that Paul’s remark (“Who is equal to such a task?”) lacks the “context of eschatological judgment” necessary to link it with Joel’s cry (“Who can endure it?”), he seems to have lost the force of his own thesis: that Paul saw himself in the procession of the triumphant Christ as though going to the arena for execution (2 Cor 2:14).
mediates the Spirit as the eschatological gift par excellence” (Hafemann, 1990, 223, emphasis his). While Paul did not suggest that he had anticipated a new Moses figure, “Paul’s role is nevertheless similar to that of Moses in that he too functions as the one through whom God’s revelation is brought to his people” (ibid, 223-224, emphasis his).37

This background in the traditions of Israel covenants, prophetic figures, and promises gave great weight to Paul’s sense of commission and responsibility. He claimed to have been commissioned directly by the risen Christ to proclaim his gospel (eg. 1 Cor 15:1-8, Gal 1:1, 11-12, 15-16, 2:2-6, 11, Eph 1:1, 3:2, 2 Tim 1:1). He thus understood his message to carry divine authority (2 Cor 3:15-16, 1 Thess 2:13). This authority, however, could not be harnessed to the world’s conventions of power and prestige (1 Cor 2:1-5). Indeed, the message appeared weak and foolish when compared to those traditions (1:18). So too did Christ’s messengers (2:1, 4a, 4:9-13). The apostle accordingly understood himself to bear the reproach of the rejected Messiah (Phil 2:6-8). The exalted Lord would manifest his power in Paul’s acute weakness (2 Cor 12:7-10).

4.5.2 “I do not set aside the grace of God”

On numerous occasions, I have noted the inter-relation of Paul’s life and his thought. I have argued that we distort Paul’s message insofar as we dissociate it from his own experience. One indication of this interplay is the autobiographical tone of certain portions of his letters (eg. Rom 2:17-3:20, 5:10, 7:7-25, 9:30-33, 10:5-15, 12:1-3, 1 Cor 13, 2 Cor 1:3-7, Eph 2:11-11, 2:11-22, Col 1:9-14). I do not mean that these passages necessarily reflect specific moments from Paul’s life-story. Rather, they reveal the deep and abiding impact of his life on his thought: his experience under the law; his conversion, subsequent commission, and ministry. These events stand out so vividly in those places where he was self-consciously autobiographical (eg. Phil 3:4-11), that they leave the impression of having shaped his thought more profoundly than even he had discerned. The impression is strengthened in those passages which lie in close proximity to clearly autobiographical sections, yet which appear to portray his basic convictions rather than his own experience. Gal 2:15-21 illustrates the point.

While Gal 1:10-2:14 is clearly autobiographical, it might seem that from 2:15 Paul had switched to a more objective stance. Yet he began this summary of the gospel with a loaded personal remark: “we who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, know that...”

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37 I would suggest a further link between Moses and Paul. Both proclaimed God’s will to those whose hearts were hard (2 Cor 4:3-4). In Moses’ case, his preaching was intended to ensure that Pharaoh, Egypt, and the nations “may know that I am the Lord” (Exod 14:4, 29-31, 15:14-16). Interestingly, the phrase also appeared in the call tradition of Ezekiel, another prophet with more than passing similarity to Paul “the Spirit-giver” (Ezek 2:5, 5:13, 6:7, 11:9, 25:24-27, 36:26).
(2:15). It seems clear that Paul encapsulated his message with clear reminiscence of his past: his former zeal for the law; his subsequent understanding of his own conversion as having reached the end of the road in seeking to attain righteousness by the law; and even his later struggles with Peter. The closing exclamation seems as autobiographical as it is kerygmatic: "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing" (2:21). Paul could well have added, "and Christ appeared to me for nothing" (1:11-16; cf. 1 Cor 15:3-19). This inseparability of his life and message was an unavoidable corollary of his tenacious identification with Christ. Whether then he spoke of Christ's dying and rising, or of their many benefits such as adoption, justification, and the presence of the Spirit, his own encounter with Christ lay near to the surface of his message. Having once refuted the outrageous claims by Christians to a Messiah crucified as the atoning sacrifice for their sins, he then "was caught up personally with the need to explain how it was possible for the Messiah to be like that" (Judge, 1973b, 111).

The interplay of his experience and thought, therefore, inevitably led him to repudiate the world's patterns, even those which lay beyond his own personal experience. Whether Paul understood Abraham and the law in terms of an excessive legalistic righteousness, or as the expression of a covenantal monism (Dunn, 1983b), the fact remains that Paul saw no problem with the law until confronted on the Damascus road (Gal 1:14). We cannot and need not attempt to rescue his perspective entirely from the charge of idiosyncrasy. Jerusalem and the law had been the focus of Saul the Pharisee's desire and experience. Subsequently, they became the quintessential indicators of what his desire and experience was not. They came to symbolise his break with that tradition and with the need for any hermeneutic sanctioned by human authority. While he continued to respect the law, he could only see his former peers through the personal anguish of one convinced that they were desperately wrong, not only about the Messiah (Phil 3:18), but also about their own traditions (3:3). Their opposition to his message of grace in Christ and freedom from the law only reinforced his assessment of them and of the redundancy of their traditions (3:2, cf. 18-19).

4.5.3 "I was not a burden to anyone"

On Paul's side nothing underscored the purity of his own motives more than his refusal to take financial support (1 Cor 49:16-18, 2 Cor 2:17-3:1, 4:1-2, 1 Thess 2:10, 2 Thess 3:8).38 While he maintained he had a right to this support, as did any other co-workers who so

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38 On the relation of Paul's manual labour to his self-understanding, see Hock (1980, 47-49).
laboured, he refused to exercise it so as not to be a burden and, perhaps more pointedly, so as to avoid any accusation of “peddling the word” (1 Cor 9:1, 2 Cor 4:1-2, 1 Thess 2:7-9). Quite possibly, Paul’s testimonials to the labours and integrity of Timothy, Titus, Epaphroditus, and others were intended to ward off similar accusations (2 Cor 8:16-24, 12:18, Phil 2:18-30, Col 4:13).

At the same time, Paul appeared fickle for taking the Macedonians’ support while making mileage out of his refusal of similar help from the Corinthians (1 Cor 9:3-18, 2 Cor 11:7-12, 12:14-18). Two factors may account for Paul’s choices. First, he seemed to trust his discernment of the motives of the givers. The Corinthian responses no doubt only endorsed his initial suspicions. Second, I offer the suggestion that he may have refused to take support from any group among whom he was actually working at the time. While he no doubt accepted individual patronage, such as that of Lydia while he ministered in Philippi (Acts 16:15, Rom 16:1-2), he may well have only taken the support of an ekklesia while he was operating at another location. If so, then his principle seemed to have been to avoid at all cost any hint of his partnerships for the gospel ensnaring him in the conventions of reciprocity and deference to patrons. Once again, his experience at Corinth would only have confirmed this strategy.

In an extensive though not unchallenged study, Hock has gone a long way towards capturing the social realities of Paul’s labour and ministry:

...far from being at the periphery of his life, Paul’s tent-making was actually central to it. More than any of us has supposed, Paul was Paul the Tentmaker. His trade occupied much of his time—from the years of his apprenticeship through the years of his life as a missionary of Christ, from before daylight through most of the day. Consequently, his trade in large measure determined his daily experiences and his social status. His life was very much that of the

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39 For a full discussion of Paul’s entourage and means of support, see Judge (1960c, 128-136).

40 Hock’s emphasis on the workshop as the site of Paul’s ministry has been challenged by Blue (1994, 172-173). Blue notes that Acts portrays Paul as spending considerable time in synagogues or other public venues. We should also note that Paul often taught from private homes, as Blue points out in other contexts. It seems that Hock may have overstated Paul’s proximity to the workshop. However, his case still seems to hold in that: (1) scholars have ignored this aspect of Paul’s life, and especially its impact on his thought; (2) Paul spent large amounts of time working, enough for this to be a major aspect of his self-understanding; (3) his work was arduous; and (4) it was humiliating to him, at least so far as he had to endure the judgements of those persons of means among his ekklesiai who had no need to labour.

41 Paul was not unique in making a point of his labours and financial independence (cf. Dio Chrysostom, Orationes 7.103-53). The philosophers debated the question of support, but generally reasoned very differently to Paul. They were concerned to preserve individual superiority and dignity. For surveys of the evidence, see Hock (1980, passim) and Malherbe (1987, 18-20). Hock makes the particular point that Paul’s attitudes to labour, and his actual practice, are illumined more by contemporary Graeco-Roman evidence than by the older scholarly opinion that his labour was an aspect of his Pharisaic self-understanding and practice.
workshop—of artisan-friends like Aquila, Barnabas, and perhaps Jason; of leather, knives, and awls; of wearying toil; of being bent over a workbench like a slave and of working side by side with slaves; of thereby being perceived by others and by himself as slavish and humiliated; of suffering the artisans' lack of status and so being reviled and abused. Paul's trade also provided him with his principal means of livelihood though never with enough to make him anything but a poor man and sometimes not even with that much, so that hunger and thirst and cold were at times his lot. His trade also may have served directly in his missionary activities in the sense that workshop conversations with fellow workers, customers, or those who stopped by might easily have turned into occasions for informal evangelization. Finally, his trade was taken up into his apostolic self-understanding, so much so that, when criticized for plying his trade, he came to understand himself as the apostle who offered the gospel free of charge. (1980, 67-68, his emphasis)

These social realities made Paul's labour and ministry mutually explanatory. Those whom he taught in daylight hours were likely financial enough to live without personal labour. In other words, he sweated to teach those who didn't have to (Hock, 1980, 52-61). This disparity formed part of the deep anguish associated with his lists of hardship (1 Cor 4:10-13, 2 Cor 6:5, 8-13, 11:27, 12:13; ibid, 40-42). Thus while Paul's labours supplied his financial needs, they cost him dearly in the process. The impact of his social humiliation on his sense of self should not be overlooked in this regard. Forbes relates this experience of weakness as social shame to his exercise of authority:

That Paul should 'boast of (his) weaknesses' is a quite extraordinary paradox...Yet it is clear that in this paradox Paul is saying fundamental things about the nature of his understanding of both apostolic authority and life 'in Christ' generally. For Paul apostolic authority is the authority of the Gospel itself, mediated through the apostle. Since the Gospel is the message of the 'foolishness' and 'weakness' of God himself (1 Corinthians 1:18-25), the apostle, if he is such at all, embodies that foolishness and weakness. (1986, 22)

Recalling our earlier discussion of leadership, a similar juxtaposition emerges here. Just as Paul understood the gospel to disallow any elitist model of leadership, so his experience of labour and social humiliation informed his choice of the labourer as perhaps his most distinctive metaphor for leadership. His own experience of foregoing the marks of leadership had shaped his inverted sense of authority (Marshall, 1993, 25, 29). For Paul, authority was a personally earned respect arising within relationships. Thus he would not encroach on another's work (Rom 15:20). At the same time, he refused to acknowledge the
authority of those who had no claim to have walked with him or with his ekklesiá for the gospel—no matter whether they carried the ‘impressive’ credentials of Jerusalem, or of the sophistic super-apostles.

4.5.4 “I bear on my body the marks of Jesus”

Paul’s break with his past, and with the traditions of his day, tended to isolate him. He carried a sense of weighty accountability to God such that it appeared to set him apart, in his own mind at least, from others who seemed more concerned with the approval of their peers (1 Cor 4:1-5, 2 Cor 3:1, Gal 1:10, 2:6, 14, 5:11, 6:12-14, 17, 1 Thess 2:4). This sense of isolation may well have deepened his resolve to identify with the dying and rising Christ with such ruthless self-denial. It no doubt also arose from his perplexing experience of living between the ages. He felt acutely the perversity and brokenness of life on the one hand, and the wonder of grace and a new creation on the other. He saw the two—both in the world, and in himself. He carried the sense of one born “last of all”, the apostle who had been “the chief of sinners” (1 Cor 15:8). He was distressed by evil. He was buoyed by hope. He sensed the immediacy of the end even as he walked in newness of life. He carried all this in his own suffering and joy, his dying and rising with Christ as one “put...on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena” (1 Cor 4:9).

There remained a knife edge in Paul’s experience of strength in weakness. He did not cease to be weak at the moment of realising the strength Christ made available to him (2 Cor 12:9). He remained weak. This was the lived substance of the gospel. As Tannehill notes, “if the believer dies and rises with Christ, as Paul claims, Christ’s death and resurrection are not merely events which produce benefits for the believer, but also are events in which the believer himself partakes” (1967, 1). Paul expressed this fellowship with Christ as the experience of near-paradoxical circumstances and choices: weakness and strength (1 Cor 1:25, 2:1-5, 4:10, 2 Cor 11:21, 30, 12:5, 9-10, 13:3-4); foolishness and wisdom (1 Cor 1:18-25, 3:18-20, 4:10); poor and rich (1 Cor 4:8-13, 2 Cor 6:10, 8:9); shame and honour (1 Cor 4:10, 2 Cor 11:21); slave and free (Rom 6:15-18, 1 Cor 9:19-23); suffering and comfort (2 Cor 1:3-11, 7:5-7); and frustration and glory (Rom 8:18-25). His most extended set of couplets occurs in 2 Cor 4:

hard pressed on every side ...but not crushed
perplexed ...but not in despair

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42 Marshall notes that Paul’s use of the metaphor ‘strength in weakness’ “conformed to usage in the Graeco-Roman literary tradition” (1983, 311; he cites Forbes, 1978, as supplying the primary sources). What is unique to Paul is the manner in which he relates the metaphor to his relationship with another.
persecuted but not abandoned
struck down but not destroyed
always carrying...the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus...may be revealed
always being given over to death so that his life may be revealed
death is at work in us but life is at work in you
outwardly wasting away inwardly renewed day by day
our light and momentary troubles an eternal glory (4:7-12, 16-17)

The sting portrayed in the left hand column must not be robbed of its force. The couplets do not convey any triumphant movement from ‘dying’ to ‘rising’. Nor did ‘rising’ remove the sting of ‘dying’. Paul worked, travelled, taught, and engaged with his ekklesiai under the pressure and stigma of a suffering, humiliated man—a lot to which by rights he was not entitled. At times he could not conceal his pain and indignation: “let no one cause me trouble for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus” (Gal 6:17).

If Paul bore his suffering and humiliation as the marks of dying, it was, he said, in order to bring life to others (2 Cor 4:14-15; cf. 1:5-6, Phil 1:21-26). The power of God and his word was not chained to Paul’s adverse circumstances, but made effective by them (Phil 1:10-12, 1 Thess 2:1, 2 Tim 2:9). In prison, he was at pains to comfort the free (Phil 1:12-26). Ostracised by the self-styled elite of an ekklesia, he endured further humiliation at their hands lest they lose the privileges he had originally brought to them (2 Cor 12:11-13). Forsaking his own rights, he had fought for those who had been marginalised in the same ekklesia (1 Cor 8:13; cf. Rom 14:1-4). He bore the marks of the self-sacrifice of Christ with the self-consciousness that God would be his judge should his affection be a sham (Phil 1:8). He carried his ministry with the conviction that he would give account for it at the day of Christ (1 Cor 3:12-15, 15:58, 2 Cor 5:6-10, Phil 2:16). He bore his sufferings with the mixed emotions of one who had no place left for boasting (1 Cor 1:26-31, 9:15-18, 11:16-12:13, Gal 6:14, Phil 3:3; cf. Forbes, 1986, 14-22).

In a strikingly strong metaphor, possibly unique among Greek authors, Paul portrayed himself as a captive ignominiously being led to his death in the arena by the
victorious Christ (2 Cor 2:14; cf. 1 Cor 4:9). The metaphor has troubled commentators. However, Marshall (1983) has shown how aptly the image conveyed Paul’s sense of God powerfully exalting Christ through the apostle’s continuing experience of dying with and for Christ, and for the Corinthians. Paul’s use of the image of triumphal procession belonged in the context of social shame which characterised his strained relations with the Corinthians on account of his disgraceful work and his refusal of their patronage. Few images could have conveyed so powerfully Paul’s radical inversion of the marks of a leader. As Marshall notes:

That Paul could be a shamed and powerless figure, being led captive, while in that very position be used by God to display the “fragrance (osmē) of his knowledge” (2 Cor. 2:14) is thoroughly consistent with, and most vividly portrays, Paul’s self-conception of his apostleship in Corinth. It indicates not just that he is the medium of the message but the kind of messenger he is. (1983, 316)

Paul’s ruthless parade of “the things which Greeks and Romans would attempt to conceal at all costs” did not end there (Marshall, 1983, 315). As noted before, the Corinthians insisted that Paul take up the stance of a leader with rhetorical skill and a refined public presence. The more he sought to answer their charges and to reposition their understanding of him, the worse his case became (2 Cor 4:7-12, 6:3-10). Finally, Paul let fly the intensity with which he felt his humiliation. In an astonishing passage (10:1-13:10), Paul’s anguish

...concentrated upon the point of whether or not he was going to engage in what he called ‘boasting’; he said that what they were demanding of him was that he boast like the rest, of his achievements as a leader. In the end he does it.

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43 Concerns have been raised about the meaning of thriambeuein and its cognates, the precise character of the Roman triumph, and of how well known it was outside Rome. Commentators also baulk at the obvious meaning—that Paul regarded himself as a disgraced and vanquished captive—and have sought to avoid this by suggesting, basically, that Paul regarded himself as starting in the triumph. But this is to put Paul on the wrong side of the arena. Both Marshall (1983, passim) and Hafemann (1990, 16-83) demonstrate that Paul took up the image as a metaphor of his suffering (also Fitzgerald, 1988, 161-164). Marshall sees the image as “a metaphor of social shame”. Hafemann regards it as a critical part of what he understands to be the interpretive crux of 2 Corinthians, namely 2:14-3:3: the metaphor conveys the sense of being “led to death” and forms a key image of Paul’s suffering, which Hafemann suggests was for Paul the proof of his apostleship and mediation of the Spirit. Both works are extremely helpful, though I find Marshall’s study more in touch with the social context of Paul troubles with the Corinthians. Hafemann tends to leave us with ideas about Paul rather than with a portrait of the man and his opponents.

44 Marshall notes the similarities in Latin authors of Paul’s use of the triumph as a metaphor (1983, 304-305, 312). In particular, Seneca noted the constant social shame felt by a man whose benefactor will not let him forget his indebtedness: “In a triumph I should have had to march but once” (On Benefits 2.11.1). He notes that, “Seneca’s example of the humiliated beneficiary provided a contemporary and remarkably similar metaphorical use (to Paul’s use of thriambeuein in 2 Cor 2:14). Both are used to denote social shame” (ibid, 317).
In a soul-searching passage, which obviously cost him a great deal and must have stunned his critics in spite of the fact that this was what they were demanding of him, he lets himself go suddenly with great violence into a full-blown display of boasting about himself. (Judge, 1973b, 108)

The startling aspect of all this is that Paul actually played up his disgrace (2 Cor 12:9-10; Marshall, 1983, 315-316). Paul spoke as though the gospel had laid him bare, as if it had forced upon him a startling self-knowledge. Yet he appears not to have been self-preoccupied. He seems neither awed by himself, nor defeated by what he saw within. Rather, alongside his dramatic and stark accounts of dying and rising, this journey was, for Paul, not a meander into his own psyche, but a walk with Christ.

4.6 CONCLUSION

Paul exposed himself as a man possessed. His dogged insistence on the centrality and sufficiency of Christ bore out the drama of his conversion. His previous confidence had been utterly dislodged and in its place he worshipped Christ and placed his faith in the scandalous events of the Messiah’s self-sacrifice. The law had run its course. He would not set aside the grace of God in Christ to appease those who wished to retain and revive the law. At stake, he believed, was the hard won freedom of the children of God. His adoration of Christ was an insatiable hunger to know him more. It did not drive him out of the world, however, but into it.

Paul’s life had become God’s topic even as Christ had been and continued to be. Paul’s desire carried his freedom. In turn, his freedom shaped his desire. Both only took shape as he interacted with the world, with the ekklesiai, and with God. Both shaped and proclaimed his message. In this sense, Paul carried in himself what his gospel offered to those whom he engaged.

What Paul offered was neither abstract nor idealised. He gave voice to a relationship. We catch the reflections of a man gripped and transformed, a man engaged and passionate. He suffered and hoped. He walked the cities and country roads of the empire bearing the shame of a crucified Jewish messiah. He laboured long hours for little pay, often to teach those who had no need or inclination to work. He worried, he wrote, and he prayed. He had no time for abstraction, yet he was constantly reflecting and

45 While Judge, Marshall, and Forbes have consistently made this point, it is frequently overlooked by others. In an excellent study of the peristasis catalogues of Paul and his contemporaries, Fitzgerald (1988) has demonstrated the considerable degree to which suffering formed part of Paul’s self-understanding. He particularly draws out the close formal similarities between the apostle and the philosophers’ portraits of the suffering sage.
learning. He was gripped by the possibilities of the present moment, and of the next. He showed remarkable insight. He was capable of subtle and perplexing paradox, and of tight turns of argument. He gives the impression of working out his thought on the run, with both remarkable precision and surprisingly little formulae. He was admired, scorned, and misunderstood. He had finished with the law and with social posturing.

Paul was determined to form the image of Christ in his converts, yet he formulated little by way of precept for them. He rejected the conventions of prestige, and was ostracised as an embarrassment. He repudiated the reality of local idols and was run out of town. He proclaimed the impartial call of God to all people, and styled himself a slave and a common labourer. He laboured to present his *ekklesia* strong and mature, while he defended the weak. He proclaimed his message with authority as the words of God not men, but looked to his converts for mutual encouragement. He trumpeted the humiliated and exalted Christ, and refused his own rights. This was the living shape of a new way.
Dying and Rising with Christ: 
The Rhythm of Paul’s Conversation

5.1 A MODEL OF COHERENCE, CREATIVITY, AND CONTINGENCY

In the previous chapter, I noted that “the rhythm of Paul’s choices—alternately conforming and innovating—was far from easy to pick up”. The metaphor was deliberate. To mix the image somewhat, Paul’s conversations for change were neither monotonous, monochromatic, nor stereotyped. We seek now to discern this rhythm—the ebb-and-flow of conversation by which Paul created and imparted new coherence in Christ in the face of the contingent circumstances of his life.

Our task is to draw together the threads of the conversation so far concerning the vitality and interdependence of Paul’s life and thought in his Graeco-Roman milieu. We have covered a vast territory and we must have clear recall of the salient features before embarking on the modern leg of the journey. In this sense, the chapter is a summary. Yet it is more than a summary. It introduces new data and perspective while making explicit what so far may remain implicit only. The task begins with a brief review.

The first chapter provided a broad pattern for characterising Paul’s milieu. I argued that the paradigms of Graeco-Roman life and thought were unavoidably dualistic, caught between the espoused priority of a theoretical reality, and the lived priority of the everyday. I further argued that metaphysical and social hierarchies were mutually interpretative, problematic, and reinforcing: the social pyramid and the scales of being mirrored one another. This interplay left two methodological legacies. On the intellectual side, abstraction and negation were the tools of those who would describe truth and reality in their purest forms. On the social side, those who would ensure the cohesion of the community presumed and reinforced the rectitude of its models and conventions of status.

As I demonstrated in chapter two, Paul worked from a very different place. He sought no recourse from the everyday, nor did he grasp at his own social position. Anchoring his thought in the histories of Israel and of Jesus the Christ, he laboured to live
and communicate the personal and social ramifications which he saw in the recent events of Christ's dying and rising. These three perspectives—the historical, the social, and the personal—were inseparable and complementary. Paul's thought oscillated between them as he grappled with explaining the new order of life inaugurated by Christ.

In the third chapter, I juxtaposed these two views of the world. More particularly, we compared Paul's thought with the Graeco-Roman paradigms of philosophy, theology, religion, and morality. The relationship was many and varied. The dying and rising of Christ did not settle in advance Paul's relationship to the world, but made possible several responses. First, Paul was embedded in his world. Second, he alternately conformed to its mores, critiqued them, or moved off on his own paths of innovation. Third, I argued that none of these paradigms did justice as an interpretative framework for what Paul was doing and attempting to do in response to the dying and rising of Christ.

Although attempting to keep Paul's thought clearly related to his life experience, the chapters to this point had emphasised the broader perspectives of his thought. We then needed to clarify the manner in which Paul actually engaged with others. This was the task of chapter four. We focused on the shape of Paul's desire and sense of freedom in the ways he engaged with the world, with his ἐκκλησία, and with God. These portraits lead us to unearth whatever of Paul's self-understanding lay near to the surface of the texts. The tenacious grip of his fascination and identification with the dying and rising of Christ clearly emerged in every aspect of Paul's relationships and self-knowledge.

We were left with a man who had eschewed the abstractions of metaphysics and the conventions of the social hierarchy for a life of self-denial in imitation of the Christ who had died and risen on his behalf. For Paul, 'reality' was not a chain of being, but the God of Israel and Christ, his purposes for creation, and his desire for fellowship with humanity now brought to light in the historical dying and rising of Christ. This reality was made vivid not by abstraction, but by retelling the events of Christ, and by identifying with him. Likewise, social relationships were no longer shaped by the canons of status, but by the impartial call of God in Christ. Paul expressed the privileges and obligations of these new relationships not by personal ambition for honour, but by the humiliated stance of a labourer.

It is clear that Paul conversed from a coherent intellectual, social, and existential framework. His ideas, the patterns of his relationships, and his self-understanding cohered. This coherence came to its fullest expression in the face of both anticipated and unanticipated circumstances. Every contingency offered Paul opportunities to articulate further the coherence he saw in Christ. Each context pushed him to innovate a response
which would explain and pass on the coherence which Christ offered to those living the challenges of that context. At each turn, the gospel allowed him to move the conversation in surprising directions, though never away from Christ. In short, each contingency challenged Paul both to critique the prevailing paradigms, and to rework his own understanding of Christ. This suggests a model:

![Diagram](image)

Figure 10: Paul recreated the coherence of the gospel for himself and his ekklēsiai in each new contingency

Simple dichotomies of theory and practice, or of interpretation and application, do not do justice to this process. We ought not to reduce what Paul was doing to "application". He was generating new meaning. The richness of Paul's gospel—the profundity of the coherence which he found in Christ—came to be only as Paul was open to the possibilities of knowing God, others, and himself afresh in the uncertainties of his relationships.

In the light of this review, and the model, I would suggest three theses regarding the rhythm of Paul's conversations as he laboured with Christ, in the world, to build the new communities. First, the dying and rising of Christ captivated Paul and shaped his every conversation. Here was the coherence in Paul's conversations: Christ, not abstraction. Second, the dying and rising of Christ opened up Paul's conversations to the opportunities and needs of each new context and contingency. Here was the creative edge of Paul's conversations: the freedom of Christ, not the tyranny of idealism and law. Third, the dying and rising of Christ created conversations over the new shape of social relations. Here was the goal of Paul's conversations: communities imitating Christ, not displays of intellectual coherence or of social cohesion as ends in themselves. Our conversation has
amply demonstrated the first thesis, which we will revisit only briefly. The second and third theses warrant further discussion.¹

5.2 CHRIST AS THE COHERENCE OF PAUL’S CONVERSATIONS

Paul’s sense of the coherence of Christ appears in his correspondence in several ways. First, he offered explicit statements of Christ’s rank and achievements (e.g. Rom 5:12-21, 1 Cor 15:20-28, Phil 2:6-11). These carried connotations of his priority and centrality. Furthermore, they identified him as the source of Paul’s inspiration and the locus of his personal wonder and loyalty. Second, Paul referred his motifs and approaches to Christ. In this way Christ provided unity within the diversity of Paul’s thought.

In previous chapters, we have noted both features in the ways in which Paul related all his thought to Christ. His themes spanned the character of God and the revelation of his purposes for humanity and history. God had revealed himself in Christ: he was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor 5:18-20). God had revealed the shape of history in Christ: history divides into those eras represented by Adam and Christ respectively (Rom 5:12-21). God had revealed the shape of the new humanity in Christ: Christ is the new Adam (1 Cor 15:45-49). God had revealed the shape of human relationships in Christ: the dying and rising of Christ is the new paradigm of community (Rom 12:1-21). God had repudiated all attempts to represent him: Christ is the end of law, religion, philosophy, and morality (Col 2:16-23). God had revealed his wisdom in Christ: every paradigm of thought must yield to the scrutiny of the wisdom and strength of God’s foolishness and weakness in Christ (1 Cor 1:18-25, Col 1:28-2:5). God had eclipsed the best of human intellectual achievement by centring his wisdom in Christ (1 Cor 1:18-2:16, Rom 12:2, Eph 4:17-24, Col 2:2-6). And as history had divided into the eras headed by Adam, the man of the earth (1 Cor 15:22a, 45a, 47), and by Christ, the man from heaven (15:22b, 45b, 48-49), so human experience divides into that which is vain and pitiable and subject to death (15:14, 17-19, 33-34), and that which is saved and glorious and made alive (15:22, 42-58). God’s control of history now focuses in Christ (15:23-28), the centre, focus, archetype, and inaugurator of all that is being renewed (15:45-49).

Within these broad parameters, Paul clustered his many personal and social concerns around Christ and his dying and rising. Christ, not Jerusalem or the law, was the

¹ I first encountered the labels ‘coherence’ and ‘contingency’ used of Paul in any sustained way in Beker (1990, 11-36). There is some overlap between my approach and his. Yet I remain dubious about his category ‘apocalyptic’ which still seems unhelpfully abstract and arbitrary. For example, he rejects Galatians as a “central and normative guide for all Paul’s letters and theology” because its “Christocentric focus...pushes Paul’s theocentric apocalyptic theme to the periphery” (58).
locus of the new covenant arrangements (Gal 4:21-31). Concomitant with the demise of Jerusalem's centrality, Paul's gospel announced the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise to the nations in the patriarch's "one seed", Christ, the new man who unites the people of God without respect to Jewish or Gentile heritage (3:15-4:7). Christ had thus become the model of the new humanity and the reference point for the new social structures emerging within the *ekklēsiai*. These new relationships were to give poignant expression to the new historical, social, and personal circumstance: as those who lived in the fullness of time, under the new Adam, and in the power of his Spirit, Paul urged the new people to eschew those futile and elitist marks of the flesh, the trappings of ambition, arrogance, and piety which belonged to an age passing away.

There could thus be no other foundation for Paul but Christ (1 Cor 3:11, cf. 2:5, 15:1-8). This was reflected in the structures of his letters, most of which commence with some brief portrait of Christ (Rom 1:1-4, 1 Cor 1:1-9, 2 Cor 12:5, 21-22, Gal 1:3-5, Eph 1:3-14, Phil 1:6, Col 1:5, 11-20, 1 Thess 1:9-10, 2 Thess 1:7-10, 2 Tim 1:9-10, Tit 1:1-3). These cameos set the scene in diverse ways for his ensuing conversations over the peculiar circumstances of the *ekklēsiai* or co-workers. Moreover, Paul consistently positioned their new behaviour as a response to the grace and mercy of God revealed in the dying and rising of Christ (Rom 5:1, 8:1, 12:1, 1 Cor 15:57, 2 Cor 3:18-4:7, 5:20, Gal 3:1, 5:1, Eph 2:4-10, 4:25, Col 2:6, 3:1). At times, Paul appealed to the coherence of Christ somewhat cryptically, as when he claimed that he had proclaimed "nothing but Christ and him crucified" at Corinth (1 Cor 2:2). Certainly Paul had mentioned more than the person of Christ and the narrative of his crucifixion, no matter how crucial these remained (15:3-4). Plainly, he did not intend his remark to be taken at face value. Rather, "Christ and him crucified" summarised a way of seeing and speaking, a way which he exemplified in his own life, and which he continued to promote in his letters as a means of subverting elitism and factionalism.

We have noted the same hermeneutical dimension in his appeals to the dying and rising of Christ.² Like the phrase 'in Christ', Paul's image of the dying and rising of Christ juxtaposed the historical events of Christ with their loaded personal and social implications. The effect was to identify the believer so closely with Christ, yet without confusing the two, as to make him the locus of the believer's new identity. In this way, Paul had only to mention the original events to bring immediately into focus a whole range of new patterns of understanding and behaviour. Likewise, the couplets which Paul associated with the dying and rising of Christ—weak-strong, suffering-joy, poor-rich,

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² Marshall calls the dying and rising of Christ "the most pivotal and integral theological idea in Paul's writings" (1993, 16).
slave-free, clay-treasure, dishonourable-honourable, foolish-wise—were so loaded with
the meaning of those events as to call them to mind even where they were not stated
explicitly. None of this is to say that the coherence which Paul grasped in the dying and
rising of Christ issued in any formulaic or predictable pattern of responses for a given
circumstance. Rather, if the dying and rising of Christ offered coherence to Paul in any of
the senses normally associated with a paradigm, then it did so as an image which
provoked him to engage with Christ personally in the transparency and open-endedness
of relationships, and to genuinely grapple with the vicissitudes of his own experience.
Indeed, Paul only knew the coherence of Christ by his own on-going immersion in the
contingencies of Graeco-Roman urban life and the sagas of his ekkēsiai.

5.3 THE COHERENCE OF CHRIST AND THE CONTINGENCY OF
CONVERSATION

5.3.1 The contingencies of Graeco-Roman culture and the coherence of
Christ

Paul brought the coherence of Christ to bear on the circumstances of his converts in order
to confirm the on-going transformation of their hearts and minds away from the patterns
of the world and towards conformity to the gospel of Christ. This engagement required
Paul at every step either to conform or to innovate in relation to contemporary thought
and practice. Yet the coherence of Christ did not dictate to Paul any single range of
possible responses.

As noted in the third chapter, it is mistaken to tie Paul to Graeco-Roman intellectual
and social paradigms. Paul showed no conscious dependence on any one school of
thought. Rather, as an independent thinker, he simply built on whatever was to hand
"exploiting the material rather than subjecting (him)self to it" (Judge, 1973b, 110). Thus
Paul’s conversations were peppered with the idiom and thought of Hellenistic education
and of popular philosophy and morality. Moreover, although he largely accepted the civil
order of life in the cities, nevertheless he promoted a distinctive set of social relations in
the ekkēsiai. Thus, again, no simple, single formula can account for Paul’s relations with
his milieu.

Clearly, Paul engaged with his world rather than retreating into an intellectual or
pietistic ghetto. He had no compunction in employing the vocabulary, literary techniques,
intellectual models, and even social conventions of his Gentile hearers’ wherever these
enabled him to tailor “his approach to the audience’s needs in order to engage their world
views" (Winter, 1991b, 129). He used epistolographic clichés, including his remembrance of friends. His own letters show close parallels to contemporary letters of recommendation (cf. Horsley, ND 4:250-255). Likewise, we have noted frequently that Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, Philippians, and Thessalonians show his consciousness of the conventions of philia in his deliberate inversions and exploitation of the motif to recast its meaning in conformity to the gospel. Similarly, when Paul described himself as a debtor (opheletés) to even those Greeks and non-Greeks, wise and foolish, with whom he had no prior relationship (Rom 1:14), he would appear to have been reversing the expectations of the motif of friendship and subjecting it to his controlling image of his own chosen social-humiliation as the mark of true friendship with Christ and his hearers. As a further example, Paul’s perspectives on reciprocal rights and obligations in marriage was thoroughly conventional (1 Cor 7:3-4), though his endorsement of celibacy (7:7) ran contrary to the classical ideals for a man and for society.

Paul’s use of contemporary vocabulary and themes was at times simply matter-of-fact; in other contexts, it appears clever and innovative, even startling. Some of the clearest examples of semantic innovations are his deliberate plays on known imperial, religious, and honorific contexts in his use of euangelion, mystērion, dikaiosunē, and charis. Note also his recasting of the common honorific and moral term philotimia (love of honour, ambition) to indicate his choice not to compete with others and to direct his ambition towards the honour of another (Rom 15:20). Similarly, we have noted Paul’s avoidance of religious terminology except where he could recast its meaning away from any cultic association (eg. leitourgia, Phil 2:17, cf. Horsley, ND 1:14; Llewelyn, ND 7:105-111; latpeia, Rom 12:2). Finally, his use of building (episk砣ômē, oik砣ômē, 1 Cor 3:10-15, 8:2, 10:23, 14:5, 21, Eph 4:16; also equipping, katartismo, 4:12) as a metaphor of social relations was a remarkable innovation which enabled him to dismantle the traditional indicators and expectations of status (Judge, 1980b, 5; 1984, 5; Marshall, 1993, 21).

While Paul freely employed aspects of the Graeco-Roman paradigms, he kept his distance wherever these would confuse his appeal for an alternative mindset. His use of

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3 For clear summaries of the schools of moral philosophy and the points of intersection with Paul, see Malherbe (1989). He includes discussions of the ideal philosopher, pastoral method, the practice of exhortation, the defence of the wise man, and the use of medical imagery. Stowers (1984) discusses Paul’s proximity to the methods and self-understanding of moral philosophers, including the forms and location of teaching, the importance of private homes to Paul, and certain parallels between Paul, Plutarch, and Epictetus.

4 Regarding two of these contexts, we have also discussed at length his proximity to the sophistic traditions and noted that his disavowal of these was made urgent for him by the all-too-obvious similarities in his mode of operation. Note again Winter (1993c, 1994) on Paul’s attitudes to the ‘entry’ conventions and professional behaviour associated with public orators.

5 For a discussion of the shifts in Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Egyptian law and custom regarding marriage, divorce, and dowries, see Llewelyn (ND 6:1-18).
both Graeco-Roman and Jewish traditions and conventions was guided by his conviction of the central significance of the historical person and work of Jesus Christ. Moreover, his personal experience of social humiliation and of the paradoxes of joy-in-suffering and strength-in-weakness repudiated the prevailing models of the moral man. Paul’s choices to ignore, repudiate, or rework the paradigms of Graeco-Roman popular intellectualism are perhaps clearest in relation to the moralists’ portraits of the ideal life as progress in virtue towards the perfect man (cf. Judge, 1987).\(^6\) We may summarise the discrepancies in this way:\(^7\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graeco-Roman emphases</th>
<th>Paul’s emphases</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pursue knowledge by abstraction</td>
<td>base understanding on the histories of Israel and Christ, and on the work of the Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>create precision through reason</td>
<td>create coherence and imitation through the gospel and the Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give priority to abstracted reality</td>
<td>ground all truth in relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relegate the everyday</td>
<td>focus on the everyday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pursue ideal man and society</td>
<td>pursue relations of love, not ideals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>educate to inculcate social mores</td>
<td>critique those mores where they cut across identification with Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>focus on rank</td>
<td>equivocate about rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pursue status</td>
<td>remove all ground for status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>preserve social order by leadership</td>
<td>trust the Spirit and believers to build the community in love and the truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maintain balance and constancy</td>
<td>abandon personal serenity and stability for the extremes of dying and rising with Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>applaud individual ambition</td>
<td>direct individuals to promote the well-being and honour of the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>censure change</td>
<td>promote transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inculcate virtue</td>
<td>identify with the dying and rising Christ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 11: Discrepancies between Paul and the Graeco-Roman paradigms of reason and moral purpose*

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\(^6\) On the parallels and departures between Paul and the moralists regarding the development of character, see Meeks (1986, 45-52).

\(^7\) See also the matrix of moral traditions towards the end of the section “Paul and Morality” in chapter three.
Paul sensed that the contemporary paradigms skewed his converts' understanding and vision away from the radical restructuring of their identity and social relations by the dying and rising of Christ. Thus he laboured to shift their sense of place in the world. In particular, he urged them to see that they must constantly choose either to believe the truth of their new identity, or to believe the lie of their old identity.

5.3.2 The contingencies of exegesis and the coherence of Christ

Paul's grasp of the coherence of Christ, and his confidence to engage with the paradigms of his day, were largely the fruits of his grounding in the scriptures of his heritage. Prior to his conversion, Jerusalem and the law were perhaps the chief symbols of the coherence of Paul's life and thought. Yet this coherence had been fragmented irrecoverably by his encounter with Christ on the Damascus road. Paul subsequently relearned the meaning of the OT (Acts 9:20-22; Gal 3:6-4:7, 21-31). He came to replace the old coherence with the new, not by discarding his heritage, but by reworking his grasp of its promises and structures in the light of the revelation of Christ to him.

There were several aspects to the interplay between Christ and the OT in Paul's thought. First, the coherence of his gospel derived in part from the coherence Paul saw in the OT. Second, Paul was as indebted to the diversity of the OT as to its unity. In other words, the coherence which he saw in Christ, and which he understood to be grounded in the OT covenants, allowed him to rework creatively the old themes and texts in different and sometimes surprising directions. Third, certain OT structures anchored Paul's gospel so that it remained coherent no matter how far he developed his thought in new contexts. His thought moved in new directions, but it did not stray from Christ. Likewise, his gospel of Christ did not stray from its OT moorings. Indeed, he drew together quotes and allusions from a wide selection of the prophetic writings to expound Israel's history as culminating in Christ (Rom 9:1-10:4; Ps 18:49, 2 Sam 22:50, Deut 32:43, Ps 117:1, Isa 11:10). In one succinct summary of his message, Paul portrayed the gospel as what had been "promised beforehand" (proopôlegeilato, Rom 1:2-4). Moreover, the gospel had been proclaimed to Abraham (Gal 3:8). Paul did not see himself as departing from the OT even where he saw meaning in the OT beyond what the original writers could have foreseen. A clear example is his presumption of the end of the law (Rom 7:6, 10:4, Gal 3:19-25).

Moreover, Paul worked with similar OT themes from various perspectives. For example, he used the figure and narratives of Abraham for several purposes: to affirm the pedigree of his message that righteousness comes through faith in the promises of God (Gen 12:1-3, 15:6; Rom 4:1-25, Gal 3:6-1); to argue for Christ's place as the one seed of Abraham (Gen 12:7, 13:5, 24:7; Gal 3:16); and to assert the supremacy of 'Sarah' (the heavenly Jerusalem)
over ‘Hagar’ (the contemporary city, Gal 4:21-31). In this way, Paul used the OT to place himself beyond the claims of two of its central symbols, Jerusalem and the law.

The same coherence-within-contingency surfaced in Paul’s handling of textual detail. The coherence of Christ offered him a congruent approach to the OT; it did not settle in advance his methodological paths for translation, citation, or exegesis. Again Paul appears to have been uninterested in methodological canons of precision. In an extensive survey of Paul’s use of OT texts, Ellis (1981) has demonstrated the diversity of his approaches both in regard to his citations of the LXX or Hebrew (or of unknown/his own translations), and the similarities of his style to contemporary Jewish exegetical models. His study confirms that Paul used the OT creatively, coherently, and flexibly. No single hermeneutical strategy controlled his reading of text, except that he believed he was always taking full cognisance of Christ. The OT was the heritage of Paul and his communities. Its narratives and promises were like mines yielding rich understanding of the mysteries now revealed in Christ (2 Tim 3:15-16).

5.3.3 The coherence of Christ as imitation, not conformity to the law

Just as the coherence of Christ did not predispose Paul to any one exegetical procedure, nor did it imply any single path of Christian experience. The imitation of the dying and rising of Christ was not an alternative moral code—it was not a ready reckoner for behaviour (Judge, 1993e, 196-197). Rather, it was the peculiar point of provocation for one who engaged with Christ in his or her own actions and choices. While the event suggested certain corollaries for Paul—such as the couplets weakness-strength, foolishness-wisdom, poor-rich, slave-free, and suffering-joy—Paul offered no formulaic means of expressing these. Instead, each provoked fresh awareness of what it meant to identify with Christ, and to imitate him. Neither the dying and rising of Christ, nor Paul’s couplets, were a means of securing allegiance to a code of behaviour.

This point is crucial to understanding the rhythm of Paul’s conversations. Simply stated, he did not labour to produce uniformity of behaviour. Paul’s own life embodied the dynamic transformations which he believed the Spirit sought to effect within the ekklēsiai (Malherbe, 1987, 54-60). Moreover, his teaching was provocative, not legislative. It avoided the pettiness of religious and legal controversies (2 Tim 2:14-26, Tit 3:9), focusing instead on the gospel of Christ (Rom 1:10-17, 1 Cor 2:5, Eph 4:20, Col 1:28-2:5), and on the relational choices of walking by the Spirit (Gal 5:16-26, 1 Thess 4:1-10). Nor did he prescribe any single pattern for the gathering. What he did advise remained open to spontaneity and diversity (1 Cor 14:26-33).
Paul’s letter to the Galatians provides a case study in this radical repositioning of behaviour away from law and morality. His passion for Christ allowed no rapprochement with those who would “cut in” on this εκκλησία and distort his gospel (Gal 5:12; cf. Phil 3:2). Nor did he mince words with those on the brink of choosing the law over Christ: “Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all” (5:2; cf. 5:7, 2 Cor 6:1). Traditional arguments about the possibility of ‘losing salvation’ fall wide of Paul’s point here. His message was starkly existential: the one who embraces the law so binds himself under its obligations as to be unable to see grace (5:4). The war is fought and lost in the heart, the mind, and the will. The conscience fixed on law cannot allow the person to live by grace. Circumcision, Sabbath observance, dietary regulations, and other obligations under OT law could only confirm the believers in a mindset which would exclude them from seeing the grace of God in the dying and rising of Christ (4:9-11). Thus those captivated by grace must refuse every claim of law to legitimacy. They must cling only to the Spirit who directs them towards the free justification to be revealed at the last (5:5-6). Indeed, only the Spirit could make clear to them the significance of the dying and rising of Christ and enable them to choose accordingly—only the Spirit, not the dead letter of the law (5:16-26).

As noted in chapters two and four, Paul’s understanding of the Spirit seems to have echoed earlier prophecies of a new covenant (cf. Jer 31:31-34, Ezek 36:26-27, 37:1-14, Joel 2:28-32). This new arrangement, Paul believed, had been inaugurated by the events of Christ and the subsequent outpouring of the Spirit. Confident of the Spirit’s presence with his people, Paul continued in the prophetic pattern, reminding the new communities of God’s actions in the dying and rising of Christ, and urging them to respond in faith. Yet this same confidence in the Spirit and his people underscores Paul’s exasperation at the choice of the Galatians and certain of the apostles to return to the law (Gal 2:11-14, 3:23-25). Indeed, in regard to the Gentile believers, Paul stood agog that they had been bewitched to abandon the Spirit so as to place themselves under a superseded law to which they had never been obligated (3:1-5).

Paul did not understand the contrast which he drew between the law and the Spirit as an innovation. Rather, he saw himself standing in line with the prophetic hopes and structures. This is critical to understanding the manner in which Paul brought the coherence of Christ to bear on the specific circumstances of this εκκλησία. The old arrangement, through no fault of its own, had only brought death (Gal 3:10, 21; cf. Rom

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8 This point is similar to the one I made in chapter two about the ‘T’ of Rom 7. There I argued that there is no need to nail down the identity of the ‘T’: it is anyone who chooses to live by law, or by any other religious or moral standard.
The new had brought life (Gal 3:13-14). The Spirit was the one who made this new life the on-going experience of those in the ekklesia (5:16, 25; cf. Ezek 37:14). The law could not guide the new life of the people of God (Gal 5:13-18). It is from this vantage that we note the force and logic of Paul’s exhortations in the final chapters of the letter.

If Paul were still tied to law as the paradigm of the new way, albeit modified in some sense to the new redemptive events, then we would expect him to have responded to the Galatians’ with a “comprehensive set of rules for ethical conduct” (Lategan, 1990, 320). Yet he studiously avoided such a move. Indeed, he made no attempt to lay down the law in any form. Rather, Paul set before them the contrasting ways of death and life as something self-evident to those who have the Spirit (Gal 5:19-23). Regarding the fruits of life in the Spirit, Paul only stated that “no law is against these things” (5:22-23). The cryptic character of this remark was integral to his strategy. It reinforced that the fruits of the Spirit were not in any way a new law: “there is no new system to be learned or to be played” (ibid, 324). As Betz notes, “the effect, therefore, is provocative, corrective, demanding, and advisory” (1979, 292). It left responsibility with the readers to discern what they must choose if they were to live by the Spirit. In this sense, Betz is right when he insists that “Paul does not provide the Galatians with a specifically Christian ethic...but his goal is to induce self-examination and self-criticism, in order to keep the level of ethical awareness high” (ibid). At the same time, Paul did not encourage self-examination in the same sense as the moral philosophers. For Paul, self-examination did not lead to a changed life. Rather, the new point of reference was the dying and rising of Christ, not the self.

Equally suggestive as Paul’s shift from the law was the overlap between his list of the Spirit’s fruits and certain attitudes and behaviours common in the lists of virtues put forward by Graeco-Roman moralists. In this regard, it seems Paul understood that the impact of the dying and rising of Christ on behaviour cut in several directions. First, it spelt the end of the law which had been left behind. Second, it spelt the comprehensiveness of the new existence of the Spirit. Third, Paul believed himself free to parallel or draw from the Hellenistic traditions, even as he critiqued and reworked them by the dying and rising of Christ (Lategan, 1990, 325). Paul assumed that the Galatians were capable of seeing the startling significance of the dying and rising of Christ and thus that they could address normal Hellenistic moral mores with new eyes and hearts. Fourth, while the Galatians’ choice to enslave themselves to the old order had forced Paul to speak as though they had no part in Christ (Gal 4:11, 16; cf. 1 Cor 3:1-4, 19, 6:7), he remained true to the prophetic spirit of seeking to call the people back to a life based on the redemptive acts of God. Thus Paul appealed to the Galatians to understand their new identity and to
act in the liberated and responsible manner which befitted those who no longer needed the
external stimulus of a codified manner of life (Gal 5:24; cf. 5:1-6, 6:14-15).9

5.3.4 Contingency, creativity, and the coherence of Christ

Clearly, Paul did not proceed from the coherence of Christ to reduce experience,
relationship, and learning to abstraction. The common and impartial gifts of Christ to the
believers did not remove them from the open-endedness of “walking worthily of one’s
calling” (Gal 5:13, 16, Eph 4:1, Phil 1:27, Col 1:10, 3:1-5, 17, 1 Thess 4:1, 2 Thess 1:11-12,
2:15). His gospel offered no formulae to settle in advance whether he would conform or
innovate in relation to the contemporary intellectual and social paradigms.

Paul’s thought and choices did not develop as reflection abstracted from contexts:
“At no point do Paul’s letters offer detached, disinterested theological reflection; likewise,
nowhere does Paul dispassionately analyze moral reasoning” (Sampy, 1991, 117). His
gospel urged him to tackle issues of specific concern in specific contexts, not to pontificate
on generalised issues and ideals. Smaller local matters such as invitations to dinner, and
larger more global concerns such as the polarisation of Jews and Gentiles, assumed
importance for Paul as they touched specific individuals and ekklēsiai within the orb of his
own experience.

Paul’s gospel eschewed abstraction. Putting the matter more positively, his gospel
embraced contingency. We have noted previously that his message neither presumed nor
set out to create any one political or social structure, nor any one model for the gathering
or leadership. Nor did he elaborate one code of behaviour, nor households duties beyond
a minimum necessary for good order and public reputation. Certainly Paul’s presentation
of household conduct never approached the detail of moralists like Hierocles. Likewise,
Paul did not formulate any single exegetical method. Moreover, his gospel was itself
capable of diverse expression. In Paul, the general did not swallow up the particular.

Accordingly, Paul worked to create discernment, not slavish conformity (Phil 1:9-
11). Moreover, he transferred common Hellenistic themes from the sphere of the
individual’s quest for serenity and success to the pressing concerns of the well-being of the
community. The old maxim “pick your time” gave way to the need to understand the
times and to act for Christ and his people (Rom 13:8-14). In this sense, Paul conversed
with his communities to create new understanding in new circumstances. Indeed, the

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9 Colossians provides a further sample of the hold of an alternative mindset over those who
have otherwise been transferred from one world to the other (Col 2:20, cf. 2:16-23). Once again,
central to Paul’s challenge was the recovery of self-understanding derived from the identity and
power of Paul’s thought only came to its fullness in the contingencies of social life. In this regard, Marshall notes that the enmity towards Paul at Corinth gave him new opportunity to grapple with the personal and social significance of the dying and rising of Christ, such that his thought on strength-in-weakness had matured between the canonical first and second letters as a result of his experiences (1983, 316). Lategan notes much the same phenomenon in regard to Paul and the Galatians: “there can be little doubt that the changing circumstances of Paul’s ministry and the new challenges he had to meet forced him to rethink and revise key concepts of his theology” (1990, 319).

Paul seems to have drawn confidence from this coherence-within-contingency to engage boldly with the world. The coherence of Christ established the broad parameters of this engagement. Yet while this did not preempt the character and the outcomes of his engagement, he seems to have acted in the conviction that his gospel of Christ had proven both adaptable and relevant to his audiences. In this sense, Paul and his colleagues were working out their message and thought as they went. Yet even as his thought matured, Paul continued to show no interest in formulating final statements in the sense of the doctrinal debates of subsequent generations. He remained focused on specific people and contexts. New contexts continued to prompt new responses from him. In this sense, Paul remained open to the Spirit and to his own experiences and relationships to guide his thought. As Sampley notes, there was nothing dispassionate or removed about Paul’s thought:

Paul has no gospel that fails to intercept flesh-and-blood life or the real happenings in people’s lives...we may be tempted to distil Paul’s gospel out of the particularity of letters to real people...(but) Paul’s thought world, his moral deliberations, and life in the world are so intricately intertwined as to be ultimately inseparable. That is Paul’s genius...Paul’s moral reasoning functions around the categories of the ‘fitting’ or ‘appropriate’...Paul’s view of the life of faith, when lived as it should be, requires vigorous involvement of the mind and heart...It is a delicate balance...but its power may lie precisely in its frailty and vulnerability. (1991, 117-119)

The complexity and flexibility of Paul’s thought was a direct outcome of this openness as he sought coherence-within-contingency. As Marshall notes:

In sketching Paul’s motif of the dying and rising Christ, we are introduced to a rich, complex and diverse cluster of ideas expressed by an equally complicated array of terms, symbols and metaphors. They are used by Paul in various supportive combinations throughout his letters as he grapples intellectually and
practically with the issues and challenges of his churches’ place in the world and his role in them... The motif as a whole gives shape, direction and character to the individual notions within it. It is transcendent, eschatological, soteriological, christological. It is driven by purpose, values and guiding principles. It interlinks past, present and future in a continuum or continuous relationship with a prejudice toward surrendering the past, realising the future in the present, and pressing toward the future. It is paradoxical, holding in creative tension a range of antithetical ideas. It is human, relational, transformational, covenantal, mutual, participative, and accountable. (1993, 38)

The rigour of this complexity did not lie in any artificial canon of precision. As noted before, there was no one overarching perspective to the complex of his ideas. Instead, we might characterise his thought as ‘multi-perspectival’: the coherence-within-contingency of his thought came to the fore in diverse images each capable in a given context of being made a perspective on the whole.\textsuperscript{10} His thought was deeply metaphorical (Marshall, 1993, 35).\textsuperscript{11} Indeed, this feature of his style is an aspect of the rhythm of his conversation. The truth Paul pursued and communicated was not narrowly propositional, but came to expression in a deep congruence of faith, hope, and love in the lives of his \textit{ekklēsiai}. Understandably, then, his means of retelling the dying and rising of Christ and of exhorting the believers to imitation were often cryptic, suggestive, and provocative. His style was to draw out hearts and minds to engage with Christ, not to create an intellectual system to be memorised and canonised. Indeed, insofar as our appreciations of Paul suppress the enigmatic and cryptic character of his thought, we misrepresent him.

This characterisation of Paul offers a vantage point on his assessment of contemporary intellectualism. From Paul’s perspective, the best of Graeco-Roman

\textsuperscript{10} I use the term ‘multi-perspectival’ in the sense in which it was coined by my former teacher, Vern Poythress. Supplementing his biblical insights from his backgrounds in philosophy of science and linguistics, Poythress offers twelve maxims for what he calls ‘Symphonic Theology’ (1987, 69-91). Several of my own observations on Paul can be cast to fit his framework (the numbers which follow refer to his maxims): (1) Paul showed no interest in overly precise language or delineation of subjects; (2) his semantic choices were both conventional and innovative; he seems to have used few terms in any self-consciously technical sense; (3) — ; (4) the boundaries between his vocabulary, metaphors, and ideas are as ‘fuzzy’ as the boundaries between the social contexts in which he employed them; (5) he showed no interest in any ‘ultimate reality’, let alone exhaustive descriptions of it; (6) he brought different perspectives to bear on similar issues and themes because of different social contexts and stages in the development of his own life and thought; (7) — ; (8) he made certain perspectives function in a given context as sufficient vantage points on the whole; (9) his flexibility was not for show, but arose from his desire to redirect the hearts and minds of his converts towards Christ; (10) he saw what he could because of the breadth \textit{and} limitations of his own heritage, psychology, and experience; (11) — ; and (12) at times he identified with the concerns of his hearers as a means of redirecting their loyalties.

\textsuperscript{11} In a profitable few pages, Marshall (1983, 309-311, 314-317) notes the pervasiveness of metaphors in Paul’s thought and calls for an in-depth study of this aspect of his style. I can only reiterate the need.
philosophy and morality had proved futile. It rendered its adherents insensitive and hardened towards God and the concerns of others, and could not lead them toward Christ (Eph 4:17-20; cf. Rom 1:18-25). Paul's converts, however, had been taught "the truth that is in Jesus" (Eph 4:21). Such truth held implications of a renewed life (4:22-24), and of social relations transformed by a concern to edify one another and to show compassion (4:25-32). In other words, 'the truth in Jesus' was absorbed by imitating the love of God as revealed in the dying of Christ (5:1-2; cf. 25-33). It is worth noting that Paul located the truth in Jesus (Eph 4:21). The personal name on its own is rare in Paul's writings in that he normally affixed the messianic title—Christ Jesus, Jesus Christ—or simply referred to him as Christ. In Gal 6:17, Paul's reference to Jesus plainly calls to mind his suffering and humiliation before the crucifixion. It may be that in Eph 4:21 Paul was making a similar allusion. If so, his point may have been to contrast the futile sophistication of philosophical and moral abstraction with the sure though unexpected truth found in the ruddy simplicity and personal suffering of the Messiah.

This nexus of truth and imitation in the dying and rising of Christ allows us to draw together several significant strands of the conversation to this point. From the outset, we have pursued an understanding of the dynamics of Paul's life and thought in relation to the intellectual and social paradigms of his milieu. At the conclusion of the first chapter, we noted the nexus of metaphysical and social hierarchies in the formulas of idealism enshrined in the conventions of status. For Paul's part, on several occasions we have noted that he characterised the life preoccupied with status as one of boasting. We also noted his propensity to regard boasting as the quintessential expression of arrogant independence, not only from others, but from God. References to boasting, and his deep aversion to it, thus functioned in his conversation as the respective hallmarks of the flesh and the Spirit. To boast or not to boast marked one's response to the dying and rising of Christ.

Abstraction, elitism, and boasting were deeply intertwined by the formulas and conventions of idealism. Idealism kept conversation abstracted from contingency. Idealism fed elitism insofar as its standards were far beyond the reach of most. And

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12 In another place (Rom 1:18-25), Paul ironically and confrontationally represented Graeco-Roman (and Jewish) morality as the fruits of an unseemly or depraved mind (adokimos noun) which could only do what was not fitting (ta mé kathēkonta; 1:28).

13 Paul made the same point in a more extensive portrait of the suffering and exaltation of Christ (Phil 2:6-8). Contra the NIV, 2:5 (toute pronoite en humin ho kai en Christo Iesou) does not lend itself to a strictly moral reading: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (NIV). Rather, its syntax and context suggests a fusion of historical and personal perspectives: "Think (humbly, 2:1-4) among yourselves as those in Christ Jesus (that is, as those who are characterised by his identity and history, 2:6-11)". In other words, the Philippians must work out their identity and new social relations by reflecting on the dying and rising of Christ on their behalf (cf. 2 Cor 8:9).
idealism fueled the reciprocity of honours and boasting as the great men and their dependents alike vigilantly preserved the ancient order of civic life.\textsuperscript{14}

In this sense, Paul's refusal of social honours was at the same time a refusal to move from the particulars to the universal. We noted this in his recasting of the language of honour and virtue away from status and towards the responsibilities and obligations of believers to imitate Christ by dying to their own self-interests. Humility thus casts off idealism, abstraction, and elitism as encumbrances to the imitation of Christ. Correspondingly, Paul's understanding of maturity-perfection (telos) inevitably moved away from the paradigms and formulas of the Graeco-Roman moralists. Loosed from its associations of conformity to an ideal, telos no longer functioned in Paul's vocabulary as a tag for a quantitative or even qualitative measure. Paul associated telos with maturity in relationship, the mark of one who was identifying with the dying and rising of Christ (Phil 3:12; cf. 4:11, 12:4-1, 1 Cor 13:10-12). Indeed, telos entailed the repudiation of the normal conventions and indicators of moral perfection: conformity, serenity, ambition, and the love of honour. The one who was telos in Christ had ceased to boast.

The dying and rising of Christ, the coherence-within-contingency which Paul saw in these events, and the death of idealism, abstraction, and elitism inherent in Paul's refusal to boast, each clarify the rhythm of Paul's conversations. They also clarify his learning. To take a step back from one's own social position as a considered response to the dying and rising of Christ was to engage afresh with Christ and others. It was thus to be open to new learning and understanding. This was Paul's experience.

5.4 COMMUNITY IN CHRIST AS THE GOAL OF PAUL'S CONVERSATIONS

5.4.1 Coherence in the community as a dialectic of affirmation and reversal

Paul's teaching was shaped in many ways by a dialectic between his grasp of the historical significance of the dying and rising of Jesus and his own ongoing experience of humiliation. This experience imitated and threw new meaning onto the dying and rising of Jesus. It also deepened his resolve to impart this insight so as to transform relationships within his ekklesiai. The task assumed greater urgency in those ekklesiai where contemporary social values were most entrenched. Speaking of the struggles between the strong and the weak at Corinth, Meeks notes that "Paul uses the mediating symbol of

\textsuperscript{14} I made this point towards the end of the section "Paul and Morality" in chapter three through the matrix of the Graeco-Roman ideals and conventions of conformity and progress.
Jesus crucified, not to achieve a theoretical synthesis of these opposing positions, but to signify a way in which the persons who occupied the position could understand their engagement with one another” (1986, 136). We turn now to a closer examination of the rhythm of Paul’s conversations with this troubled ἐκκλησία.

In Paul’s conversations, the “knowledge which builds up” (1 Cor 8:3) first tore down. This ‘destructive’ knowledge, founded on the strength and wisdom of the weak and foolish message of the cross, reversed the ideals and fortunes of those who drew near to Christ (1:18-2:5). Those who think they are sophos, must become mēros in order to know true sophia (3:18-23; cf. Job 5:13, Ps 94:11). In other words, they must embrace the reversals of status urged by the cross (Rom 12:1-4). The one who does renounce all claim to honour and privilege can come to know the startling reinstatement of “all things” (1 Cor 3:22-23). Both the reversals and the privileges spring from the foolishness-wisdom and weakness-strength of the dying and rising of Christ (1:18-2:5). Paul’s own choices to identify with Christ’s death placed him in stark contrast to the elitists at Corinth: they were rich, he poor; they were kings, he was the scum of the earth (4:8-13). Paul and his co-workers were mere servants who stewarded God’s own mysteries “húpēretas Christou kai oikonomous mustērion Theou” (4:1), without comparison or praise (4:2-7) and in self-humiliation (4:8-13). This is the manner of those truly possessed by the Spirit and his mysteries (4:14-17; cf. 2:5-3:23; 4:6, 18, 19, 5:2, 8:1, 13:4; Meeks, 1983, 128-129). Those who know the full extent of their privileges attribute these to Christ (3:22-23, 4:7). Those transformed in these ways “do not exceed what is written”; they do not boast beyond what Christ has done, nor make comparisons between men (4:6-7; cf. 1:10-17, 26-31, 3:1-4:5).

In all this Paul staked a great deal on how the Corinthians would grasp the cross and the corresponding place of the new community in God’s designs for his people. In his estimation, they ought to have been able to deduce certain conclusions by reflecting on the manner in which God had worked among them (1 Cor 1:13-17, 22-2:5, 3:5-4:13). Yet, Paul conceded, their grip on the hallmarks of conventional social honour had only created and reinforced elitist group boundaries (1:13-17). These precluded them from grasping the mysteries of the Spirit (2:3-3:1). So long as they remained tied to the social system of honour, and endorsed the prestige and sufficiency of education within that system, they would not see the system for what it was (1:18-20).²⁵ Paul and Apollo, however, modelled the new way. As co-labourers for Christ (1 Cor 3:5-17; cf. 4:6), they too had wisdom (sophos

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²⁵ For a discussion of Paul’s relation to contemporary education practice, see Judge (1983b, esp. 11-12).
architekton, 3:10). Yet they did not parade this so as to boast of their own achievements. Rather, they were held up as fools and outcasts as they laboured to build up the new people of God (3:5-4:13). The contrast was stark. Indeed, the debacles over the immoral brother (5:1-13), and lawsuits within the ekkleśia (6:1-11), highlighted to Paul the need for drastic action to loosen the grip of the mindset of the old order.

At this point, Paul moved his critique from what to him at least was self-evidently wrong in the Corinthians’ mindset to what was right but equally mistaken. In the first place, Paul largely affirmed the slogans of the strong—“everything is permissible” and “food for the stomach and the stomach for food” (1 Cor 6:12-13). Yet they had failed entirely to rethink these according to the gospel Paul had delivered to them. Where God is building community, Paul argued, what matters is not the permissible, but the beneficial (sumpherei, 6:12; cf. Horsley, ND 1:60). “‘Permissible’? Yes, but not expedient. ‘Permissible’? Yes, but better not to be mastered. ‘Food for the stomach and the stomach for the food’? Yes, but God will destroy both. ‘The body for immorality’? No, the body is for the Lord and the Lord is for the body” (6:12-20).

In the following conversations Paul offered answers to explicit concerns raised by the Corinthians themselves. The first concerned marriage and Paul seized the occasion to continue outlining the new manner of life and thought. In particular, he seemed to have derived three perspectives from his grasp of the historical moment: the critical importance of God’s gift; the binding value of God’s command; and the relative worth of Paul’s (God’s) concession (1 Cor 7:29-31). God grants gifts, ability, and a place. But, Paul argued, if one changes one’s place, then let the new place be the opportunity to honour Christ. This cautions us against reading 7:19b—allā tērēsis entolōn Theou, “but keep(ing) the commands of God” (my trans.)—as Paul deferring to OT law. After all, he had already dismissed circumcision as having no enduring importance. Indeed, he had advised the Gentile converts not to obey the OT law in this regard (7:18b).

What Paul did encourage was a new mindset, albeit in touch with the wisdom of the OT. His advice exuded much the same spirit as his exhortation in Rom 12:2: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will”. In other words, Paul called the Corinthians to adjust their mindsets, desires, and behaviours in accordance with their changing circumstances. The

16 The NIV prejudices the options by its paraphrase, “Keeping God’s commandments is what counts” (emphasis mine).
point was not to acquiesce to the mores of society, but to act with the radical perspectives of the new era in the light of the impending destruction of the old.\textsuperscript{17}

Whatever else may be said of Paul's relation to OT law, both in 1 Cor 7-10 and elsewhere, his understanding of the new way exuded an air of freedom within responsibility. Characteristic of this freedom was a certain ambivalence to circumstance. This was not a deference to any transcendent reality as more important than the everyday. We have noted repeatedly that this was not Paul's way. Rather, Paul's grasp of what it meant to walk in the new way was not bound to any one path of choices. By grounding choice in the believer's identity and allegiance—"the body for the Lord, and the Lord for the body"—Paul could not only prescribe certain actions (6:12-20), but also provide a platform for ambivalence and adaptability (7:17-24). He left many choices open, though not totally so. He established certain boundaries, but placed the onus on personal discernment and responsibility. He cast all choices as issues of faithfulness to Christ, and frequently restrained from prescribing an exclusive option. The manner of how Paul unfolded this new way of "making up one's mind" in the light of the gospel is apparent in the 'grammar' of 1 Cor 7:\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{quote}
It is good...but since there is...
I say this as a concession, not a command...
I wish that...but each has his own gift from God...
one has this...another has that...
Now to...I say...
It is good...but if...for it is better...
I give this command (not I, but the Lord)...she must not...but if she does...she must...or else...
And he...must not...
To the rest, I say this (I, not the Lord)...If...and she is willing...he must not...
If...and he is willing...she must not...
For...and...
Otherwise...but as it is...
But if...let him do so...he or she is not bound in such circumstances
God has called us to peace
How do you know, wife, whether...
Likewise, how do you know, husband, whether...
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{17} On the recurring interplay in 1 Cor between gospel and response, note the proximity of the following 'gospel' statements to Paul's exhortations to change thought and behaviour (1 Cor 1:18-25, 30-31, 2:6-16, 3:10-23, 4:6-7, 5:6-8, 6:2-3, 9-11, 12-20, 7:29-30, 8:1-6, 11-13, 9:1-27, 10:11, 10:23-11:1, cf. Rom 12:1, 13:11-14, 14:5-12, 15:1-13).

\textsuperscript{18} Meeks describes this as Paul's "grammar of moral process" in a succinct and fascinating discussion of 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians (1986, 124-136).
Nevertheless, each one should stay...
This is my rule...
If circumcised, stay so...
If uncircumcised, stay so...
Neither is anything...just keep God's commands...
Each one should remain where he or she is...
If a slave, stay so...don't be troubled...although if you can get free, do so...
A slave is the Lord's freeman...
A freeman is the Lord's slave...
You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men...
Each man, as responsible to God, should stay where he was when God called him...
Now about...I have no command...
but I give a judgement as one who by God's mercy is trustworthy...
Because of your present circumstances, I think that it is good...
Are you married...stay so..
Are you unmarried...stay so...
But if you do marry, you have not sinned
But those who do face many troubles...I want to spare you this...
What I mean is...the time is short...
From now on...
If 'A'...live as if 'B'...
If 'B'...live as if 'A'... (etc)
For this world in its present form is passing away
I would like you to be free from concern...with interests undivided...
I say this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord
If anyone...and if...he should...he is not sinning...
But if another has settled the matter in his own mind (the other way)...this man also does what is right
So then, he who...is right...but he who...does better
A woman is bound...but if...she is free...so long as...
In my judgement, she is happier...
...and I think that I too have the Spirit of God.

In 1 Cor 8-10, Paul appeared to extend this 'grammar', or at least the spirit of it, to the conflict of the 'strong' and the 'weak'. Christ's dying and rising had abolished the
sacred-profane dichotomies of Jewish and Graeco-Roman religion and morality. This held far-reaching implications for the Corinthian factions. First, the ‘weak’ must face what they still did not know (8:6-7): that “an idol is nothing” (8:4); that there are no real gods other than the one God and his Christ (8:5-6); and that one is free to converse with unbelievers without raising matters of conscience (8:9-10). Second, the ‘strong’ must face the responsibilities which Christ had placed on them for the well-being of those who “do not yet know” (8:9-13). Third, the strong must face the real dangers which the weak rightly discern in idolatry (10:1-1-22). In other words, true perception counts for nothing without love since “knowledge puffs up, but love builds up” (8:1; cf. 13:2, 8-12).

The one who loves God—not necessarily the one with complete knowledge—is the one whom God acknowledges (8:1-3). Likewise, love of “the one for whom Christ died” must shape the imitation of Christ (8:11, 10:31-11:1; cf. 4:16). In matters of conscience and rival factions, then, the inclusio Paul provided by the priority of love (8:1) and its exposition in the self-sacrifice of Christ (10:33-11:1) suggests that he regarded the imitation of Christ’s self-giving love as the controlling paradigm for one who would choose the transformation which Christ offers (cf. 8:6, 11-12, 9:19-23, 10:16). Such a paradigm, far from endorsing the Graeco-Roman moral ideal of constancy, lead Paul to adapt his manner of life to the concerns of his hearers (9:19-23).

Paul epitomised this new way in his own refusal of personal rights (1 Cor 9:1-27). In an important sense, this shift of focus (chap 9) did not depart from his counsel to the strong and the weak (chaps 8 and 10). Certainly, the passage was critical to Paul’s self-defence (9:3). Yet it also offered the Corinthians an extended analogy to their own concerns. It was as if Paul said, “this is how I imitate Christ in my circumstances; consider

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19 Meeks helpfully captures the social impact of this desacralisation: “The Pauline school had self-consciously abandoned the rules of purity that helped to maintain the social boundaries of the Jewish communities, for in a community composed largely of former gentiles these rules were dysfunctional—and, for Paul, they appeared to deny the newness of the gospel of the crucified and risen Messiah. A whole second-order or symbolic system for mapping the sacred and the profane was thus discarded. It was no longer particular foods or closely defined events or actions that rendered a person ‘unclean’... It was necessary, therefore, to define the purity of the community more directly in social terms. For example... (the violations of mutual care at the communal meal [1 Cor 11:29-32] were) offences against the social cohesion of the group caused by tensions between people of higher and lower social and economic positions. So, too, the one excluded from fellowship by the curse in 1 Cor 16:22 is not one stigmatised by a ritual flaw, but whoever ‘does not love the Lord’” (1983, 103). I must point out that while my quote retains his original intent, it omits Meeks’ emphasis in one respect; namely, he presumes that the meal was the new “sacred” and “magical” event in the community. I find this characterisation unnecessary, even contradictory, given that his argument heads clearly in the direction of showing that no event in the community’s life was more ‘sacred’ than any other. Note also his anachronistic use of ecclesiastical language to describe Paul’s communities: e.g., “...the Eucharist would be the occasion par excellence for stunning the person under discipline” (ibid).

20 It is important to recall at this point that the conflict at Corinth was fundamentally social, not narrowly ideological (Thiessen, 1994, 121-143; Meeks, 1983, 69-70, 97-100). Forbes' comment on 2 Cor would seem to hold for the earlier (stages of the) conflict and correspondence: “We need not... assume any real theological coherency within this group, though it is conceivable. We may rather see ad-hoc alliances, for diverse social and theological purposes” (1986, 15).
now how you make your choices". The point of Paul’s defence was two-fold. First, while those who preached had a right to financial support (9:7-12a, 13-14), Paul refused this right for himself (9:12b, 15-18). Second, this refusal was a poignant expression of his determination to place himself under ‘slavery’ to those whom he served. The analogy cut deeply. As Paul refused his own rights (exousia, 9:12), placing himself at the service of all (including the Corinthians), the strong ought also to surrender their liberty (exousia, 8:9) so as to serve the weak: "The apostle exercises his liberty by choosing not to use it; so ought the ‘strong’" (Meeks, 1986, 134). At the same time, he moved to protect the strong from the tyranny of the weak. Hall has captured this point in her translation of the crux passage: “For what good does it do for my freedom to be subjected to the judgement of another’s conscience/consciousness? If I partake with thankfulness, why should I be denounced for that for which I give thanks?” (10:29b-30; 1990, 152-153).

Meeks helpfully distinguishes Paul’s process in 1 Cor 8-10 from its intended outcome (1986, 134-136). The immediate goal was compromise; both the strong and the weak were to accommodate one another.21 The blandness of such an outcome, however, does little justice to the profundity of the process. What Paul effected, Meeks argues, was "a dialectic of affirmation and reversal". Paul affirmed the beliefs and concerns of both groups while he reversed the claims of both groups to any intellectual, social, or pietistic superiority. He affirmed their individual premises, yet undermined their conclusions. What he sought to achieve, then, was not "theoretical synthesis", but "engagement". As Meeks understands it:

...in that process met three different but overlapping perceptions of the world—that of ‘the weak’, that of ‘the strong,’ and Paul’s—each informed by the distinctive experiences, history, and social location of the different parties, but each transformed in its own special way by the novel Christian teachings as those persons appropriated them (1986, 136).

It is clear that Paul led his communities into a new process of defining their individual and communal identities and purposes. It was a profoundly relational strategy crafted in situ to drive home the responsibilities and opportunities of choosing the well-being of others in imitation of the dying and rising of Christ. Paul left the Corinthians having to work and learn together. He left them to experience the meaning of that "love which builds up". Hall portrays the risks and riches of this arrangement:

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21 Stated this way the goal was not far removed from the classical ideal of consensus (cf. Judge, 1982b, 106).
Paul does not take the side of one group against the other, nor does he try to resolve the problems once and for all. Certainly, he does not enunciate a general principle and then apply it to this specific issue. He works instead on relationships. He asks something of both groups which he hopes will make it possible for all of them to move forward together. Paul does not ask or expect everyone to agree. What he asks, rather, is that those on each side identify with those on the other side, to become as the ones with whom they disagree. They are not initially required to change their convictions; they are to act on behalf of those with whom they disagree. Paul knows that this is a difficult and complicated thing to do. It is, however, necessary if the eschatological community is to exhibit and proclaim the new creation, even as its members take diverse paths of obedience. (1990, 153, her emphasis)

Similar affirmations and reversals shaped the concerns of 1 Cor 11-15. In these chapters, Paul did not offer a ‘manual’ for the Corinthians’ gatherings, but continued to provoke a radical reorientation of their expectations and experience. The Spirit, Paul affirmed, was among them to manifest his power (12:1-11). At the same time, Paul reversed the arrogant claims and expectations of some. Taking up the hallmarks so prized by the ‘haves’, and perhaps envied by the ‘have-nots’—wisdom (sophia), knowledge (gnosis), reason or eloquence (logos), power (dunamis), and spirit (pneuma)—Paul recast them as areas of service (diakonia) and unmerited gifts (charismata) so as to exclude all grounds for boasting (12:4-11, 13:13:1-13, 14:6-9, 20, 15:24, 58; cf. 1:18-21, 31, 2:1, 5, 6-16, 3:18-21, 4:10, 5:6, 8:1-3, 9:16, 10:1a). The strong did not have more of the Spirit than others. Indeed, their boasting suggested that they were devoid of the Spirit and in league with the old era of the flesh (sarkinois, 3:1; cf. psuchikon, 15:44-47; Meeks, 1983, 90). Moreover, Paul used the common political metaphor of the body to drive home the reversal of status (12:12-26). No member (the ‘weak’?) was inferior to any other (12:15-16). Nor was any member (the ‘strong’?) superior to any other (12:21). Rather, all were vital to the body’s well-being (12:17-19; cf. 1:10-17). Moreover, honour must go to those judged less honourable (by the Corinthians’ standards; 12:22-26). The Spirit had granted his gifts to build up the community, not for individual display and prestige (12:25-27; cf. 10:33).

The centre-piece of Paul’s new way of living (kath huperbolēn hodon) was love (agapē; 1 Cor 12:31b-13:13; cf. 8:1b). Little used in the papyri and literary sources, agapē seems to have served Paul as a substitute for many of the Graeco-Roman virtues and moral conventions (cf. Judge, 1987, 170). Perhaps ‘substitute’ is too weak. agapē encapsulated many of Paul’s vivid images and desires of social relations transformed by the dying and rising of Christ. The way of agapē embodied service, partnership, and edification (13:6-7).
It eclipsed every gift, including prophecy, languages, and knowledge (13:1-2, 8-9). It was the antithesis of boasting, self-interest, and factionalism (13:3-5). It alone was the mark of maturity (to teleion; 13:10-12). Love was supreme for the one who lived before God in the present (pistis) and for the future (elpis; 13:13; cf. 16:14, Col 3:14). Once again, Paul had not strayed from his earlier concerns: love marked each affirmation and reversal. Love was the way of those who engaged rather than compared. It was the way of those who refused their personal rights, ideological precision, and rectitude for the welfare of others for whom Christ died. It was the mark of the imitation of Christ (4:14-17, 8:3, 10:32-11:1), and of identification with one’s neighbour (9:19-23). Love eschewed conformity to the world’s marks of power and prestige. The one who loved could not resort to pro forma guides to behaviour and thought. He or she must embrace the contingencies of each new context and decision. The knowledge and discernment which marked the mature was not walled within the philosophers’ fortresses of unassailable reason, but remained exposed to the risks of love.

There is little evidence that Paul’s strategy succeeded. It seems that his own example, first put forward in 1 Cor 9:1-27, had not endeared him. Rather, he had become the focus of the Corinthians’ disapproval, scorn, and enmity (2 Cor 1:12-2:11, 10:1-13:10). Such, Paul would have argued, were the risks of love.

5.4.2 Personal and social change as the cutting edge of Paul’s conversations

It seems evident then, if the Corinthian correspondence is any guide, that the clarity and profundity of Paul’s grasp of the coherence-within-contingency provided by Christ did not guarantee or automatically effect any revolution in the behaviour of his ekklēsiai. Paul’s conversations with the Corinthians were profoundly risky. His opposition to their elitism and factionalism brought him into enmity with them. He attempted to right this wrong by urging them to rethink the nature of their relationship to Christ, to each other, and to him. Their values and conventions imitated the hallmarks of prestige in Corinthian society. They paraded these values amongst themselves and used them to judge Paul as seriously deficient as a leader, a speaker, and an apostle. He sought to regain his credibility with them. But he had no recourse of argument other than to refute their criteria. More pointedly, he could only refute these values by agreeing that he did not meet their criteria, and by insisting that he would continue to disappoint them. As he sought to (re)build the Corinthian community, he put himself further out on a limb. At each step of this conversation Paul was at risk of defeating his own purposes.
Plainly, there were limits to Paul being “all things to all people”. In particular, Paul drew his line at endorsing in the ekkλēsiai those social structures which undermined the impartiality of God’s calling. Moreover, we have noted repeatedly that Paul bitterly opposed those who attempted to defraud his communities of their freedom. His passion for the freedom of the ekkλēsiai precluded him offering them the ‘security’ of social conformity and legislation. Nor would he allow the life of the communities to be centred in the hands of one or more leaders. There was no place for any role or ritual controlled by an elite. Moreover, he made no attempt to enforce one model of community life. Different ekkλēsiai looked different (Barclay, 1992). Paul always affirmed the responsibilities of each ekkλēsia to work out its path of freedom and obedience. He maintained that they were able to respond to the dying and rising of Christ. He would not resort to law, nor would he impose his or another’s leadership in order to secure their imitation of Christ. In Paul’s frame of reference, such coercion was at best self-defeating; at worst, it denied the gospel.

Paul’s desire to be conformed to Christ was embedded within his experience of community. He laboured to promote Christ among his ekkλēsiai and to see the gospel transform their personal and social lives (Rom 12:1-21, Col 1:28-2:6). This was no individualism. We have noted frequently the strongly communal dimensions to his thought: the Christ whom Paul served was the head of the new order of humanity in fulfilment of the prophets’ hopes of a renewed people of God in intimate covenant relationship with him and with each other. Indeed, in Paul’s estimation, the mindsets of the flesh and the Spirit manifested themselves precisely either in the perversion or the renewal of relationships.

The dying and rising of Christ, then, was a hollow ideal for Paul unless it provoked the inversion of social conventions and the concomitant personal experience of strength-in-weakness. Dying and rising with Christ meant status reversal. Here is the foundation for Paul’s distinctive paradigm of community. The generalities and ideals of maxims and cardinal virtues were eclipsed by the call to trust God in the immediate circumstances of one’s life and to act responsibly in love towards those who gather together in Christ’s name. The body did not exist for the individual’s social and moral status. The individual lived to bring honour to Christ and to build up the body. Moreover, Paul encouraged the believers to work out these transformed social relations at a personal level beyond the gathering.

Paul refused to build a fortress for the ekkλēsiai. Nor would he allow the ekkλēsiai themselves to become fortresses. He would not allow any human system or convention to hedge the communities against the risks of working out what it meant to live by the dying and rising of Christ. Such ‘security’ would only throw the community back on their own
resources and reinforce individual and communal boasting. The communities must rely on God alone. Only so would they realise for themselves the rhythm of those conversations which lead them further into the imitation of the dying and rising of Christ. It was in these conversations that Paul sought to hold together a mix “inherently unstable…but enormously creative” (Meeks, 1979, 23).

5.5 CONCLUSION

Paul’s thought was both profoundly centred and remarkably agile. Both phenomena were a measure of his engagement with and commitment towards others. His singular desire to make Christ known produced the radical multiplicity of his approach: “I have become all things to all people” (1 Cor 9:22). Likewise, his goal with the ékklesía to “present everyone mature in Christ” (Col 1:28) translated itself into not one portrait of Christ, nor into one image of the believers’ walk with him, but into the rich hues and textures of the interchangeable patterns and heuristics of his thought. His labours “to bring every thought captive to Christ” (2 Cor 10:5) did not yield the arid precision of an abstract system, but brought new “power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ” (Eph 3:18).

Centred and agile: each facet a corollary of his commitments and engagements with others to build the communities of Christ’s people. This was the rhythm of Paul’s conversation. At times, he drew back to familiar territory. At others, he moved towards new horizons. Old themes recurred with little variation. New motifs arose from the familiar. Occasionally, the old was recast with unexpected nuance. At every move he showed no interest in the contrived precision of philosophical, theological, or moral systems. Nor could a religious system portray God and his Christ.

Only one kind of precision interested Paul: the degree to which his thought faithfully reflected the gospel entrusted to him, engaged with the contingencies of his hearers’ worlds, and confirmed them in their choices to love and honour Christ. This was the measure of Paul’s rigour. Moreover, his stance was only possible as he continued to abandon the need to protect himself with the conventions and marks of serenity, constancy, and status. This was the measure of his new ambition.

His conversations, then, turned on the givenness of the revelation of Christ to him, on the pressing needs of each context, and on the unfolding insights of his on-going learning. They bore the marks of his personality: pleading, strident, exasperated, affectionate, urgent, reflective, passionate, and at times impatient. They bore the marks of his close knowledge of the popular intellectualism of his day, and of the social systems of
status and honour. And, once again, they revealed the costs and risks of his myriad choices to proclaim and model the dying and rising of Christ free from abstraction, idealism, elitism, and law.
CONCLUSION TO PART TWO

Our portrait of Paul is now clear enough for us to move on from the first century to the twentieth. The preceding chapters have moved from broad brush strokes to the finer hues and textures of some of the scenes of Paul's life. His indebtedness to his Jewish heritage has been clearly visible in the framework of each tenet of his thought. His embeddedness in the cultural and intellectual patterns of Graeco-Roman life was apparent in the shape of his arguments and the choices of his lifestyle. His concern for the *ekklēsia* gave vitality and punch to his ministry and correspondence. His preoccupation with Christ gave coherence to his thought and harnessed his considerable intellectual powers for purposes other than abstraction and reputation.

There is more we could have said about Paul. There is far more about Paul that I do not yet know and thus cannot say. I do not pretend to offer an exhaustive or dispassionately objective reading of Paul. There is no need to. Indeed, I have registered my suspicions about the claims of others to produce such accounts. Our approach was unashamedly guided by the needs of the final leg of the journey.

Evangelical conversations may be as hindered as they are helped by so-called 'theologies of Paul'. Indeed, I will now argue that such artefacts are both symptomatic of and integral to the problems of evangelical life and thought. Evangelical conversations around Paul do not need more 'objective' scholarly abstractions of his life and thought. They need portraits of a flesh-and-blood Paul engaged with his Christ and with the cut-and-thrust of his social milieu. They need portraits which invite engagement, not armchair reflection. They likewise need portraits of the actual phenomena of evangelicals seeking to make sense of Paul and of their own systems and cultures.

Such portraits must stand up under the weight of historical scrutiny from the past. They must also pass the scrutiny of profitability for the present. I have attempted to pass the first test in the previous five chapters. I now submit to the second. What I have said, and will say, must stand or fall by these two canons: is my portrait true to the texts and contexts, and can it provoke profitable conversation among evangelicals? The proofs are in the conversing.
The Academy, the Pulpit, and the Congregation: Paradigms and Conventions of Evangelicalism

6.1 A MODEL OF EVANGELICAL LIFE AND THOUGHT

Our conversation has highlighted certain intellectual and social paradigms of Paul and his Graeco-Roman milieu. At each turn of the conversation I have aimed to portray rather than to judge. In other words, my concern was to describe those paradigms and to suggest ways in which they took shape in living experience and in turn shaped that experience. I largely refrained from offering a verdict on the inherent cogency of either view of the world, though my own biases were no doubt clear enough. At the same time, certain themes for the modern leg of the conversation no doubt have already appeared on the reader's horizon.

My focus shifts now to certain intellectual and social phenomena of evangelicalism. I do not attempt to explain evangelicalism; neither historically, nor sociologically.\(^1\) Rather, I describe something of the interplay of intellectual paradigms and social conventions in those conversations which create and confirm evangelical identity and purpose. Thus while I am interested in evangelical thought, I view it as an aspect of a wider concern—the experience of evangelical cultural and social patterns.

Some evangelicals argue that whether or not evangelicalism is a cultural or sociological phenomenon, it ought to be understood purely in terms of its theological

\(^1\) For such analyses see, for example, Bebbington (1989), Marsden (1980), Hatch and Noll (1982), and Hunter (1987). Hearing about an early draft of this thesis, a modern historian expressed concern that I might imply evangelicalism could be explained as an historical phenomenon by reference to Paul and the Graeco-Roman milieu. This is not my intention. Rather, I am interested in analogies of experience. I seek to open up conversation about making sense of evangelical experience in the modern world by reference to Paul's experience of doing so in his own milieu. Moreover, the attachment of evangelicals to Paul as both normative and exemplary for their own experience adds a unique dimension to the analogy.
distinctives. The concern seems to be that any sociological explanation may misrepresent evangelicalism by ignoring what is central; namely, its theological distinctives. The concern is well-founded. Yet it is important not to obscure social realities. Thus rather than dismissing the social phenomena out of hand, or arguing against the distinctives of evangelical thought, I seek to describe something of what is meant to happen, and does happen, in the encounter between evangelicals and their beliefs and ideals. It is in this sense that I focus on preaching, viewing it as a central concern and event in evangelicalism; a nexus of beliefs, expectations, and experience:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Academy</th>
<th>The Pulpit and the Congregation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The articulation, refinement and validation of evangelical truths and ideals</td>
<td>The sermon as the point of imparting and imbibing evangelical truths and ideals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>training &amp; preparing</td>
<td>hearing &amp; applying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Everyday experience as the coalface of living the truths and ideals of evangelicalism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 12: Preaching as a critical nexus of evangelical thought and life*

Each process is undoubtedly more complex and subtle than the model suggests. Nonetheless, it holds as a simple representation of how perhaps a majority of evangelical scholars, preachers, and believers might describe either their ideals, or experiences, or both. I do not intend to say that the academy is utterly removed from the coalface. Nor am I implying that the pulpit and congregation are irrelevant to the formation of evangelical truths and ideals. The model simply serves as a heuristic for an event central to evangelical identity and purpose: the imparting and appropriating of biblical truth so as to live an evangelical life. The conversation will roughly follow the model from left to right, from the academy to the congregation, always with an eye to the centre, the centrality of preaching.³

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² Thus John Stott, long the doyen of British evangelicals, wrote: “It is the contention of evangelicals that they are plain Bible Christians, and that in order to be a biblical Christian it is necessary to be an evangelical Christian” *(Christ the Controversialist, 1970*, page 32, quoted in Thompson, 1994a, 2). Likewise, Thompson remarks that “evangelical theology is not simply a means of self-identification; it is God’s truth for the world” (ibid). According to Don Carson, a widely regarded evangelical scholar and preacher, evangelicalism is “Christianity at its straightforward best” (quoted in Payne, 1992, 9).

³ A word about style and sources is in order. In chapters one and three, I quoted primary sources extensively to allow them to tell the story. Also, as far as possible, I worked from the ‘everyday sources’ of the period, not only from literary works. I aimed to trace the contours of a popular intellectualism and its widely familiar social contexts. I continue that style here. First, I allow evangelical voices to tell the stories of evangelicalism. As far as possible I keep my commentary secondary and congruent with the tone of those sources. Second, the conversation requires a wide perspective. Thus I enter into broad themes, not detailed analysis. Third, apart from three years in the USA, my experience is of Sydney evangelicalism, and my sources are somewhat slanted to this location.
6.2 THE ACADEMY AND THE TRUTHS AND IDEALS OF EVANGELICALISM

6.2.1 The priority and the burden of preaching

At the heart of evangelicalism stands the person of Christ and his historical death and resurrection as a substitute for sinners. Evangelicals live to know this Christ and to make him known. Moreover, they serve and proclaim the Christ who is attested in the Scriptures and who gives meaning to them. Thus evangelicals stand or fall by the trustworthiness of the Bible and by the integrity of their proclamations of its message. These distinctives give preaching its critical role. Indeed, they make the sermon in many respects the central event of evangelical life and faith:

Preaching is indispensable to Christianity. Without preaching a necessary part of its authenticity has been lost. For Christianity is, in its very essence, a religion of the Word of God. (Stott, 1982, 15)

...preaching is of the very essence of the corporate phenomenon called Christianity as I understand it. By that I mean that Christianity, on earth as in heaven, is...fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, and the preaching of God’s Word in the power of God’s Spirit is the activity that...brings the Father and the Son down from heaven to dwell with men. I know this, for I have experienced it. (Packer, 1986, 2)

Nowhere more than in preaching is Christ so clearly present and honoured. No other ministry better serves the ultimate needs of believers. No other ministry encapsulates the full-orbed responsibilities of those who set their lives to serve Christ and his Church:

...preaching is the primary task of the Church and therefore of the minister of the Church...everything else is subsidiary to this, and can be represented as the outworking or the carrying out of this in daily practice. (Lloyd-Jones, 1971, 26)

Periods of evangelical decline coincide with a lack of sound preaching: “I would say without any hesitation that the most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching” (Lloyd-Jones, 1971, 9). Thus the minister must reclaim the centrality of preaching in the gathering of the saints. Indeed, “he is there, primarily, to address people who have come together in order to listen to him and to what he has to say” (ibid, 121).

The preacher, however, is not the only one who speaks. Preachers stand before their congregations as “the oracles of God” (Knecht, 1986, 302). They are “men sent from God” to translate the Word of God written into the Word of God preached: “the sermon is not
(his) word; it is God’s Word’ (Ferguson, 1986, 192, 195, 205). Thus they carry the authority of ‘the highest and the greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called’ (Lloyd-Jones, 1971, 9). Moreover, the preacher’s demeanour must reflect this calling and authority:

(The preacher must have) a sense of authority and control over the congregation and the proceedings. The preacher should never be apologetic, he should never give the impression that he is speaking by their leave as it were...He is a man, who is there to ‘declare’ certain things; he is a man under commission and under authority. He is an ambassador, and he should be aware of his authority...far from being controlled by the congregation the preacher is in charge and in control of the congregation. (ibid, 83)

Such a task must never be taken on a whim. The ambassador of God speaks only as he is commissioned and instructed. Thus he stands in line with the prophets and apostles:

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, he was not aware that because he had spoken with the Lord (Exod. 34:29) his face was radiant. The work of the preacher is illustrated by this phenomenon in the life of Moses. The work of the prophet envelops the preacher’s person... (Hulse, 1986, 62)

...a great crisis arose in the life of the early Church (Acts 6)...Why go on preaching when people are starving and in need and are suffering?...but the Apostles...saw the danger and said, ‘It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God, and serve tables’... (Likewise) we are here to preach this Word, this is the first thing, ‘We will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word’. (Lloyd-Jones, 1971, 23)

This authority and responsibility requires an explicit call of God, setting apart the preacher to devote himself to this Word:

...the preacher is a Christian like every other Christian...But he is something more than that, there is something further...A preacher is not a Christian who decides to preach, he does not just decide to do it; he does not even decide to take up preaching as a calling...rather...he becomes conscious of a ‘call’. This whole question of the call is not an easy matter; and all ministers have struggled with it because it is so vitally important for us. (Lloyd-Jones, 1971, 103-104)

...the ministerial call...must be defined narrowly: it is one’s conviction that God would have him faithfully proclaim the Word of God. The ministerial call is that and nothing more, and those who want to serve God in the ministry must make
sure they have it; and those who have this call must make sure they obey it. (Nederhood, 1986, 44, emphases his)

Among the attitudes...that must be present in anyone called to the ministry are...Self-discipline...Self-sacrifice...Self-giving...Self-control...Alas, it is simply impossible for any person to approach the ideal all the time and in every respect. Even so, the attitudes discussed provide us with significant points of reference and can function as helps for those who are looking at themselves closely in order to determine whether God is truly calling them to the ministry of the Word. (ibid, 55-56)⁴

Preaching is thus the great burden of the pastor, the focal point of his ministry:

The one thing that the pastor can do, and must do because nobody else can do it, is to preach the Word...And nobody will do it, because if he doesn’t do it, it won’t be done. And the preaching is the single most effective thing in equipping the Church for its mission. It’s the preaching that God blesses...Beyond that, (the pastor) does have to give a vision, he has some management tasks (especially as the church grows), but if he doesn’t preach, the church won’t survive. Or it’ll become nothing more than a secular institution erected on church growth methods, but which isn’t building character into the lives of the people. (Boice, in Hastie, 1990, 9)

Thus the preacher must focus singularly on his task. He must not be encumbered with the cares and responsibilities of those who have not been called:⁵

...all church members have a responsibility to let Christ’s Word dwell richly within them...Yet all these truths are not incompatible with the equipment, call and commissioning of specialists, that is, of pastors who devote themselves to a ministry of preaching and teaching...(Indeed) the pastoral ministry of regular preaching and teaching is extremely exacting. It demands much time and energy in study. So a pastoral team in any sizeable church needs at least one

⁴ This traditional idea of ‘the call’ is widespread among denominations, mission organisations, and individuals, and carries across the divides of fundamentalist, charismatic, Reformed, and mainstream evangelical distinctives. A candidate’s sense of call is often critical when applying for ordination or an overseas missionary post. For an evangelical appraisal which is critical of this tradition, see Miles (1993).

⁵ Traditionally, a stipendiary or ‘faith’ ministry normally implied an appointment as the pastor of a local church or in overseas missionary service. In recent years, it has become commonplace among some Sydney evangelicals to encourage evangelical tertiary students and young professionals to choose a variety of full-time evangelistic and Bible-teaching ministries rather than to pursue a career. In an article titled “Quit your day job”, and aimed at this audience, Cheng argues that “There can only be one meaningful career choice for Christians—that of preaching the gospel of the risen Christ...Gospel work is the only work with permanent effect. That is why it ought to be top priority for Christians” (1991, 6-7).
full-time leader, who will give himself to the ministry of the Word. Without this the congregation is bound to be impoverished. (Stott, 1982, 118-119, 121-122)

6.2.2 Accreditation to preach and the formative role of the academy

Here then lies the necessity and role of the academy. The high calling and rigorous labours of preaching underscore the critical role of the denomination and the academy to ensure that only suitably called and trained men are ordained to preach. Their high standards of selection and training are vital to maintaining both the orthodoxy and power of the pulpit:

The individual preacher's authority, indeed the entire church's authority, depends entirely upon the confession upon which it is based. If the confession resounds with the truth of the gospel, the authority will be that of the kingdom. But if the solidity of the confession wavers, the authority dissipates. Doctrinal orthodoxy is thus necessary to the authority of preaching. (Logan, 1986a, 151-152)

I am convinced that those with the very best minds and training belong in the pulpit, and that the pulpit will never have the power it once had (and ought to have) until this happens. (Boice, 1986, 91)

The pressures of modern world views, and the enticement of intellectually provocative but unorthodox theologies, require an armoury of exegetical skills and theological discernment. Thus the fledgling preacher must master the original languages of Scripture and the whole system of biblical truth. 7 He must be able to answer challenges...

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6 Lloyd-Jones not only underscores the need for duly called and authorised preachers to pursue this as their full-time, stipendiary vocation, but he also argues that the rise of lay-preaching clearly indicates a loss of theological conviction amongst evangelicals. He claims that prior to the mid-eighteenth century, lay-preaching was comparatively rare, and it only became prominent as there was a shift in theology: "a Reformed Calvinistic attitude (gave way) to an essentially Arminian one...[which] ultimately, is non-theological. That being the case it is not surprising that the view gained currency that preaching was open to almost any man who had become a Christian, and later, any woman also. My assertion is that this is an unscriptural view of preaching" (1971, 100-101).

7 Training in Greek and, less commonly, Hebrew (rarely, if ever, Aramaic) traditionally formed the core skill and discipline of theological studies, though some practitioners from time to time have questioned its value for the daily realities of ministry and sermon preparation (Harman, 1991, 91-93; cf. Ferguson, 1986, 199-200). The debates have resurfaced in recent years. Some doubt the level of expertise required for preaching; others, doubting whether a theological institution can impart a realistic proficiency in language, argue for courses in general linguistics rather than language study (Davies, 1993). Yet others argue that the demise of language study directly relates to a perceived malaise and mediocrity within evangelical scholarship, preaching, and church life (Hafemann, 1988; Harman, 1991, 93).
and to direct a congregation away from both heresy and modernity.\textsuperscript{8} Intellectual acumen, then, is a key indicator of a man's call to preach:

...there are certainly cases of effective ministry by authentically called preachers of the Word who have been singularly ungifted. But such cases should be viewed as exceptional...To begin, then, we can assume that God endows those whom He truly calls to the ministry with the necessary intellectual capacity...it is practical to assume that...He will provide the person with intellectual capacities sufficient to enable him to handle the general course offered by an accredited seminary. This involves study in the original languages of the Scriptures, systematic study of church doctrine, and studies of the Old and New Testaments. This confronts one studying for the ministry with material that demands a certain level of intellectual ability, and if a person cannot handle this material satisfactorily, we should assume that he is not being called to the work of the gospel ministry. (Nederhood, 1986, 50-51)

While "preachers are born, not made" (Lloyd-Jones, 1971, 119), the denomination nevertheless plays a vital role in selecting, training, and approving those men who are worthy of being authorised to carry the word to the congregations (ibid, 115-120). In this sense, ordination safeguards the church:

It is to the church that kingdom authority has been granted; individual preachers possess it as they speak on behalf of the church (which is, of course, what the ordination process is supposed to mean—it is the church's recognition that the individual being ordained has the kingdom authority to speak to and for the church). (Logan, 1986a, 151, emphasis his)

Nothing but this overwhelming sense of being called, and of compulsion, should ever lead anyone to preach... (but) I must hasten to add that even this needs to be checked and to be confirmed; and this is something which is done by the Church... The Church selects those men in terms of given principles; she is taught what to look for, and she looks for such qualities... So before you can be quite sure that a man is called to be a preacher, his personal call must be confirmed by the Church, it must be attested by the Church... (yet) the history of the Church, and of preachers, shows quite plainly that sometimes the Church can make a mistake... and has rejected men who have proved by their records as

\textsuperscript{8} In this regard, note that evangelical and Reformed denominations and academies often require a candidate to hold a first degree or its equivalent before pursuing his theological degree and ordination. This is seen as a means of ensuring that pastors "understand their culture as well as the Word that they sought to proclaim in it" (Clowney, 1984, 252).
preachers that they were obviously called of God...But that is the...exception which proves the rule...When there is an exceptional and outstanding man God will make him known somehow, and in spite of men; but that does not happen very often. (Lloyd-Jones, 1971, 107-108)

The academy, then, provides the training ground for a man’s ordination to preach. In this sense, preaching stands, and must stand, at the beginning, the middle, and the end of theological curricula and method. Indeed, the authority and viability of preaching rests on the theological strength of the academies. And vice versa:

‘Theology without proclamation is empty, proclamation without theology is blind’. So wrote Gerhard Ebeling, and if what he says is true—and surely it is—then the connection between theology and preaching is an intimate one. The theological process does not exist for itself. It exists only as a preparation for preaching...if our theology is not preachable, its claim to being a theology at all is exceedingly doubtful...A true theology will seek articulation, claim a place in the liturgy of the church, and assert its right to walk with the people of God in the valley of the shadow of death. If it is content to be silent or to be confined to the groves of academia, it has lost its prophetic character, and with that its integrity. It is equally true, however, that theology is essential to preaching. Without theology there is no preaching, at least not in the New Testament sense. (Macleod, 1986, 246)\(^9\)

The academy forms the ideals of theology, ministry, and piety through exacting biblical, historical, systematic, and practical curricula and methodologies. To this end, the faculty not only teach, but debate amongst themselves and with those of other academies to further refine the principles and practice of exegesis and theology. Likewise, they monitor the wider evangelical scene, identifying both helpful developments, and any departures from evangelical distinctives.

6.2.3 The academy and the objectivity of exegesis, theology, and preaching

An evangelical stance on the character of God and the Scriptures would seem to ensure a high regard for the trustworthiness of the Bible and the objectivity of hermeneutical procedures. These in turn should ensure the purpose and content of evangelical preaching. Moreover, evangelical theology, taken as a whole, seems to provide clarity about evangelical identity and purpose. In this sense, evangelical theology, preaching,

and identity would seem both mutually reinforcing and robust enough to ensure the purposes and direction of the academy, the pulpit, and the congregation. But all this has come under fire.

Debate about the nature of the Bible has figured prominently in evangelicalism throughout this century. Initially, the debate chiefly entailed the issues of defining the Bible’s trustworthiness. Gradually, debate shifted towards tightening the logical parameters of historical and theological reliability. In this sense, the rise and fall of certain key terms charts the flow of the debate: from inspiration to infallibility to inerrancy (Johnston, 1979, 15-47; Marsden, 1980, 141-195; Mouw, 1982).10

In the last two decades, however, the centre of debate has shifted again. It now lies with the nature of meaning and the objectivity of hermeneutical procedures: “Hermeneutics is the unfinished item on our agenda of theological prolegomena...Without a hermeneutical consensus, any hope for a consensus in theology and ethics is mere wishful thinking” (Gundry, 1979, 13).11 Accordingly, evangelical scholarship has entered the broader arenas of phenomenology, structuralism, philosophical hermeneutics, and the philosophies of language and science.12 However, Krabbe and others probably speak for many evangelicals when he reduces these issues to a single question: “Is it possible to arrive at a proper and full-orbed application of the text based upon an equally proper and full-orbed exposition?” (1986, 236).13

10 Amongst North American evangelicals, concerns over inerrancy have come to dominate and divide evangelical scholarship. In his 1979 presidential address to the Evangelical Theological Society, Gundry made a plea for reassessment in the light of how the issue was polarising amongst evangelicals: “One pole will be sharpening and defending the concept but may be in danger of so narrowing inerrancy that it will depart from the Biblical basis and historical understanding of the concept. The other pole in the discussion can be expected to continue to repudiate the concept altogether or to continue to use the term ‘inerrancy’ but to so qualify it as to evacuate the concept of any significant meaning...Important as it is, though, the discussion of inerrancy should not be allowed to become the preoccupation of evangelical theology. Theology is more than prolegomena. Our theological task is to move beyond and build on that theological foundation. If we do not do this, in a few years, we will discover that our work has only been an eddy in the on-going stream of theological discussion in our time. We may have won the battle (over inerrancy) but have lost the war (the construction of a Biblicaly-based evangelical theology addressing the issues of our time)” (1979, 3, 7).


12 For overviews of this territory, see Bernstein (1983, 1-49) and Thiselton (1980, 1992).

13 Scott expresses much the same agenda: “The evangelical...must still seek a framework for translating the normative, authoritative message of the Bible for the modern world without doing violence to its once-for-all character. He must beware of the pitfalls of excessive objectivity or subjectivity; he must maintain a balance between the historical and conceptual content of revelation and its personal and relevant application...In seeking to delineate hermeneutical theories appropriate for evangelicals, I suggest that interpreters be prepared to keep in view both the world behind the Biblical text (the situation in which it was written) and that in front of it (the one in which the interpreter lives). But—and I view this as essential—the former must control the conclusions for the latter” (1979, 67-77).
According to this line of inquiry, it is vitally important to establish an unequivocal boundary between interpretation and application. In the opinion of the evangelical OT scholar, Kaiser (eg. 1981), the way forward lies in the equation of meaning with authorial-intent as formulated by the literary scholar, Hirsch (1967, 1976).14 The bottom-line for Hirsch, and for those evangelicals who appeal to him (directly, or through Kaiser), is that any text has a single, fixed meaning, which is the author's intent. Many evangelicals champion this definition to counteract what they discern as the encroaching tide of relativism and postmodernism (Packer, 1983). Thus, theories of multiple meanings seem like floodgates into relativism, structuralism, deconstructionism, and feminism. According to the Hirsch-Kaiser model, an author may have intended the text to have ramified levels of meaning, but it is invalid for readers to discern any meaning which the author did not intend. Significance, however, is another matter entirely, and fundamentally consists of those universal principles to “be gleaned” from the text. These evangelicals argue that the principle of a single fixed meaning identified with the author’s intent, and the concomitant principle of a clear demarcation between meaning and significance (or interpretation and application), alone offers a defence against those scholars and preachers who would otherwise twist the text to their own ends.

This boundary between meaning and significance yields itself to a patient “syntactical-theological” or “covenantal-historical” method, and is the key to vital biblical preaching (Kaiser, 1981, 69-163; Krabbendam, 1986, 229-230). The end of this process is to “principilize’...the author’s propositions, arguments, narrations, and illustrations in timeless abiding truths with special focus on the application of those truths to the current needs of the Church” (Kaiser, 1981, 152). These “timeless abiding truths” and “timeless principles” which constitute “the essential substance...(and) the permanent, abiding, and doctrinal part of the passage”, are not imposed upon the text, but are “drawn solely from the Biblical author’s single truth-intention” (ibid, 161, 209). Krabbendam provides a summary of the method:

The first thesis is that the biblical text has a single meaning determined by the will of the author as expressed in the text with a view to a specific public and can be reproduced from it in consultation with its context and in accordance with its purpose. The second thesis is that the biblical text has a manifold significance that is squarely based upon the meaning of the text and can be

14 “Evangelicals desiring to protect the objectivity of propositional revelation in Scripture have usually gravitated toward E. D. Hirsch’s view, since it promises an objectively fixed, textually expressed authorial intention” (Poythress, 1988a, 40).
formulated by means of universal principles and patterns to be gleaned from it with a view to any public...

In conclusion, it seems that the covenantal-historical method, as outlined above, is best suited to bring out the single, proper, and full meaning of the biblical text by means of 'auxiliary' studies, is in harmony with its purpose, and is most effective to open up the way to its manifold, proper, and full significance by means of universal principles and patterns. (1986, 213, 245, emphases his)

This stress on authorial-intent is crucial to exegetical rigour. Without it, Hirsch and Kaiser argue, interpretation rests on the whim of the exegete. Hirsch stresses this point when he employs a familiar rationalist-irrationalist gambit against those who argue that textual meaning is random: "I was once told by a theorist who denied the possibility of correct interpretation that I had not interpreted his writings correctly" (1976, 6). The argument, then, is that anything other than a definition of meaning as the single, fixed, authorial-intent will open the door to subjectivism and a further accommodation of postmodern emphases.

Other evangelicals are not as convinced that the process of interpretation-application is as linear as the Hirsch-Kaiser models imply. Thiselton (1980, 1992), Conn (1984), Poythress (1986, 1987, 1988a,b, 1992), and Frame (1987) each argue against any dichotomy between interpretation and application. Moreover, they regard the authorial-intention model as somewhat naively objectivist. Furthermore, they argue that the drive towards timeless universals tends to strip the text of an historical, contextual husk in search of an irreducible, ahistorical kernel. Instead, they favour seeing exegesis as a...

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15 "The interpreter, in any case, cannot simply step out of his own horizons, and look at the text as if he were detached from his own time and his own tradition. While his subjectivity should be critically controlled, the hermeneutical task involves both distance, in which account is taken of the particularity of the text, and also a progress towards as close a fusion of horizons with the text as the relation between text and interpreter will allow" (Thiselton, 1980, 439-440, emphases his).

16 "Exegesis still carries a mythic aura as a final refuge against theological relativism" (Conn, 1984, 185).

17 "A perfect chronological separation of exegesis and application into two distinct stages is an idealization that oversimplifies the actual practice of interpretation" (Poythress, 1988a, 28-29).

18 "The principle, then, is that we may use Scripture in any way that it is suited to be used. And the meaning of any text, then, is the set of uses to which it is suited" (Frame, 1987, 199, emphasis his).

19 Poythress has been criticised as opening the door to subjectivism (Karliberg, 1990). However, he seeks to highlight the pitfalls of both subjectivist and objectivist hermeneutics, and to reposition the debate in terms of the character of God and of relationship with him: "Subjectivist willfulness is destroyed by the unchangeable, inescapable, undeniable, objective fact of who God is and what he says. Equally, objectivist human self-sufficiencies are destroyed by the presence of God in his mystery; God invades our supposedly private space" (1992, 21). Subjectivism nonetheless remains the greater concern for most evangelical scholars (Hafemann, 1988).
dialogue between the ancient text and its world and the modern reader and her world, in
which the reader seeks to remain open to the vistas of both horizons.20

6.2.4 The academy and the absoluteness of truth for theology and
preaching

Kaiser offers his methodology as a means of reviving true "exegetical theology" in the face
of a crisis in which evangelical scholarship and preaching has lost rigour and precision
(1981, 17-66). He may well be right about a malaise in evangelical scholarship and
preaching. He may also be right about a lack of rigour and precision. Yet his corrective
methodology may not differ markedly from what most scholars and preachers do
intuitively. The difference may lie more in the articulation of methodological ideals, than
in the practice of exegesis and theology.21

In the first place, evangelical scholars and preachers generally at least claim and
seek to allow the text to dictate the terms of their exegesis and preaching. Second, the
distinction between meaning and significance, or interpretation and application, is
virtually a truism across the standard references on exegetical method and homiletics.
Third, theological enterprise is largely about extracting 'absolute', 'timeless', and
'universal' truths from texts and forming these into 'systems of truth'.22 Fourth, the
academy largely exists to refine and promulgate these systems.

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20 Alternatively, some evangelicals regard hermeneutical debate as unnecessary and
distracting. P. D. Jensen, an influential Sydney evangelical preacher, argues that "Very little of the
New Testament is dependent on understanding non-biblical first century culture. All the
information we need is in the one spot... We are First Century people; or, if you prefer, the New
Testament is a Twentieth Century book... Hermeneutics is an interesting field of modern debate, but
it rests on an ungodly foundation... Those of us who believe that these documents are the very words
of God, directed to our deepest needs and aspirations, need no new theories of Bible application. If
the Bible is God's word to mankind, our response is simple—to take him at his word" (1986a, 3, 4, 6).
While this may seem obscursantist or naive, his writings and preaching show otherwise.
Interestingly, some of those heavily involved in the debates have echoed some of his concerns:
"valid hermeneutical principles show the implications of God's Lordship and our servanthood.
They instruct us on how to submit ourselves to what God actually says rather than reading in our
own autonomous desires... (Yet) we desire to create our own false hermeneutical principles in order
to escape God" (Poythress, 1992, 7).

21 In the following description of the ethos of evangelical theology, I do not mean to minimise
the tensions between those of a more objectivist or subjectivist orientation. For a review of the
issues, see Conn (1979, 1984), Hafemann (1988), Muller (1985, 1991), and Grenz (1993). Rather, I
simply seek to describe the more ambiguous interactions at the coalface. Thus evangelical
'subjectivists' are no more inclined than 'objectivists' to accept exegesis or theology which seems to
grate against a 'plain reading' of the Bible. Similarly, 'objectivists' may moralise texts or romanticise
evangelical history or convention (equally) as much as 'subjectivists'. In over 12 years of close
involvement with evangelical students at a university in Sydney, it has seemed to me that the
character of the students' church experience (in terms of the objectivist-subjectivist continuum)
rarely makes a major difference to their Bible reading or expression of faith until the discussion turns
to the more predictably contentious areas such as charismatic distinctives or the ordination of
women. The major differences consist of which conferences, churches, and preachers the students
laud and advocate. I have noted much the same amongst students of Bible and theological colleges.
Again, my comments relate to Sydney evangelicalism which, taken as a whole, inclines towards the
'objectivist' end of the spectrum (Judd and Cable, 1987; Piggin, 1989, 1994; Doyle, 1994).

22 On the idea of evangelical theology being art as well as science, see Johnston (1979, 149-
151).
Each of these points resonates with the Hirsch-Kaiser agenda. In this sense, while
the debate about meaning and hermeneutic has occupied much evangelical scholarly
attention, it may have had minimal impact on the broad directions of seminary education,
or on the character of theological study and method. Each new generation of graduate
preachers may articulate both subtle and significant shifts in hermeneutics, yet practise
much the same exegetical and theological traditions. In other words, the debates may be
functionally irrelevant to graduating preachers except insofar as they sense a
methodological ideal and feel an obligation to argue for it or attain to it.

The same seems to hold for the general tenor of theological curriculum and
method.23 Evangelical academies by and large espouse exegetical and theological
methodologies which aim to distil the essences of textual meanings into rigorously
objective and systematic structures. Indeed, while no scholar is likely to argue that the
substance of a course in the doctrine of God actually gives a more pristine knowledge of
God than say a reading of Isaiah, the student is likely to feel that this is the case. In other
words, the timeless and universal constructs of systematic theology are likely to function in
conversation and preaching as more exact and exhaustive than the text of Scripture.
Indeed, an aura of idealism, objectivism, and precision seems to colour the experience of
formal theological study (Conn, 1979).

Evangelical academies have a long history of being oriented towards systematic
theology, a point acknowledged by its advocates and critics alike.24 The appeal of
systematic theology, it is argued, is that it unfolds “the total network of universal
principles (which) covers the total tapestry of God’s truth and the Christian’s life”
(Krabbendam, 1986, 239). It aims to draw together into one place the fruits of the
exegetical and historical disciplines. It then orders these insights into rigorous
classifications of theological truths yielding precisely objective definitions of topics and
sub-topics which make up the total system of biblical truth:

...systematic theology...’is nothing other than the saving truth of God presented
in systematic form.’ It utilizes what biblical theology has discovered...(and)
what historical theology has to say...But systematic theology is more
comprehensive than either...It seeks for the over-all biblical and historical view,

23 For evangelical arguments in favour of (reviving) the classical locus of theological
disciplines and for scholastic methods, see Muller (1985, 1991). For proposals that theological
curriculum and method ought to reflect more explicitly its setting in community and the concerns of

24 Amongst advocates, see Muller (1985). On the more critical side, “the pastoral dimensions
of theology are befogged by the church’s understanding of theology as a schooling science, abstract,
done by experts, yielding universal principles applicable in all times and cultures” (Conn, 1979, 351).
collating all the relevant biblical passages and the contributions made by academic and polemical discussion. It is final and normative in a way that its sister disciplines are not. It seeks the final view of Scripture, rather than the transitional one of the Old Testament or even the Book of Acts. (Macleod, 247-248)²⁵

...to the extent that our interpretation of Scripture (i.e. the system of doctrine) corresponds to God’s revelation in nature and Scripture it provides a metaphysically ultimate and true analysis of the world. (Karlberg, 1990, 104)²⁶

The drive to systematise truth, however, must not overwhelm the particulars of text and audience: “the context and life-situation of the text will almost always indicate how the doctrine of the text is to be applied...” (moreover) we must be faithful not only to the doctrines of the text but to the pastoral perspective that underlies it (Macleod, 1986, 254). Nevertheless, it is critical that preachers are trained in the art of ordering the fruits of their exegetical and theological labours into precisely structured sermons. Such an art mirrors the creative character and work of God (Knecht, 1986, 276). This systematising of the message helps clarify the needs of the congregation and the critical role of preaching. It is central to the process of extraction, distillation, application, and communication. Indeed, it is itself central to that event which lies at the heart of evangelicalism—the ministry of the pulpit:²⁷

Systematic theology...is normative. It regards its own conclusions as representing not what a particular biblical author thought or what certain theologians believe or what it may be inspiring for the church to accept, but the truth...First (this) system of truth elucidates each text...Second, the system of doctrine exercises control over the exposition of a particular passage. Precisely because there is a system, and because truth is one, dogmatics lays down

²⁵ Macleod quotes from B. B. Warfield (Selected Shorter Writings, Vol 1, ed. J. E. Meeter. Philipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, page 281). Louis Berkhof, whose Systematic Theology, though in print for over sixty years, is still widely referred to in evangelical academies, defines theology as “the systematized knowledge of God” (1959 ed., 19). Alternatively, Grenz focuses more on “the intellectual reflection on the act, and the attempt to articulate the content, of Christian faith, including its expression in beliefs, practices and institutions” (1993, 64).

²⁶ Scott argues that the seeming objectivity of the move from text to ideals and timeless principles obscures the inextricably personal character of the process: “the actual act of making the transfer of meaning from the one world to the other involves also a subjective element; something inexplicable takes place within the person of the translator-interpreter. This is the art of interpretation. It cannot ultimately be governed by rules or prescribed procedures. Its accuracy depends upon that ‘certain something’ within the translator-interpreter himself” (1979, 76).

²⁷ Ferguson outlines “six primary elements in the preparation for and preaching of expository sermons. They may be described as selecting, understanding, crystallizing, structuring, concretizing, and deterring” (1986, 196, emphases his).
parameters that exegesis must never trespass. (Macleod, 1986, 248-249, emphasis his)

6.3 THE PULPIT AS THE BRIDGE BETWEEN TWO EVANGELICAL WORLDS

6.3.1 The priority of preaching amid contemporary challenges to its relevance

The scholars and preachers in our survey regard the preaching of the evangelical faith as a beacon shining absolute truth on a world lost in relativistic ignorance and idolatry. For them the sermon is a saving event (Runia, 1982, 34-36). Any challenge to the centrality of preaching, or any diminution of its authority, then, must of necessity condemn the preacher and his congregation to a malaise of relativity and doubt. Yet such challenges are at hand:

(There are) three chief obstacles to preaching today. The anti-authority mood makes people unwilling to listen, addiction to television makes them unable to do so, and the contemporary atmosphere of doubt makes many preachers both unwilling and unable to speak. Thus there is a paralysis at both ends, in the speaking and in the hearing... (Some preachers) have given up altogether. Others struggle on, but have lost heart. Indeed, all of us have been affected by the negative arguments, even if there are counter-arguments which we have begun to deploy. (Stott, 1982, 89)

...our problem is that we're trying to present absolutes to a culture that no longer believes in them. (Boice, in Hastie, 1990, 8)

However, the challenges are not solely from outside the fold. Indeed, many evangelicals sense a greater danger in those subtle pressures at work within evangelicalism to white-ant the ministry of biblical preaching. These internal pressures may pose legitimate challenges which must be heeded. But larger issues lie at the heart of the struggle over the priority of preaching:

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28 "But true evangelicals will repent of their misunderstandings and turn back to the Scriptures rather than persist in error...The real threat to 'evangelicalism' is from within, from our fellow members who drift away from the basic elements of evangelical belief and who call on us to follow...this openness to see our own mistakes and to re-evaluate our understanding must not be confused with wooliness of thought and confusion over basic theology...we must not deceive ourselves about other people or about ourselves. We mustn't think that we can be genuine inheritors of New Testament Christianity and yet ignore, twist or deny God's word" (Payne, 1992, 10).
In some circles it has become fashionable to speak of a ‘Christ-centred ministry’ as opposed to a ‘Word-centred ministry’. The aim of such language is to counter the danger of an arid intellectualism...It is also meant to challenge models of ministry which have been perceived as insensitive and impersonal. These are real dangers of which we are helpfully warned. However...our relationship with Christ cannot be separated from our relationship to God’s Word. We know no other Christ than Christ as he is presented in Scripture...In evangelical circles, this movement away from the ministry of the Word does not usually take the form of a total abandonment of the Bible. It is more subtle than that, at least at first. It usually begins with a gradual loss of confidence that the ministry of the Word of God is sufficient to make a difference in people’s lives. (Thompson, 1993, 2-3)

It is therefore perilous to abandon preaching in the face of these challenges and pressures, be they legitimate or otherwise. The need of the hour, then, is not less preaching, but more:

...we live in an age (as did Chrysostom and Calvin) when the primary need is for our people to be instructed in the teaching and application of Scripture. Exegetical preaching serves that purpose, bringing the hearers under the influence both of the content of God’s Word, and the spirit in which God’s Word has come to us. (Ferguson, 1986, 195, emphases his)

My answer would be that even though people don’t believe in truth, our task is to proclaim the truth...Personally, I think our real challenge is to re-educate Christians. It’s a task of Sanctification—a sanctification that begins with the renewal of the mind. Within the churches, that’s probably the biggest task we have. (Boice, in Hastie, 1990, 8)

...let me say to myself that what I have is the Word of God, and I am to hold it forth as the Word of life to all the folk of this generation. Let men thus deal with this crippling lack of confidence in the Word of God and in their own calling and preach with boldness as men of faith. (Thomas, 1986, 386)

Reassured of his purpose, the preacher calls down a vision of God and his redemption. He draws the congregation beyond their own horizons and the distracting voices of criticism to see for themselves the grandeur of God and the weighty responsibilities of the hour. This is what the people need and expect from their preacher:
The hearer asks for a preacher who sees a vision and concentrates on the hearer while he is seeing the vision. If the hearer sees the preacher seeing and senses him sensing, the hearer will also see and sense. (Harms, in Walters, 1986, 458)\(^\text{29}\)

This vision is timeless, universal, and absolute. This is the true nexus of exegesis and proclamation—the preacher labours at the text to uncover the absolute and universal truths which his congregation most needs. The need of the hour is for clear, unequivocal, objective truth:

...if what the preacher says is meaningful at all, it is so because and to the degree that it conveys analytic, objective information. Thus, from this perspective, the primary function of the preacher’s language shall be to communicate propositional (shall we say orthodox?) truth. (Logan, 1986a, 135)

This goal is vital.\(^\text{30}\) Bridging two worlds, the ancient and the modern, the preacher must preserve the historic faith even as he charts a contemporary vision which the congregation can make their own. He must translate biblical truths and principles into clear ideals of faith able to shape the expectations, commitments, and behaviour of those entrusted to his care. It is critical, then, that the preacher never lose the timelessness of the message. He must not preach isolated snippets of advice, but the entire system of biblical truth. Indeed, this system of truth safeguards the preacher, the text, and the congregation.

6.3.2 Preaching as therapy of the soul

These challenges and pressures underscore the responsibility implicit in the call to preach. They are part of the living context of preaching in which the preacher must discern not only the Word, and the subtleties of cultural forces, but also the complexities of the human heart (Nederhood, 1986, 52-53). The preacher must convey the persuasion and conviction of his message. It is unabashedly his role to move the congregation “so that the full impact of drama and emotion can take place” (Sproul, 1986, 119-120). The old rhetors have much to teach the modern preacher in this regard:

...the preacher learns from Cicero that the genuine orator has a goal, persuasion; he has a means, language; and he has a technique, delivery. The measure of his expertise is how well he molds an audience to his purpose—or, for the ministry,

\(^{29}\) The entire quote is from P. Harms (\textit{Power from the Pulpit}, St Louis: Concordia, page 31).

\(^{30}\) Once again, note the goal of exegetical and homiletical method: "Once the 'auxiliary' studies have been completed and the general purpose or unifying theme(s) has (have) been determined, the stage is set to harvest the universal principles and patterns from the biblical text...Factual outlines that present the details of the text can be of great help...But they are only an intermediate step toward the ultimate goal of an outline couched in universal terminology (Krabbendam, 1986, 238-239).
how well a congregation is molded according to the purposes of divine revelation. (De Koster, 1986, 310)

In other words, ministry aims "to change people’s hearts, not just their behaviour" (Thorburn, 1994, 3). This aim must shape every aspect of preaching. After all, conformity to Christ is not laissez faire, but deliberate and decisive. The preacher is aware of this as he draws his message to a close:

The conclusion of the sermon is the final engagement of the mind of the speaker and the mind of the hearers in that particular discourse. It is the decisive conflict. Humanly speaking, eternity hinges on the effectiveness of the preacher’s conclusion. He must give it his all. Here his proposition is clearly in mind—it is the one great luminous truth that must be mounted high for all to see in its most comprehensive statement. The whole of it must be seen at one time. So the preacher concentrates his efforts to make one point only at the conclusion. It will not be new, but will be the gathering up and holding forth of all that he has asserted thus far. He must decide what he wants the hearer to do with the truth. If he wants a lesson learned, then let him summarize and recapitulate what has been taught. If the preacher is eager for them to feel the reality of God’s love or some other great spiritual truth, then let him draw a striking verbal picture of the truth in action or in display. But if the preacher desires the response to be one of decision, then he must appeal to great Christian motives or to Christian character or example as the driving force of his conclusion. (Knecht, 1986, 295)

It is in this sense that preaching is seen as the truest form of therapy and care. Indeed, "theological preaching is the primary means of pastoral care" (Macleod, 1986, 262). Or, as the Reformers understood it, preaching was "the means of grace par excellence" (Runia, 1983, 32). The pastor who preaches the Word with clarity and conviction fulfils his primary vocation to nurture and protect his people:

You can pastor a flock from the pulpit. You speak to their needs, you show them how the Bible teaches them. You can do for them as a group what it’s very difficult to do for individuals...The danger comes if you don’t make your preaching a priority. (Robinson, in G. Clarke, 1993, 9)

God has so ordained it that His people should be fed and nourished by the exposition of His truth through the lips, lives, and personalities of His human servants. It is peculiarly in this way that He ministers to whole men and women, and makes broken men and women whole. It is for lack of this—a
spirit that is dominated by the teaching expounded and is in harmony with it—that the needs of men and women are not met. We can never rest content with exposition that is formally ‘correct’. Unless exposition breathes the Spirit of the truth expounded, it is incorrect and itself needs healing and correction. It may be that this, among other reasons, is a chief cause of the preaching-counselling tension so current in North American churches today. In many instances spiritual health could be preserved at a much earlier stage were preaching directed to whole men from whole men whose disposition and whose message were intertwined. (Ferguson, 1986, 210-211)

Thus the health of the people of God rests with the faithfulness, clarity, and power of evangelical preaching. The preacher directs the Word to those who struggle and labour to see and live out the truth. They are, as it were, spiritually infirm:

...the pastor should come to terms with his calling to be a physician of souls...The local church is a stone quarry, not the finished temple. Innumerable aches and pains will have to be treated in the Lord’s infirmary, which we call the local church. A hospital for the infirm is not an inappropriate analogy...Likewise spiritual physicians are called to tend those coming out of the realm of death and darkness. The pastor’s calling is to deal with problems. His work is to anoint with the balm of Gilead. As a shepherd he must not only heal but also protect. Dealing with wolves is unpleasant and dangerous. A piety must be built that is sufficient for these strains and demands. (Hulse, 1986, 75)

To protect and heal, the preacher concentrates on bridging the gap between the ancient and modern worlds. The biblical truths and their ideals for faith must be brought to bear on the believer’s own walk with Christ: “preaching is driving home the Word of the living God to the lives of His people...bringing (them) under the authority of God” (Bettler, 1986, 332). He knows he must tell them “what God wants from them” (Adams, 1982, 43). Indeed, preaching is a meeting “that confronts and interprets each member of that congregation anew” (Logan, 1986a, 141). It is as though “they have been served notice what the Holy Spirit expects of them” (Bettler, 1986, 340):

Preachers shine strong light into the darkest corners of people’s hearts and chase out their excuses for ignoring God. We reveal their hiding places, demanding a response to what we say. We simplify the issues for people, clearing the foggy areas in which people hide from God so that they can see the decisions before them. (P. D. Jensen, 1994, 4; also Hogan, 1994, 8)
...the preacher enters the ear that he may gain entrance to the most important gate of them all—the gate of the heart, leading to the emotions, the conscience, and finally the will, where the inner spring is, where life is bent and changed and directed to the will of God. (Knecht, 1986, 300-301)

Every malady of faith derives ultimately from a failure to grasp and apply the word of truth proclaimed in the evangelical faith. When the preacher encounters doubt, unbelief, and disobedience, he will preach again those abiding, fundamental, absolute truths which, if only the believer has ears to hear, will convict and heal every spiritual malady. This reinforces the need to preach with the kinds of rhetorical power which can heal and move an audience. Indeed, if clarity, passion, and presence marked those great classical orators who carried the power to release captive minds and revive flagging hearts, they must no less mark the pulpit which seeks to present everyone mature in Christ:

For Augustine, as for the church at large, pulpit discourse is moral pedagogy. Its text is the Bible, its audience the congregation, its goal obedience, its end the maturing believer. This defines the nature of the homily, the role of the sermon. Nothing of the passion and finesse of classical rhetoric need be lost, but all is refocussed. The commitment and power of a Demosthenes, the analytic of an Aristotle, the poise and urbanity of a Cicero, and the scope of a Quintilian are indeed, like the jewels of Egypt, placed rhetorically by Augustine in the service of the people of God. The power of the spoken word surges into the world now from a pulpit as well as a podium; moral as well as political behaviour comes under the sway of eloquence, requiring no less rhetorical training than commanded by the classic treatises. (De Koster, 1986, 319)

The preacher then is pedagogue and rhetor for the kingdom. But not all see the need. Indeed, “even regenerate people do not naturally take to the hearing of the Word of God” (Knecht, 1986, 279). Thus the congregation “must learn to hear and digest sermons from their minister” (ibid). They must learn to value and receive his life-giving gift. The wise congregation recognises this and pays due respect to those who carry such a burden. The wise denomination and academy ensure that the task is kept to those properly mature, equipped, and authorised to preserve the truth of the evangelical faith and thus the salvation of the people of God.
6.4 EVERYDAY LIFE AND THE BREAKDOWN OF IDEALS

6.4.1 The preacher and the burdens of idealism and rectitude

Our sources largely represent those evangelicals for whom being ‘Reformed’ is an important part of their self-understanding (cf. Logan, 1986b). Yet the portrait would hold within almost any constituency of evangelicals concerned for a renewal of biblical preaching. Indeed, these themes and conventions—the centrality of the Bible; due care and rigour in exegesis; a wariness about subjectivism; the seriousness of the task of preaching; the importance of timeless, universal truths; the authority and calling of the preacher; the need for deep congruity between the man and his message; the confrontational character of the gospel; and the goal of effecting deep personal change through preaching—form the mainstay of evangelical sermons and church services. Moreover, many evangelicals would attest that they have been edified and equipped by these times to live out their faith. This seems incontrovertible.

Yet this portrait may obscure another. Any group deeply committed to absolutes and authority will struggle to some degree or another with the sense of gap between ideals and lived experience. Evangelicals are no exception. On the one hand, the portrait our sources have provided can seem strong and secure, buttressed by the weight of divine authority. On the other hand, it can seem intimidating, impossibly beyond reach, and even elitist. Our sources speak with the conviction that their messages are transparently biblical and pastoral. Yet other evangelical voices raise serious objections. Some would repaint the portrait in contempt. But not all. Others struggle to juxtapose an appreciation of evangelical distinctives with a sense of unreality about the ideals of evangelical life. They do not seek to overthrow the evangelical faith, but to rid it of unnecessary baggage. Nor is it only congregations who struggle with such senses of unreality.

Our portrait bears a formidable set of ideals for those who labour in pulpits Sunday by Sunday. There may be little comfort for a young preacher when told that “if (he) can master a few basic strategies, his entire preaching structure will be practical and pointed” (Bettler, 1986, 336). We have only skimmed the prescriptions and proscriptions of the senior preachers and scholars cited. Yet those “few basic strategies” may already threaten to overwhelm. What is the personal impact on a young or a ‘dry’ preacher as he

31 It is salutary to consider the ways in which volumes such as Logan (1986b) and Lloyd-Jones (1971) may impact on a young preacher setting out to make his mark in ministry and preaching within the same evangelical tradition as the authors. The first volume draws from seventeen UK and USA preachers and scholars highly respected within the Reformed evangelical tradition. The author of the second is legendary among the same circles. Indeed, authors of the first volume frequently cite Lloyd-Jones in the same breath as the greats of past centuries.
tries to emulate "the right method of preaching" through his exegesis, systematising, applications, and rhetoric (Runia, 1983, 95, emphasis mine)?

The model of meaning as single and fixed may appear less clear-cut beside the social realities of preaching. Four or five noteworthy preachers will not preach one sermon from the same text, but four or five. Moreover, it will make no difference that they adhere to the principle of a single meaning, nor that they share the same theological framework. Scholars may advise our preacher that the differences show the richness of the one true meaning of the text. But this begs two issues at least. First, there will be no agreement between our hypothetical sermons about exactly where interpretation ceased and application began. Second, whatever is the single meaning of the text, it seemingly lies beyond any one sermon or preacher.

Whatever its philosophical and theological merits, then, the principle of a single meaning may begin to appear as an abstraction with few links to the social experiences of exegesis and preaching. The strong disavowal of subjectivism inherent in the principle—and, as we have noted, in the structure of evangelical theology generally—may foster the ideal of an engagement with the text largely devoid of personality. In other words, the preacher must minimise the human element in exegesis to ensure faithfulness to the text. At the same time, the social contexts of preaching are congregations, peers, and mentors who appreciate and commend personal creativity. Thus two ideals appear in tension: how does the preacher simultaneously minimise and maximise the human element in his preparation and delivery—and keep these distinct? Other issues weigh more heavily.

Over and above the ideals of hermeneutics, exegesis, and homiletics, the preacher has been exhorted—and expected—to live with exemplary piety. Thoroughly equipped by the Scriptures, this "man of God...is ready for any challenge as he ministers to the needs of God's congregation" (Bettler, 1986, 334). Moreover, he must act and feel with the composure necessary for one who fills this dignified office. He must convey the power of the Holy Spirit and be an eminent man, full of assurance and faith (Thomas, 1986, 382-383). In other words, the preacher embodies the ideal Christian. Moreover, his position and pulpit presence reinforce that image. According to Hulse's lengthy study of the preacher and piety (1986), the minister must:32

- have a robust piety (67)
- be godly (67)
- find the time to seek the mind of God (68)

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32 Most of the following remarks are quotes from Hulse (1986). Occasionally I have altered his wording slightly to fit the imperative form in which I have presented them.
discern his priorities (69)
keep physically fit (71)
exercise self-denial in the use of lawful pleasures and recreations (72)
make his feelings, desires, and comforts take second-place to the Lord’s will (73)
build a piety sufficient for the strains of constant shepherding, protecting, and healing (75)
keep morally pure (76)
mortify pride and ambition (76-77)
rely on the means of grace (78)
emulate Christ in love, self-sacrifice, prayer, fasting, humble and joyful service, and persevering faith (80)
shine as an example of love (81)
serve with a willing spirit of giving oneself to people (83)
be wholly consecrated to God’s will (83)
emulate uninterrupted prayer and fasting (83-84)
overcome evil by finding joy in the most humble and menial service of others (85)
exercise faith in hard times of disappointment (86)
labour to perfect themes over a lifetime (87)
and experience the power of Christ and his Spirit (87-88).

And we have not spoken of perfecting the arts of sermon construction, illustration, application, rhetorical skill, or dress. One wonders what emotions and resolutions pass through the minds and notepads of novice ministers when they leave preachers’ conferences.

In a sense, all of these ideals issue from within the preacher or from his peers and mentors. But he must also measure up to the expectations of the congregation. From the start, he must meet the approval of those who hire him:

Knowing that everything rises or falls depending on the quality of leadership in the parish, the work of the incumbency committee is therefore vital in selecting the best possible leader...Don’t major on the less important things like...spiritual gifts; but rather focus on the passionately held convictions about truth, evangelism, the role of the laity...Thoroughly research the track record (the specific achievements and failures) as well as the reputation of your top 3

33 See the relevant articles in Logan (1986b).
candidates...Ask tough questions (eg tell us specifically about your daily devotions, recent answers to prayer, when you last led someone to Christian commitment, how many hours a week do you work; what recent changes have you made etc). (Crawford, 1993, 8-9)

What takes place in a man when he feels that the fate of his congregation rests on him having to emulate his message not only outwardly, but inwardly as well? What happens when the sermon fails—when the ideal is not reached, and ‘deep does not call to deep’ (cf. Knecht, 1986, 283)? What conclusion is a preacher likely to draw? He may attribute failure to the congregation, as Hogan suggests: “When the preaching of the Word fails, there is only one place where blame can be placed—on the condition of the listener’s heart” (1994, 9). However, it is just as (or more?) likely that he will judge himself against an ideal of piety:

One of the reasons why poor preaching is dull is that the preacher himself fails to experience what he is talking about as he speaks—there is no joy, sense of awe, tingling down his spine, or whatever. When he fails to relive the event it is almost axiomatic that his congregation will ‘experience’ that failure. In preaching, it is not enough to talk about something; the preacher himself must experience it afresh. (Adams, 1986, 355, emphasis his)

Our sources repeatedly urge the young minister to preach with authority and power. Yet such power eludes many preachers. Moreover, the path to it has many dead ends:

The problem is universal. There is not a denomination or fellowship of pastors that does not designate powerlessness in the pulpit as its greatest weakness, and there is no shortage of homiletical literature that suggests to preachers the source of power and a revolution in their ministry...Where, then, is power for preaching to be found? For some the answer is glossolalia...For others the answer is intimidatingly austere and almost frighteningly monastic in its tone—agonizing in prayer, fasting, mortification, and self-denial are all absolutized as the only answer to our powerlessness. How it intimidates the young pastor!...Certainly (such power is not) the rare possession of an elite group of conference speakers or favoured ministers. (Thomas, 1986, 369-370)

There is hope here for the minister wrestling with the lack of power in his own preaching. Specifically, Thomas seeks to spare him from chasing false ideals and from berating and humiliating himself to attain an unrealistic piety. However, his following remarks may only replace one burden with another:
Every sermon is to be accompanied by divine power if it is to be true
proclamation of the Word of God. Is it not as sinful to preach the Scriptures
powerlessly as it is to misrepresent them by false exegesis? The only way that
the New Testament knows of preaching the gospel is with the Holy Ghost sent
down from heaven...where may such power be found?...Clearly its own
explanation is the life of God in the soul of the preacher...It is, therefore...the
personal relationship of the minister with Jesus Christ that serves as the critical
foundation of all he is and does in the Lord's service. This kind of relationship
empowers the minister with unction from on high. (Thomas, 1986, 370-371,
emphasis his)

In the face of such ideals, the preacher may fear that his piety, and consequently his
power in preaching, will break down. Such breakdowns have clear causes: a "lack of self-
denial"; "nervous tension"; "moral failure"; "pride and selfish ambition"; and "deviation
from the truth and from reliance on the instituted means of grace" (Hulse, 1986, 70-79).
Each is a "ministerial breakdown that may be traced to a lack of proper biblical piety"
(ibid, 79). Thus a minister must guard the time to prepare himself in heart and mind.
More than this, he must draw back from his parishioners lest he lose the discernment and
composure congruent with the authority and power of his preaching:

...ministers touch conscience all the time...(thus) it is absolutely essential that a
minister possess the gift of judgement, the gift of wisdom. He must have the
ability to understand what is really happening among the people he is most
closely related to...Such judgement can only be exercised if a minister is able to
maintain a certain degree of emotional distance from other people and from the
circumstances in which he finds himself. The only kind of person who can
maintain such distance is a person who is at ease with himself, has a proper
amount of self-esteem, and possesses self-confidence. (Nederhood, 1986, 52-
53)\(^{34}\)

Finally, the pressures building up within and around a preacher may lead to his
premature resignation. What is at stake for him at this time, particularly in relation to his
peers and the denomination?

\(^{34}\) For some evangelicals, it is not simply a matter of the minister needing to keep his
distance, but of him having a distinct identity. "We should not have ministers become members of
local congregations for sentimental reasons. Their membership in the Presbytery goes with the job
and the calling. If our pastors are feeling a lack in their lives, let them not look to what the local
church would offer them in membership with them, for that would bring many unwanted problems.
Rather, let them look to (the) Presbytery... (Kroeger, 1992, 211). Earlier in the article, Kroeger lists
some of these (inappropriate) "sentimental reasons": "(to) have fellowship?...Have membership
where their families are? These are valid reasons for members of the local congregation, but not for
teaching elders/pastors" (ibid, 20).
For most ex-pastors, the emotional and spiritual strain associated with their transition out of parish ministry is considerable. One writes: 'My denomination and colleagues treat me as if I were a leper...’ Another: 'The only contact from the Superintendent of my denomination when I left the pastorate was a terse request for the keys to the manse!'.

In the end, isolation may engulf the ‘failing’ pastor. Doyle (1994a) observes that there is often no one to listen to the preacher. Then, he faces professional risk and loss of face if he reveals his struggles to his peers and superiors. After all, they are “the ones who will give advice to others about job places both now and in the future” (ibid, 8). Thus the ideals of preaching and ministry may consign him to silence and a gnawing sense of unreality, both before and after his departure.

6.4.2 The pulpit and the power of idealism and rectitude

Our portrait thus far has highlighted the view from the preacher’s side of the pulpit—the institutional and personal capital invested in preaching by preachers, academies, and denominational authorities. But these images outline only a part of the landscape. The sermon is a social event in which its form is as much the message as its propositional content. That form takes in the wider phenomena of idealism and experience. The sermon embodies an entire cultural experience: what, then, is this event to a congregation? what images, expectations, and ideals does it convey? what parity or disparity lies between the timeless principles and ideals of the pulpit and the realities of experience?

The preacher himself may sense that a congregation has not experienced the event as relevant to life. For some this signals the need to preach more. Others, however, recognise that it is too simple to reduce the problem to a lack of proper teaching or listening. Indeed, blaming the congregation may only disguise and compound the problem:

I know that many (preachers) simply state that preaching is relevant, because it is the preaching of God’s Word in Holy Scripture and God’s Word is always relevant. The mere statement is not only too easy, even simplistic, but it is also unreal. It does not tally with the experiences of many church people. (Runia, 1983, 73; contra Hogan, 1994, 9)

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35 Taken from the information flyer of Rowland Croucher, John-Mark Ministries, Melbourne. Croucher researches the sociology of pastoral resignations and offers a counselling service to ex-pastors and their spouses. He estimates that presently in Australia there are approximately 10,000 active clergy, and another 10,000 who have retired prematurely. Many of these have been deeply disaffected by their experience of the pastorate and resignation.
The ambiguity of life renders the ideals of preachers less than self-evident. The preacher aims to enrich his congregation in the truth. But no matter how he engages with them, he cannot know their worlds as they do. Moreover, his confidence in the timeless and universal principles of the faith may limit his sense of the value of such engagement. The critical thing, then, despite Runia’s caveat, may be to preach those principles which apply universally to any congregation.

With rare candour, De Koster describes the ideal underlying this levelling of the congregation. Here community comes to mean conformity to a set pattern, a “one audience-personality”:

…the rhetorically artistic journey begins, for the Ciceronian, with narration (in the pulpit, doctrine)—bringing the audience to one mind with both speaker and itself. If, to achieve this, sentences are short and languages colloquial, these are dictated by antecedent intent. And that intent is the all-important creation (in the most artistic sense of the term) of one audience-personality out of many audience-persons. And more, the creation of such a corporate personality brings into existence seeing with the eyes of the speaker, feeling with his emotions, and sharing communion through his perspectives. ‘Communication’ is, after all, creating community. (1986, 310-311, emphases mine)

Thus the preacher must learn how to turn the congregation to see things the right way: “If we become exclusively preoccupied with answering the questions people are asking, we may overlook the fact that they often ask the wrong questions and need to be helped to ask the right ones” (Stott, 1971, 139).

There is a critical point here: idealism requires conformity; conformity requires artifice. In order to create the “one audience-personality”, the preacher must employ “that powerful speech (which) has its origin in passionate conviction, focused upon a precisely envisioned oratorical objective, molded by a ‘style’ that obliges every syllable and every gesture to pursue the predetermined end” (De Koster, 1986, 311). In this way, the preaching not only instructs, but establishes the range of acceptable responses. In this sense, the conventions of preaching and evangelical language establish boundaries for thought, feeling, and action. The effect is to render these paradigms and conventions as self-evidently true. In the shadow of such undeniable rectitude, the believer may pull back from the uncertainties of her experience into the shelter of authorised explanations and ideals.
6.4.3 Idealism, rectitude, and the seeds of disaffection

Such shelters, however, may collapse roundabout those who seek their refuge. Even stalwart and conservative evangelicals sense the denial implicit in much preaching. As Crabb notes, it is easy to spot the unreality of those who preach a “heaven now” gospel. But even amongst those who reject this manipulative and misleading theology

...many more communicate the same (false) hope by neither sharing honestly their own current struggles nor addressing realistically the struggles of others. It’s tempting to stay removed from the problems for which we have no ready answers. It’s much easier to preach that we need less counselling and more obedience than to involve ourself in the messy details of life where obedience comes hard. One result of extricating ourself from the tangled complexity of life is simplistic preaching that fails to deal with life as it is. Rather than penetrating life with liberating truth, such preaching maintains a conspiracy of pretence that things are better than they are or ever can be until Christ returns. We end up unprepared to live but strengthened in our denial. (1988, 17)

Knowingly or otherwise, such preaching teaches “that more knowledge, more commitment, more giving, more prayer—some combination of the Christian disciplines—will eliminate our need to struggle with deeply felt realities” (Crabb, 1988, 14). In the face of complexity and fear, superficiality holds great allure:

When we reflect deeply on how life is, both inside our soul and outside in our world, a quiet terror threatens to overwhelm us...In those moments, retreat into denial does not seem cowardly, it seems necessary and smart. Just keep going, get your act together, stop feeling sorry for yourself, renew your commitment to trust God, get more serious about obedience. Things really aren’t as bad as you intuitively sense they are. You’ve simply lost your perspective and must regain it through more time in the Word and increased moral effort. (ibid, 15)

For some evangelicals, however, the vocabulary of conformity no longer gels. The tensions and dichotomies of faith and life may become acute in the face of a deepening personal confrontation of ambiguity and pain. The believer may try to conform, to be part of “the one audience-personality”, but her deepest longings may rebel. For some, this was and is the shape of evangelical experience:

Week in week out, month after month our earnest and pious Baptist pastor would preach the Gospel. This ‘good news’, apparently, was that Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Sinners meant all of us, who sat doggedly, Sunday after Sunday in the red vinyl chairs in the cream brick veneer
church...All that was needed to claim this great Salvation was that we make our Decision for Christ by publicly coming forward at the altar call...

I sweated it out week after week as one by one my peers capitulated around me and ‘went forward’ to show that they had done it. To me this was a shameful procession. Heads bowed they would walk to the front and stand there while the congregation mentally checked them off the list. Everytime someone went forward the pressure increased. It finally became unbearable after my young brother ‘did it’.

I was, of course, too young to articulate my extreme discomfort. I assumed that the sweating and flushing embarrassment I experienced every week was the result of my rebellious sinfulness. There was no other option in this view of the world. You were ‘out’ until you did it. And I knew I was out.

So finally I did it. I hated every moment of the walk down the aisle, the congregation’s eyes boring into the back of my head, the mental checklisting; but the worst was yet to come...

A week later (the pastor) came to visit our home. Mum and Dad hovered, sweetly protective, as he interviewed me privately in the loungeroom. It was the first time I had been forced into such invasive intimacy with an adult I did not know.

As he left he spoke in hushed tones to my parents. To my horror I heard them all agree that there had been a great change in me. The complicity was complete. Even my parents could not see through me. (Perron, 1994, 58-59)

In such contexts, there is no room for alternative constructs. God, and relationship with him, is exactly what the preacher and the culture of the service convey.

The character of the gathering as a sermon plus options is itself a focus of the tension between ideals and experience. Evangelicals emphasise the Reformation principle of ‘the priesthood of all believers’, thus acknowledging the dignity and equality of the entire congregation, both leaders and led. In recent decades, the principle has been taken to imply the wider participation of non-clergy in the gathering. However, although this ideal has passed into common evangelical vocabulary, generally it has brought little
change to congregational life. As one cleric notes, the gathering remains the job of the clergy:

Lay participation in the Church services needs to be encouraged, after adequate preparation through well-run training classes...Effective communication is more important than participation for its own sake. The laity’s job is not primarily to help the clergy do their job in the church, but the clergy’s responsibility is to help the laity do their job in the world. The old authoritarian clericalism is thankfully on the way out, but new problems will arise if it is replaced by an aggressive layism. (Shilton, 1993, 6)

These boundaries define the gathering in terms of the formal proceedings led from the front. The more informal interactions are clearly understood as happening before or after church. Understandably, then, “the most common criticism that is directed at our worship services is that apart from the hymns we sing, we ask people simply to be spectators” (Thomas, 1986, 380). According to Thomas, there should be more interaction. But of what kind?

The sermon should be the greatest period of participation in the church’s assemblies. During a thirty-minute period a Christian should be moved to inward thankfulness and praise, conviction of sin and repentance, determination to love and obey God, new concern for his fellow-believers and his fellow men. The sermon is not for balconyers, but for travellers, for those who are most involved with God; it is the climactic aspect of worship. (Ibid)

In some traditions, that response is audible and physical: “When a Black congregation’s heart and mind are gripped by the sermon, ‘the ensuing dialogue between preacher and people is the epitome of creative worship’” (Stott, 1982, 61). Yet neither Stott, nor any of the scholars and preachers cited earlier, advocates such give-and-take. Rather, the linchpin of the preacher’s ‘dialogue’ is his ability to discern and pre-empt his

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36 Many books by evangelicals have explored themes such as ‘body life’, ‘one-anothering’, community, and the house church. See for example, Banks (1980, 1988b), R. and J. Banks (1986), Snyder (1975, 1977, 1983), Stevens (1985), and Tillapaugh (1982). Each created some interest at its time of publication, but has had little lasting impact in mainstream evangelical communities.

37 For a particularly striking account of this ideal, see Hayford, etal (1990). One quote will suffice to indicate the book’s tone: “That jerkiness (in worship) can be prevented if, for the example just mentioned, worship leaders plan to move toward the pulpit during the end of the hymn. For me that means timing the last few bars of the hymn with my walk from my seat to the pulpit. When I first began ministry, I actually practiced this on Saturday nights” (Ibid, 61). At least one Sydney evangelical Anglican church uses this book to train its lay worship leaders. The book is part of the Mastering Ministry series and brings the same perspective to an array of the functions of clerical leadership.

congregation's questions: he declaims; they mull along the lines he has anticipated; and he
responds to their silent questions:

...the kind of dialogical preaching I am recommending...refers to the silent
dialogue which should be developing between the preacher and his hearers,
For what he says provokes questions in their minds which he then proceeds to
answer. His answer raises further questions, to which he again replies. One of
the greatest gifts a preacher needs is such a sensitive understanding of people
and their problems that he can anticipate their reactions to each part of his
sermon and respond to them. Preaching is rather like playing chess, in that the
expert chess player keeps several moves ahead of his opponent, and is always
ready to respond, whatever piece he decides to move next. (ibid)

Let us remember, it is not the form that is decisive but the content. A sermon,
whatever its form, will be really dialogical when it takes the congregation with
its joys and sorrows, its questions and doubts, its aspirations and frustrations
seriously, by letting the light of God's redemptive Word shine upon them.
Preaching that takes account of both the message of the text and the reactions of
the congregation and that tries to incorporate these reactions into the exposition
of the text will be truly biblical preaching and therefore also relevant preaching.
(Runia, 1983, 72, emphases his)

The priesthood of all believers, then, means that an evangelical has the Spirit and
does not need a priest to mediate either its meaning nor the presence of God. However, it
does not mean that the gathering is the context for audible interaction between
evangelicals who seek to follow Christ in everyday life. There is next to no place for
conversation. For some evangelicals, this disjunction becomes intolerable:

Some manage to hold on at the edges of congregational life. Some find a
temporary resting place in parachurch activities of one kind or another. Some
withdraw into a private life to find a home there again. What binds these
people together is a deep sense of desperation. They literally ache to belong to
an informal, compassionate community. For them this is no general desire or
optional extra. It is a life-and-death matter, a case of spiritual integrity and

6.4.4 Piety, idealism, and rectitude

Evangelicals have tended to refute mystical and sacramental notions of dualism.
However, other dualistic paradigms may be at work among them. A sacramental clergy
may have given way to what Lawton calls the "clericalised laity":
Rather than an institutional collapse through the death and defection of the clergy, a diversification of ministry may be taking place. However, it is also possible that we are continuing to see a further contraction into clericalised laity by people disillusioned with materialistic society" (1988, 15)

Increasingly, larger evangelical churches and movements have encouraged young lay people to enter some form of full-time stipendiary ministry. Cheng (1991) argues that such a strategy takes Ecclesiastes seriously: everything other than ministry is meaningless. Thus the challenge is for young evangelicals to quit their careers, to undertake formal theological training, and to become full-time Christian workers. Then, Cheng argues, their work will be meaningful. But what makes something meaningless or meaningful? The key issue for Cheng is the question of time:

... nothing is ever achieved...Anything, job included, belonging to this creation is doomed to futility by its temporary nature...(But) there is nothing temporary or hollow about our new life...Gospel work is the only work with permanent effect. That is why it ought to be top priority for Christians. That is why the most demanding full-time secular job can really only be, in its significance, a small part of a Christian’s life...Or have you poured your energies into an investment that cannot last? (ibid, 6-7)

In other words, something is only meaningful if it lasts. The eternal is the meaningful. The eternal is the sacred. The present, the physical, must be transcended. The newer emphasis seems to revamp those older constructs which made the terms ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’, ‘spiritual’ and ‘physical-carnal-fleshy’ part of the vocabulary of historic evangelical piety (Hunter, 1987, 40-75; Bebbington, 1989, 151-180). Moreover, it trades on the assumption, noted earlier, that preaching is the essential and sufficient therapy for all maladies of the heart. Preaching belongs to the higher ground. However, not all would agree:

Perhaps it’s time to screw up our courage and attack the sacred cow: We must admit that simply knowing the contents of the Bible is not a sure route to spiritual growth. There is an awful assumption in evangelical circles that if we can just get the Word of God into people’s heads, then the Spirit of God will apply it to their hearts. That assumption is awful, not because the Spirit never does what the assumption supposes, but because it has excused pastors and leaders from the responsibility to tangle with people’s lives. Many remain safely hidden behind pulpits, hopelessly out of touch with the struggles of their congregations, proclaiming the Scriptures with a pompous accuracy that
touches no one. Pulpits should provide bridges, not barriers, to life-changing relationships.

Bible colleges and seminaries have spent enough time proving that merely instilling knowledge does not change lives. Graduates with impressive academic records have too often failed miserably in their ministries because of an inability to get along with others. Some have done very well...but they haven't helped honest Christians deal effectively with the realities of their lives. (Crabb, 1988, 160)

At the heart of much evangelical piety, Crabb maintains, stands the need to keep an appearance of strength and rectitude. Moreover, he claims that this idealism stretches across the internal theological and ecclesiastical boundaries of evangelicalism (1988, 17). It insists on an ordered world of commitment, control, and success. Yet it may ruin those who do not measure up: "I have often wondered how much crippling guilt and soul-wracking pain those testimonies (of success) provoke in folks who have committed themselves to Christ as best they can but whose lives are filled with terrible discomfort" (ibid, 79).

Few issues expose the destructiveness of evangelical idealism like the responses of some churches to the sufferings of evangelical women at the hands of their abusive and violent (and often evangelical) husbands:

I despised his attendance and eager participation at church because it underlined the contrast to his behaviour at home. Those who did believe me offered no solace; only sympathy and empty platitudes. They affirmed my submissive reaction to my husband's abusive tyranny. No one at any time went to talk to my husband about his behaviour in loving correction. I was always left empty-handed to return to my living hell. (Survey respondent, in Alsdurf, 1990, 14)

After eight years of extensive research and interviews with battered Christian women in North America, the Alsdurfs (1990) conclude that many evangelical leaders when made aware of abuse in their churches seek at all cost to maintain the semblance of an ordered family and congregation:

Almost without exception women report that their pastors focused on getting them—not their abusive husbands—to change. Comments by pastors in our sample confirmed that stance. One minister said that his approach with abused women is to involve them in Bible studies because 'the studies take their mind out of the home situation for a while,' implying that his goal is to keep the wife
preoccupied rather than to work for change. What this technique
communicates to the battered woman is that the responsibility for change is
hers; it becomes a spiritual strategy for blaming the victim.

‘All three pastors said a man was “head of the family” and I must endure
whatever he did,’ one woman wrote. ‘My current pastor, after observing my
husband’s violence and anger, advised divorce, but gave no more counseling or
emotional support. He does not want to be perceived as an advocate of
divorce.’ Since filing for divorce, that woman added, only two older women in
her church talk to her. ‘I’m an outcast, being a victim of “church discipline” for
divorce, although my husband’s behaviour is well known.’

...Tragically that woman (not the one above) is not alone among abused women,
many of whom have felt that leaving an abusive spouse also means leaving the
church. One woman said she is ‘totally disillusioned’ with the church after
being told she was in the wrong for wanting to leave her abusive husband.

...Her comments are echoed by a plethora of Christian women who have been
abused by their husbands and then abandoned by their churches when their
marital problems became public. ‘Divorce is a stench in the nostrils of the
church’, a woman (observed). Though her pastor advised against it, she
divorced her husband after putting up with ten years of abuse. ‘I finally
decided that I didn’t have to answer to the ministers, but to God,’ she
concluded. ‘It was my neck being squeezed, not theirs.’ (ibid, 19-20)

An Australian engaged in counselling and pastoral support records the same kinds
of episode:

Then through the blackness I could see my precious child, sobbing
uncontrollably...my beautiful child...raped and abused...by her father...Pressure
was exerted by well meaning Christian people to drop the action before court in
order to save the family. That was difficult to resist at the time. I became very
angry and incensed. People placed more importance on keeping the family
一起 than excising the cancer...Rather than believing my daughter and the
inescapable evidence, rather than safeguarding the other children, I was
expected to sacrifice the lot for the sake of ‘family’ and ‘marriage’. (Client’s
story, in McClelland, no date, 103).39

39 On the propensity of evangelicals to urge ‘forgive-and-forget’ in child sexual assault cases,
see McClelland (no date, 109-110) and Horsfield (1992).
6.4.5 The breakdown of evangelical meanings

The disregard by some leaders and churches for the adult and child victims of violence and sexual abuse presents a poignant image of how idealism can tyrannise evangelicals. The same phenomena are reported more widely, however. Faced with the standards of evangelical pulpits and culture, failing believers may work harder to comply, rather than to question those ideals. Moreover, they may internalise the unreality of these ideals as their own personal inadequacy to live up to them. In such cases, every effort to own the preacher's interpretative framework only reinforces self-condemnation. These tensions may finally become intolerable in the face of a growing inability to see the world in terms of such constructs.

A preacher describes what he calls a "burnt-out Evangelical", typical of the many "half-converted" to whom he ministers:

I think April\(^{40}\) felt that because she was a Christian she had to 'measure up' to a sub-conscious, unspoken standard—at least externally. The growing reality was that internally she wasn't measuring up. Now understand, no-one does! But everyone is going around holding up some facade that they are measuring up to this unspoken standard. April went on for 15 years like this...Well (finally) April began to have real concerns about (her church's building plans, debts, and money-raising). Then there were some personal disappointments in her life that she felt shouldn't have happened to her because she was a Christian...Her bad experience of church coupled with her growing disappointment with the realities of life kind of crowded in on her and she dropped out. In talking to her it became obvious that she was simply burnt out. Her beliefs hadn't changed. But she had a growing skepticism about what she was experiencing in her life under the heading of 'being a Christian'. (Heuss, in Miles, 1991b, 5-6)

Heuss' interviewer identifies the problem of a "performance mentality":

At the same time that the modern Evangelical will tell you that he believes in grace...there is a performance mentality that stems from what they really believe...I believe this is partly contributing to the 'burnt-out' Evangelical. They're tired of jumping through hoops; they're tired of performing all the time. (Miles, 1991b, 6)

\(^{40}\) A pseudonym.
The interviewer continued, "Has she been able to come out of that?". Heuss' response indicates his understanding of 'April's' need:

It's still at the beginning, but I've been able to outline some of the Reformed doctrines of grace...And they were news to her...It's interesting that the 'burnt-out Evangelicals' that I've been corresponding with...seem to have four choices...they drop out altogether...they go the total emotional route...(they) go high church...(or) The only other option is to become Reformed, and at the church where I work...it seems that we're not only trying to reach the unconverted, but also the half-converted! (Heuss, in Miles, 1991b, 6)

The presumption seems two-fold. First, Heuss presumes that 'April', and those like her, dropped out because of her drivenness to comply with the unfair and unbiblical expectations and ideals of those evangelical preachers and churches not Reformed in theology. Second, 'April' must face up to her "self-induced spiritual exhaustion" (Payne, 1991, 2, emphasis mine). But the explanation founders. Other 'April's' are leaving churches not only of an Arminian or Dispensational orientation, but those of Reformed theology. Indeed, our portrait of evangelical idealism and rectitude thus far has drawn for the most part from Reformed-evangelical sources. They suggest that a similar 'performance mentality' operates as easily within evangelical churches of a Reformed persuasion, as amongst those of a more fundamentalist or charismatic emphasis. Moreover, the exhaustion may be as much imposed as it is self-induced.

Other evangelicals are not so much 'burned-out', as 'dried-out'. While hanging on to the tenets of evangelicalism, some find that the fear of being theologically inaccurate stifles their desire for and expression of open relationships. In response to the seeming dryness of church life, some have attended and promoted weekend 'relational' workshops designed to help people "understand what living for Christ meant" (Howell, 1994, 2).41 Other evangelicals warn that while such movements may offer immediate emotional benefits, in the long term they may undermine the objective character of the gospel:

(It) has the potential to make whole groups of Christians very inward looking, as they focus on other Christians, and on their own Cursillo experience...Because of the warmth and God-centredness of its advocates, it appeals to many whose lives as Christians seem dry and fruitless. But history

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41 The article and ensuing correspondence cited below refers to the Cursillo movement. Originally created by Spanish Roman Catholics, it now attracts evangelicals. There is also a Protestant version, The Emmaus Walk. Both emphasise a personal experience of God, and encourage participants to talk freely, if they so wish, about their heartaches and joys in following Christ.
shows that the emphasis on experience is not unique, and the Bible shows it is misplaced. (ibid, 7)

Several readers reacted to what they saw as the overly negative tone of Howell’s article, and consequently wrote to the editor to highlight the value of the experience in their own lives and in the lives of others.42 One letter stands out amongst these. It articulates a deeply felt tension between a strong appreciation for evangelical teaching, frustration over the suspicion of emotion and experience, and the preoccupation with rectitude:

I have felt for a while, and your article confirms it, that there can be such an obsession with doctrinal truth that we can’t be touched by God unless everything is 100% correct. As much as I value my background, with its strong emphasis on correct scriptural interpretation, I find in myself and others almost a cynicism to anything emotional and experiential. I don’t like it. I understand why people end up in the charismatic movement.

...I’ve seen people arrive (at the weekend) so withdrawn, anxious, burdened and become outreaching, smiling, relaxed and even share some of their very deep pains and struggles with another human being. Of course, this change isn’t permanent, but it can allow them to be open to God’s truths.

The main impact for me (of the weekend) was not great spiritual growth, but the experience of real, open communication—people being real with one another. That’s truth too. We can go away on a (parish houseparty-style) weekend and have everything doctrinally correct but little depth of relating. I feel as though you are fighting those who are on your side. (author’s emphasis)

In some sense, the author’s experience of evangelicalism seemed inimical to “anything emotional and experiential”, such that the need to be “correct” at times militated against “real open communication”. In other words, while she remains resolutely committed to basic evangelical tenets, her experience of evangelical paradigms and conventions is that they seem inadequate to convey important personal and relational dimensions to her faith. She is not alone.

Recently a large Sydney Pentecostal church attracted over 5000 participants, many of them from mainline evangelical churches, to its annual conference-training course in

42 All letters including the one quoted at length below were written to the editor of The Briefing, issue 146, November 8, 1994, page 5. The Briefing is a Sydney evangelical magazine published to stimulate biblical preaching and evangelism in the face of what the publisher and editors consider to be a perceived loss of direction amongst Sydney and Australian evangelicals, particularly evangelical Anglicans.
music, creativity, and leadership. In his review, Batt notes the strong implicit messages of victory, triumph, success, and glamour underlying much of the conference. He concludes with a salutary reminder of what may happen for those who miss the boat: “the greater you sell the life of victory, the more likely those who don’t attain it will either start faking it or feeling guilty” (1995, 26). Yet there was something more to this conference. Why, Batt asks, were so many attracted to it? More than anything else, he maintains, the participants welcomed the appreciation of their gifts which otherwise go unvalued:

The Protestant church this century has been very heavily influenced by Keswick theology, or the holiness movement. Phrases such as ‘less of me, more of Jesus’ ended up meaning ‘anything I want to do or am good at must be sinful’ (unless of course it was evangelism, engineering or business and fitted into the existing Protestant work ethic). As for creativity and art, well, that was a worldly hindrance to the Kingdom...and though the explicit theology is not a major part of the church now, it is still implicit in much of church life.

So when Christians start to hear that, yes, their singing voice, acting ability, guitar riffs, or passion for photography or even business are probably gifts from God; that he would delight to see them used as part of our worship to him; that there is a place in the church community for those gifts to be used to add colour and passion and maybe even to help bring other people to faith in Christ—when people hear this, it’s not just like the possibility of a warm, colourful breeze blowing through a cold, grey besa-brick Baptist church building designed by a third-rate architect. It’s like a kid discovering that her dad is suddenly overjoyed and proud of a hobby she always felt guilty for. (ibid, 25-26)

For some, the breakdown of evangelical meaning strikes at the core of belief:

I picked up a bible recently. Given all that’s been happening in and to me lately, that could be seen as an utterly incongruous action.

You see, I often think that God isn’t really there in an immediate sense. As a child I suffered the agony of being sexually and emotionally abused. Where was God when that happened? After much soul-searching, I finally came to the conclusion that the God who exists is in some ways absent from us here in the world.

It’s taken me a long time to be able to express that concept or even say those words—“God’s absence”. Years of biblical exegesis and systematic theology
have taught me God is omnipresent. Even the expressions in the Bible of a feeling of forsakenness by God are tempered by the assurance that God is.

It has been said that to be a Christian is to accept that Jesus took on himself all the suffering of alienation from God. Some say that because Jesus took on this suffering, we need never experience the devastation and anguish of God’s separation from us; of God’s absence, both here on earth or after death. This is the theology many faithful and biblical Christians accept and believe in.

So what happens to the faithful and biblical Christians who, trusting in God, nonetheless find their primary experience of God one of absence?

The Bible seems to portray people who feel God’s ‘absence’ whilst holding onto a theology of God’s presence. And the whole testimony of the Bible is that God is actually there. The thing is that this is primarily a theological and not necessarily a pastoral statement. If people feel abandoned by God, it does not necessarily help them to be told that God or Jesus is there.

How can a six-year-old girl continually raped by her father be told that Jesus is by her side, that God is looking over her? How can the parents of a stillborn baby be assured of God’s protection and provision for them and their child? And what of the family and friends whose God did not stop the one they love from a suicide attempt?

For these people, the pain of separation from God is just as real as the initial ‘honeymoon’ glow experienced by many just starting on the journey of faith. Both these groups of people need contact with Christians who have enough security in their own relationships with God to not feel obliged to defend any particular picture of God as the only ‘right’ one. Rather, we should help the one group to explore, feel and express their sense of jubilation at ‘all God is doing in their lives’, but equally justifiably we should help the other group explore their sense of God’s ‘absence’.

The former is easier and far more comfortable for us in our age of quick-fix solutions, but it is often those in the latter group who need the most support. To ignore their pain is to deny they are in a relationship with God, shaped differently by different people. And it is to imply that God is not big enough to take seriously real people in real situations—with real needs.

Picking up a Bible tonight was a difficult thing for me to do. Largely, I feel judged by this book, because of my many years’ experience of Christians who
have used it simplistically and in a condemning way when I have expressed my feelings of aloneness.

But it was not an incongruous action, even though a lot of the time I feel ‘outside the circle of faith’. It was the kind of expression—one of many—which different people in different circumstances and at different times have made in trying to deal with the tension inherent in knowing God exists, yet is not there. (Lisbon, 1995, 32)

In the face of such a breakdown of the normal constructs of evangelical meaning, there may be cold comfort in ‘correct’ answers. Harvie Conn (1982) recounts a poignant example of such “talking about grace without talking grace”. It is an excerpt from the film Hard Core. Jake, a lay member of the “Christian Reformation Church”, has sought the help of a teenage prostitute to track down his daughter who has run away from home and the church to the world of pornography. Jake is reading a newspaper as he and the young prostitute wait in an airport lounge. As Conn recalls the dialogue, it unfolds like this, beginning with the girl’s inquiry:

‘What church do you go to?’
‘Well, we’re a Calvinistic church.’
‘Calvinistic? I don’t understand.’
‘Well, we believe in the Canons of Dordt.’ There is a look of confusion on her face. He continues, ‘You know, the five points of Calvinism: T-U-L-I-P.’
‘Tulip?’ she asks.
‘Yes, that’s an acronym,’ he continues, still reading. ‘T stands for total depravity.’
‘Total depravity?’
‘Yes, all men are totally unable to do any good...’ At this point the flight is announced, Jake puts down his paper, and they head for the door. (1982, 22-23)

The scene is too close for comfort. Those who know the tradition will recognise it. Moreover, it was not orchestrated by an outsider. The film was “written and directed by a young man raised in an evangelical church” (Conn, 1982, 22). The links seem clear enough—the church, the confession, the obscurantism, the coolly detached conversation—but why are they there? Conn notes, “I found myself asking, ‘Is the film-maker trying to tell me why he left the church?’” (23). No matter how ‘correctly’ the gospel is articulated, it never happens in a vacuum, but in a cultural space crammed with a myriad of religious messages each able to make a mockery of grace. These damning messages are not simply the mistaken constructs of ‘Aprils’ and ‘teenage prostitutes’; they are the theology of ‘Jakes’ and preachers. At these times, idealism is the evangelical theology and gospel.
It seems, then, that at least some evangelicals are losing their loyalties towards the paradigms and conventions of evangelicalism. The experiences and questions which drive them away from the fold may begin as simple, transparent questioning. They may end in disbelief and contempt. I conclude with a selection of those I have heard:

- I guess that’s how it has to be
- But why do we have to do this?
- Why do I need your permission?
- How come your way to read the Bible is the only way?
- Why won’t you allow me to question you?
- You’re not hearing me!
- Stop expecting me to live up to your ideals!
- Stop telling me to pray and read and participate more — can’t you see that it doesn’t work?
- Stop telling me to pray and read and participate more — can’t you see that I’m too tired and disillusioned for that?
- Can’t you see why I don’t want to be with Christians?
- Can’t you see why it’s so hard to pray and read the Bible?
- ...happened to me—can’t you see why I can’t cope with the idea of God being sovereign?
- ...happened to me—can’t you see why I hate calling God, ‘Father’?
- Can’t you see that I still love Christ even though I gag to talk about God?
- “I don’t have any problem with God. It’s Jesus I can’t stand!”
- Why won’t you let me be real?
- No, I’m not trying to walk away—I’m trying to stay!
- I’m sick of Christianity!

For some evangelicals, it seems, something endemic to evangelicalism prohibits those questions which push against its culture.

\[\text{42} \text{ The comment of a survivor of child sexual abuse (McClelland, no date, 107).}\]
6.5 EVANGELICALISM AS A CULTURE AND A HUMAN SYSTEM

6.5.1 Idealism and authority

The exchanges we have observed between the academy, the pulpit, and the congregation suggest that the process of interpretation-proclamation-application is neither lineal nor simple. No translation seems uncomplicated: neither from text to timeless principles and ideals; nor from objective, analytic propositions to the rhetoric of the pulpit; nor again from pulpit ideals to changed hearts and minds. Moreover, the most assured evangelical paradigms and conventions may in some sense defeat their own purposes by exacerbating the disaffection of those who can no longer live by them.

None of this necessarily challenges the tenets of evangelicalism. Neither need it question the importance of the Bible to evangelical life and thought, nor its place in the gathering. Nor again does it necessarily argue against the academy or evangelical scholarship. Our conversation has simply yielded an impression of what seems to happen in the worlds in and around an evangelical sermon and service. In this way preaching has appeared as a locus of a far wider set of human interactions. No matter how important are the theological tenets of evangelicalism, and how important it may be to define the movement in that way, our sources suggest that evangelicalism is not simply a set of beliefs, but a complex network of conversations. Our task remains to clarify this impression before we turn to consider how evangelicals converse with Paul.

What we have seen may be expressed in the terms of a culture or a human system. Note, for example, how any tenet of evangelical thought means more than its propositions.44 In other words, the propositions are not spoken into a social vacuum, but into a set of relationships laden with assumptions. The audience 'hears' part or all of these. And while both speaker and audience may have clear ideas of where doctrine finishes and application begins, those boundaries are themselves part of the vagueness and complexity of what the doctrine means in evangelical life.

In this sense, an evangelical doctrine means far more than its formal articulation. It also means the cluster of conventions, ideals, and expectations which surround the private and public utterances of those propositions. The doctrine includes all the 'goes-without-saying' roles, expectations, and experiences of evangelical life. In short, both the propositions of the sermon, and the responses of the hearers, convey far more meaning

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than meets the eyes—of either. We sensed this occasionally in those sources which seemed to convey a broader 'system meaning' at crossed purposes to the explicit message.

The preachers and scholars cited earlier made much of the preacher's call to be an agent of change. It seems incontrovertible that God brings and desires change in a believer's life—that grace transforms the heart and mind. The preacher preaches the Word and the Spirit changes the heart. Yet the preacher cannot simply leave the Word to direct itself. He directs it in a myriad of overt and subtle ways. His study and his ministry convince him that his charges need to face this challenge rather than that. Thus he cannot avoid conveying his expectations. Ideally, these match those of the Word. Consider the first and last sentences of the following quote:

How tempting it is for the minister to take the Word of God and beat his congregation over the head for not attending services, for not giving to the budget, for not reading their Bibles, or for not showing up for the fellowship supper. But what the church really needs is pastors who so love their congregations that they will woo them and urge them by the constraining love of Christ. We need ministers of the Word who go to the heart and seek for total rebirth of the person so that the desire to change behaviour starts from within. (Vosteen, 1986, 414-415, emphases mine)\(^{45}\)

The contrast seems clear enough: a pastor who speaks to the heart versus one who berates his people toward outward acquiescence; matters of the heart versus externals. Yet the preacher does expect to see “change(d) behaviour”. Here is the rub. Most likely, the preachers alluded to by the various disaffected evangelicals cited above believed they had aimed at “the heart” and and sought “for total rebirth”. Indeed, it is hard to imagine any evangelical preacher seriously believing he was or should be “beat(ing) his congregation”.

No preacher thinks he is a legalist or moralist. Yet the sources told a different story. The point is simple. The more overtly legalistic or moralistic preacher is not alone in bringing his ecclesiastical and personal backgrounds and prejudices to the text and the congregation. Likewise, what the preacher of grace understands as preaching grace, and what he expects as true uncoerced responses of the heart to grace, are just as conditioned by his own experiences of the wider conventions and expectations of evangelicalism. The changes he seeks in the heart are those he has already determined. This issue lurks in the

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\(^{45}\) I do not mean to impute any motives to Vosteen, nor to any of the authors cited above or below. I only aim to describe the ways in which messages sent and received may be at crossed purposes because of the wider expectations unavoidably associated with any private and particularly public utterance. Preachers cannot help but represent a system and a culture. Hearers may or may not be aware of that culture or feel free to critique it as they listen. In other words, both are part of a system far bigger than them. I also wish to register my deep appreciation for evangelical life and thought. I do not intend any contempt or sarcasm in any of the observations and constructions of this chapter or the next.
best of preaching. Two recent articles illustrate both the subtlety and the crucial importance of this point.

In a clear rebuttal to moralistic preaching, Thorburn urged his peers to understand that the call to change must never swallow up the message of free justification by God’s grace:

God doesn’t stand over us, threatening to withdraw the carrot and get the whip back out if we don’t quite come up to scratch. If we are justified by grace (and not our efforts) then we can neither earn it or un-earn it. (1994, 2, emphasis his)

Most evangelicals are reasonably clear about Thorburn’s second sentence. They may also recognise the construct of ‘change as a response to grace, not a precondition of it’. One might think this would close the door on unnecessary guilt—what Heuss describes as the ‘performance mentality’ (Miles, 1991b). However, Thorburn seems to sense that his peers may give assent to this grace, yet nonetheless apply ‘the carrot and the whip’. Anecdotal evidence abounds of evangelicals languishing under this kind of tutelage. His message could thus find a ready home among those struggling under the load he describes so clearly.

Yet one further sentence threatens to undermine Thorburn’s intent: “The aim of ministry is to change people’s hearts, not just their behaviour” (1994, 4). In the first place, many evangelicals can testify that ministry does bring change. Indeed, constructive ministry fosters growth and maturity and a deepening of relationship. But is this the aim of ministry? I do not mean to be pedantic. But should the one who ministers set out to change hearts and behaviours, or to convey the knowledge of Christ knowing that change may follow? In other words, should change be the focus of ministry, or its by-product?

Once again, these questions do not exist in a vacuum. What might the words “aim...to change people’s hearts, not just their behaviour” convey to a preacher? They may sanction a world of ideals and standards of performance both for the one ministering and the recipients. In other words, as we have noted repeatedly above, the changes of heart and behaviour towards which the preacher aims may be the same seemingly self-evident paradigms and conventions which alienated those disaffected evangelicals cited above who dared question them in their desire to follow Christ. Where this is the case, the freedom in Thorburn’s message becomes chained in the delivery.

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46 Once again I do not mean to belittle the article over this point. The article is timely and refreshing.
A similar tension may arise over experience. Those who hunger for a greater sense of immediate experience of God may hear this desire being invalidated by those who emphasise the encounter of God in his Word. One evangelical has helpfully sought to open conversation between the two concerns by seeking to dispel false dichotomies:

In the context of all this confusion, there are some of us, I believe, who have reacted by rejecting what we see as spurious claims to Christian experience. In doing so we have, perhaps unintentionally, given the impression that we oppose the very idea of ‘Christian experience’...(but) the correct response is not only to criticise the errors, but to teach and promote and encourage the development of true Christian experience...(after all), authentic Christianity is experiential. (Woodhouse, 1992a, 3)

Of course there is a place for emotions in the Christian life...The New Testament rings with joy. It might be expressed in a number of ways; it might have some sadness attached to it; it might be borne in the crucible of suffering; it might be expressed in the most exuberant or laid back way. In the end, the way we express it does not really matter. (Woodhouse, 1992b, 5-6)

The same problem may lurk in the last sentence: “the way we express it does not really matter”. Other evangelicals might give assent to this as written by one of their own, but nonetheless bring the weight of clerical authority down on those who do not express their faith, hope, love, and joy in the right way.47 In other words, an evangelical might agree wholeheartedly with Woodhouse—that her Christian experience is a response to God as he has spoken to her in his word, the gospel of Jesus Christ—and find her own experiences and responses vilified because the way she expressed herself did really matter. In other words, her experience was not considered a “true Christian experience” (Woodhouse, 1992b, 3, emphasis mine).

Something similar surfaced from our sources in regard to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Nederhood defined the preacher’s call in language which in another context might underline the responsibility of all believer’s to evangelise (1986, 44). Rather than raising questions about the ministry and its call, however, the preacher and the congregation are likely to absorb any dissonance and to accept that while “the preacher is a Christian like every other Christian...he is something more than that” (Lloyd-Jones, 1971, 103). Instinctively, both parties may sense that “the one thing that the pastor can do, and must do because nobody else can do it, is to preach the Word” (Boice, in

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47 I am thinking of such simple expressions as raising hands in corporate singing and prayer, or breaking bread together in a small home group without an elder or cleric present.
Hastie, 1990, 9). They know that "if he doesn't do it, it won't be done... (indeed) if he doesn't preach, the church won't survive" (ibid). The same evangelicals who acknowledge that "the old authoritarian clericalism is thankfully on the way out", may not wince to hear that "lay participation in the Church services needs to be encouraged, after adequate preparation through well-run training classes" (Shilton, 1993, 6, emphasis mine). In such contexts, the priesthood of all believers means that what happens in church is the "job" of "the clergy" (ibid). It may also mean that "when the preaching of the Word fails, there is only one place where blame can be placed—on the condition of the listener's heart" (Hogan, 1994, 9).

These social constructs of preaching and its ideals are the doctrine of the authority of Scripture to many evangelicals. In other words, the paradigms and maxims of the doctrine of Scripture—inerrancy, propositional revelation, authority, absolute truth, objectivity—reach the hearer through their social constructs. Thus, they mean the primacy of preaching, the centrality of the sermon, the necessity of theological training, the requirement of ordination, and the silent reception of the sermon.48

In this sense, the sermon and the service can be seen as the centre of a system—a system which conveys the absolutes and ideals of evangelicalism, and which regulates conformity to them. In this way, each sermon and service proclaims not only the tenets of the evangelical faith, but also the entire system. To accept the sermon is to accept the system, and vice versa. Likewise, to question one is to question the other. In this sense, the system is evangelical reality. Its paradigms and conventions are the models and ideals of evangelical experience. Every sermon conveys paradigms of timelessness, absoluteness, and objectivity. Every service re-establishes the conventions of authority, rectitude, and professionalism. In this way, the evangelical world continually structures and restructures each intellectual and social construct, and the boundaries of meaning and response are reshaped and reinforced.

Evangelical conversations are replete with the vocabulary of certainty. The following adjectives occur commonly in evangelical conversation and form a semantic field conveying a sense of self-evident rectitude: right, correct, evangelical, proper, perfect, full-on, godly, solid, true, absolute, strong, objective, sound, reliable, inerrant, robust, complete, infallible, inspired, assured, biblical, spiritual, Reformed, lawful, powerful, holy, confessional, mature, orthodox, rigorous, exegetical, sure, committed, ordained, licensed,

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48 In this regard, note how the earlier sources cited in support of 'silent interaction' linked this convention to notions of the authority and indispensability of Scripture: in other words, of preaching (cf. Stott, 1982, 61; Runia, 1983, 72; Thomas, 1986, 380).
authoritative, submissive, theological, doctrinal, loyal, called, sanctified, covenantal, authorised, ideal, faithful, pure, and their antonyms.

These terms occur in conversations covering every facet of evangelical life and thought, and underscore the pervasiveness of paradigms of rectitude and certainty. Being right and correct is critical in evangelical consciousness. Implicit in any convention is the presumption that there is a right way to do it: the proper...sermon, service, church, Bible study, theological method, pastor, business meeting, quiet time, evangelistic strategy, etc. Nothing conveys this as succinctly as the cultural force of the adjectives ‘biblical’ and ‘unbiblical’ to determine the social fate of the character and labours of an evangelical.

6.5.2 Professionalism and authority

This preoccupation with absolutes and ideals can too easily lead to elitism and control. Consider the reflections, first of a parishioner, then of a minister:

Our pastor was the most inspirational preacher you’d ever hear. He drew people to him like a magnet. He could motivate people to do things and take responsibility. The catch was that you had to agree with his vision. (Survey respondent, in Kaldor, et al, 1994, 32)

…it is the Presbytery of the visible church that confirms the Lord’s giving a teaching elder (pastor) his credentials or teaching-elder authority. It is the Presbytery that provides for his training, tests him, ordains and inducts him into the pulpit of a local church...The local pastor is a ‘member’ of Presbytery because that is where his peers are...If a pastor desires the status of being a member of a local church, the question must be raised, ‘Why?’...These are valid reasons for members of the local congregation, but not for teaching elders/pastors...All kind of problems come to mind if the pastor is a member of the local congregation. Principally we are talking about lines of authority: from the local church to Presbytery, from Presbytery to General Assembly... (Kroeger, 1992, 20, emphases mine)

Evangelical paradigms and conventions of authority and control presume the professionalism of ministry. This is the norm. Preaching and ministry must be a full-time stipendiary vocation. Indeed, for many the minister is the “indispensable professional”

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49 Macleod’s comment is apposite again here: “First (this) system of truth elucidates each text...Second, the system of doctrine exercises control over the exposition of a particular passage. Precisely because there is a system, and because truth is one, dogmatics lays down parameters that exegesis must never trespass” (1986, 248-249, emphasis his)

50 I will return to this theme in chapter seven.
(Conn, 1979, 330). We have noted already the pivotal role of ordination to ensure conformity to evangelical culture. If the sermon is the bridge between the academy and the congregation, ordination is the equivalent of the engineer’s certificate. Conn senses that paradigms of elitism and control are implicit in this professionalism:

In the church, says Ward, status is earned by knowing; what is required for leadership is the possession of a ‘magic bag of merits’. "These magic bags of merit are systematically dealt out only to a relatively few players in the game. The dealers are the theological seminaries. Once a magic bag of merit is in one’s possession, it can be traded for honor and prestige (plus a salary) at the friendly local church, and thus one maintains oneself, career and salary, more in terms of what one knows than what one is." The language to many of us may sound extreme. But some hard questions may highlight the problem. (Conn, 1982, 93)\(^5\)

Conn goes on to ask those questions about the presence of educational elitism in evangelicalism, and the awkward association of an ostensibly servant leadership with pride, privilege, and manipulative techniques (1982, 93-94). Certainly there appear to be clear cultural mores and conventions of rank and status, each of which passes as ‘biblical’ or ‘practical’ or both. Thus the constructs of calling and service appear simply to overlay the normal conventions of a professional career. It is hard to imagine a cultural shift with more profound implications for evangelicalism than a departure from professionalism. Or from abstraction and idealism in theology.

The categories and definitions of systematic theology simultaneously create the questions which drive the theological enterprise and establish the parameters for legitimate answers. Since these prescriptions are couched in the constructs of absolute and objective truth, they tend to prescribe those enquiries which move beyond conventional parameters. Moreover, the enterprise carries the caution of maintaining doctrinal purity, and the urgency of proclaiming this absolute truth to a relativistic world. It is also structured around the social constructs of ordination and the marks of intellectual attainment. In this way, theological inquiry comes embedded in the social constructs of expertise and authority:

Coordinate with the rise of the schooling, abstractionist model of excellence has grown a concept of theology as the academically disciplined, thematic ordering of biblical data, ‘the scientific presentation of all the facts that are known

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concerning God and his relations'...The legitimate place for a teacher as one in whom those gifts of edification are heightened has been transposed into an acculturated model of the professional. And theology has become his job, not the task of the church...Does (then) the structure of a theological seminary, isolated from community with the body of Christ, and from the world which it observes, not teach more about theology than it intends? (Conn, 1979, 350, 353, 359, emphasis mine)52

Theology can create a web of abstractionism. The doctrine of the church, for example, becomes a question of when is or is not a particular entity a church. The reformers, Berkhofer believed, had established the parameters (1958, 577-578). A properly constituted church preaches the Bible correctly, administers the sacraments correctly, and exercises discipline over the unrepentant. Yet the model only drives further questions: Is an entity still a church if any of the three marks are missing or inadequately or incorrectly observed?

Whatever the merits of this as a method for theology, it does not address the living experience of church. The concern for precision and objectivity renders the actual gathering less determinative than its theological formulations and prescriptions. Similarly, those texts which might address the concern—"As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another" (John 13:34-35)—are overlooked, presumably because they are insufficiently precise. Moreover, if the true church is the definitions of scholars and preachers, then evangelicals may demean those gatherings which occur outside established and acceptable ecclesiastical structures. Thus an evangelical may find her small or home group more edifying and encouraging than the Sunday service, but will not consider it as church.

All of this suggests that a clearly delineated system of professional expertise and authority sustains the validity and viability of the sermon and the service. Preaching is central to evangelical life. A preacher must be ordained (or licensed) to preach. An ordinand must complete an approved academy's prescribed course of theological and ministerial training. The faculty of the academy are likewise ordained. The denomination directs the academy. The denomination oversees the placement and replacement of clergy in congregations. The denomination and the academy offer career prospects (larger churches or managerial or academic posts) to those suitably qualified, experienced, and respected. Thus the academy, the denomination, and the preacher, to all practical extents

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and purposes, form a self-referential loop of influence centred on the processes of ordination and the clerical or scholarly career. All of this renders evangelicalism as self-evidently right. For all the same reasons, however, evangelical life can also seem closed and fearful.

Our ‘disaffected sources’ testified to the breakdown of meaning in the face of this system and culture. Some could not question the paradigms and conventions of evangelicalism and felt condemned by its culture. Others experienced the breakdown of evangelical meanings in the sense that they no longer explained their lives or the world at large. For some, these breakdowns fell within tolerable constraints. For others, the meanings were almost irrecoverable. Yet others spoke of new constructs which held promise of restoring faith, yet which might or might not sit comfortably with the evangelical constructs to which they had been accustomed.

In themselves, breakdowns in meaning are not necessarily destructive. Winograd and Flores argue that “meaning arises in listening to the commitment expressed in speech acts” (1986, 68). Their point is that we engage with others in a community and are able to share meanings with them to the extent that we continue to give and discern commitment to live and converse together with integrity. Yet these shared understandings of the world are never static. Nor do they ever parallel one another exactly. Moreover, for the most part we live without any explicit consciousness of how we understand the world—we simply live. New understandings arise at those moments when ‘what-goes-without-saying’ becomes conscious and problematic. Then we feel drawn to reassess our commitments and the basic presumptions we share. In other words, each ‘breakdown’ opens up new possibilities for commitment and structure—a new design—since the breakdown creates the space and architecture for more conversation.

However, if the community in which a person seeks to live and converse is not open to new meanings, she must try to mesh her new understanding with any salvageable constructs of those meanings which had broken down. Or she may begin to ‘leave’ intellectually, emotionally, and socially. Again, our ‘disaffected sources’ made the point eloquently. In their experiences, other evangelicals too rarely allowed them the freedom to acknowledge that traditional constructs were losing meaning for them. Nor did they allow room for new meanings to emerge from genuine conversation about the social realities of evangelical belief and culture. It appears to have been too threatening.

Like all cultures, then, evangelicalism is experienced as a continual interpretation and reinforcement of itself within a network of conversations. Within evangelicalism these conversations include those around the character and apprehension of truth, the
meaning of texts, authority, theological method, leadership, preaching, change, perfection, and community. Moreover, evangelicalism is committed to its conventions and to those who keep these by providing authorised hermeneutics for experience. These interpretative grids ensure that the Bible endorses evangelical life and thought. They may also restrict the manner and extent to which evangelicals may question their own paradigms and conventions. Yet, as evangelicals have long noted, the fences of tradition are often iminical to conversing with Paul.

6.6 CONCLUSION

Our portrait suggests that any conversation between evangelicals and Paul must be open to looking hard at any blindness endemic to evangelicalism. Yet evangelical scholarship and preaching does not always welcome such cultural introspection. Our conversation here has attempted in some small way to open up this crucial dimension for those who would converse across the ages.

If our impressions of the pervasive influence of evangelical systems and culture hold true, then evangelical readings of Paul will inevitably carry far more meaning than the mere propositions derived from an analysis of his letters. This has been extensively discussed elsewhere from the philosophical side and is not my interest here (cf. Thiselton, 1980, 1992). Whatever the subtleties and complexities of hermeneutical debates about bridging the respective horizons of the text and the reader, our portrait of evangelicalism suggests that weighty social and cultural realities may lie in and around its every reading of Paul.

Evangelicals have long noted that Paul’s letters did not offer detached, abstracted theology, but were genuine letters. Personal. Contextual. Historical. Relational. Passionate. Concerned. Specific. Paul certainly engaged with the text of Scripture. But our earlier study suggests that he did not think of texts as artefacts. Moreover, he offered little if anything by way of the kind of meta-level remarks which characterise modern hermeneutical discussions. Rather, there is a transparent matter-of-factness about both his reading of Scripture and his sense of the intellectual and social revolution implicit in his message of Christ. For Paul, the text formed part of the wider contexts of his engagement with God and his ekklesiē, and of his own wrestling with the dying and rising Christ. It was an aspect of relationship, not an artefact of inquiry.

If Paul raised no meta-level concerns about texts, he was nonetheless highly absorbed with the impact of the intellectual and social paradigms and conventions of his converts’ worlds on their understanding of his gospel and on their relationships with
Christ. Thus he repeatedly provoked them to examine their absorption of the philosophical, theological, religious, and moral perspectives of their day, and he exposed the grip these held over the ekklesiai.

This reading of Paul has shaped and energised my attempts to describe evangelicalism. At the end of the day, the clear-sightedness or blindness of those who would converse with Paul may not depend so much on the rigour and profundity of their hermeneutical procedures, as on their willingness or otherwise to step down in the world as Paul did.

6.7 POSTSCRIPT

I have one deep regret about this chapter—the most relevant and important sources do not appear. The conventions of writing a thesis have excluded many articulate voices. These are the conversations of stalwart and disaffected evangelicals, and of those who find themselves somewhere in between. For nearly thirty years I have tried to listen to the ways evangelicals make sense of their lives. Many of those voices are disaffected by a tradition they appreciate deeply. Some leave; others stay hoping to bring reform. Some stories are thick with self-pity and the smugness of irony and sarcasm. Most cannot be discounted that way.

These are the voices of family, friends, and peers. Of past lecturers, students, and acquaintances. Of business clients who tell stories of an evangelical past. Yet all these rich stories are just that: stories, without date, journal number, publisher, or page reference. I have been tempted to let them speak surreptitiously through my commentary. I have tried to refuse.

Those who do speak, then, are those I could reference. It was easy enough to find those ready to state the ideals and tenets of evangelicalism. The problem there lay with knowing which ones to cull. Telling the ‘other side’ was an altogether different story made difficult by a glaring discrepancy. The paucity of published artefacts of dissent is entirely disproportionate to the prevalence of pain, frustration, and anger in the living conversations which are evangelicalism. I have searched high and low in print to find so little of what otherwise is common discourse. Interestingly, the bulk of dissenting voices in print are of women. Some argue that this paucity, and gender bias, only confirms that such voices belong to a disgruntled, self-interested minority. The 10,000 ex-pastors of Australian churches might demur.

The evangelicals I have heard come from either side of the objectivist-subjectivist divide. Such boundaries make little difference to pride: “I’m in touch with myself (you’re
not)”; “I’m biblical (you’re not)”. Nor can they convey the pain of disillusionment and acquiescence: “I’m just sick of pretending I can accept all this”; “I’m just sick of pretending that I’m OK”. The terms are cruel and false. There are no objectivists or subjectivists as such. No labels, only people.

None of this is balanced: neither the sources, nor my glosses. It cannot be. Smooth edges would belie the jaggedness of these realities. The experiences are uneven. No formulas explain how evangelical ideals arise, nor how they are sanctioned and promulgated, nor how they disenfranchise and aggrieve. I encounter many who want to converse—to praise, to argue, to cry, to laugh, to rage, and to appreciate. None want the conversation to sidestep the Scriptures. Indeed, much of the frustration rests there. The Word is life to them—yet it seems encrusted with the abstractions, idealism, and rectitude of men. They wonder why evangelicalism makes so much of the Word, yet will not allow that Word to question the traditions. Or why scholars raise the questions, but do nothing with them.

What these voices ask for more than anything else is conversation about the present, undiluted, unsanitised realities of evangelical life and thought. Such a conversation cannot be smooth. If, after too many edits, this chapter is still too jagged, it may be that I simply cannot do justice to these voices. It may also convey the kind of unevenness that jars a conversation to life. These voices may have no place in a thesis (I wish it were otherwise), but they must somehow be heard by those who would converse with Paul on his terms.
Conversing Across the Ages: Paul and Evangelicalism

7.1 A MODEL OF CONVERSING WITH PAUL

Our portrait of the worlds in and around the sermon and the service suggested that while scholars, preachers, and their audiences may think of evangelicalism as exclusively a set of theological propositions, they nonetheless experience it as a complex network of cultural events and involvements. In other words, evangelicals converse with one another within the patterns of human systems and cultures. Moreover, these conversations include Paul. It seems reasonable to infer, then, that reading Paul's letters not only shapes evangelical culture, but is shaped by it. We need to clarify what this may suggest regarding the ways evangelicals converse with Paul.

A clear sense of dissonance has emerged between the ideals and experience of evangelicalism. We have noted this across the board in relation to the academy, the pulpit, and the congregation: from the character and aims of exegesis and theology, to the preparation, delivery, and reception of the sermon. Moreover, this dissonance does not necessarily arise because of imprecise exegesis, poor theology, or lackluster preaching. It can emerge in the most rigorous and robust expression of each discipline and task. Indeed, the drive for absolute precision and objectivity has itself appeared as a key contributor to this dissonance of ideals and experience. The more scholars and preachers collaborate to render Paul's letters as timeless principles and ideals, the more they may inadvertently distance the congregation from the vitality and pertinence of Paul's life and thought. They may also read the tenets and conventions of evangelicalism into Paul's letters.

The student of evangelical exegesis and doctrine acquires far more than theological propositions from his textbooks and lectures. The student 'knows' an evangelical doctrine only as it is embedded in his living experience of being an evangelical. He does not learn the doctrine of the authority of Scripture independently of his experience of hearing ministers preaching those Scriptures with what they regard as appropriate expressions of
its authority. Likewise, he does not know the doctrine of church independently of his experience of church structures and meetings. In this sense, he knows that the doctrine means a church service designed and led by a minister; it means the particular components and order of that service; it means an ordained ministry; it means his need to secure permission from church leadership in order to initiate a ministry; it means the structures and programmes of the churches he respects; and it means the way his denomination conducts its affairs. At the same time, the student also knows that the tasks, responsibilities, and privileges which he anticipates with his entry into the professional, ordained ministry are the meaning of Paul’s portraits of his life and thought and of those of his ekklēsiai.

In this sense, the exegetical and theological precision of the academy, and the rhetorical authority and power of the pulpit, not only help to preserve evangelical life—they also shape and distort that life to the degree that they consolidate the ideals of an objectivity which has been abstracted from personal and social realities. Likewise, the experientialism of those who emphasise pietistic and revivalist themes not only helps to preserve evangelical life—but also distorts that life to the degree that it urges the ideals of an inner experience or cultural ethos abstracted from other historical, personal, and social realities. Ironically, then, the ideals and labours of both objectivists and subjectivists may equally obscure the meaning of a text and dilute its power to challenge both the rectitude of traditional paradigms and conventions, and the hold of pride and fear. Abstraction and idealism, then, of whatever ilk, blind and bind the academy, the pulpit, and the congregation.

Thus we come full circle to Paul: to the relevance of seeing him in juxtaposition to his milieu; and, to the contours of his own engagement and conversation. Not only did his life and thought eschew the abstraction, idealism, and elitism of his Graeco-Roman contemporaries, but he faced their impact on his ekklēsiai. We have noted how his life and thought oscillated between a profound grasp of the historical significance of the dying and rising of Christ, and his own experiences of personal and social humiliation. These experiences brought new meaning to his gospel. Yet it remained anchored in Christ, not in the apostle.

The categories and canons of objectivity and subjectivity thus are unfit as criteria for Paul’s conversations. His letters do not evidence the ideals of exegetical precision and theological objectivity. Nor the ideals of piety and revival. On the contrary, we could equate each of these at some point with one or other of the distortions of life and thought which Paul repudiated. The ‘patterns of this world’ which he opposed were not ‘out there’, but within each ekklēsia. Paul found members within each ekklēsia who had
conformed his gospel to the paradigms and conventions of philosophy, theology, religion, and morality in the interests of their own pride and fear. Yet these paradigms and conventions did not appear as 'worldly' to those who promoted them: these patterns did not appear to come from 'out there', but seemed intrinsic to the new message of Christ. Thus the intellectual and social elitism of the Corinthian 'strong' did not seem out of place to them or to their peers. On the contrary, it was a mark of the Spirit. It was Paul who appeared unintelligent, ungodly, and unseemly by his refusal of rhetoric and status. Likewise with the Galatians' attachment to Jerusalem and the law.

Paul did not counter with abstractions and ideals. Nor did he draw ever tighter legal and moral boundaries around each ekklesia. Rather he urged an ongoing encounter with the Christ who had died and risen. The believers must choose for themselves to die with Christ: his humiliation, or their pride; his freedom, or their fear. Thus Paul's conversations candidly laid bare the systems and cultures of his ekklesiast as he refused to allow them to wall themselves with rectitude.

This juxtaposition of Paul, his Graeco-Roman milieu, and modern evangelicalism suggests numerous lines for further conversation both in the present work and more generally. The contours of those conversations are implicit in the juxtapositions: the abstraction, idealism, and elitism of Graeco-Roman popular intellectualism; Paul's struggles with these as he lived, thought, and spoke his gospel in historical, social, and personal terms; and the seeming affinities of evangelicalism to both ways of being in the world. Our own efforts thus far suggest a simple model for these conversations:

Paul's conversations in historical, social, and personal context (chaps 1-5)

Paul's letters as the focus of dialogue (chaps 2-5, 7)

candid conversation over the agendas, systems, and cultural patterns of evangelical life (chaps 6-7)

Figure 13: Conversing with Paul over the social and personal realities of identifying with Christ

The model is a heuristic, not a definition or methodology. Like earlier models, it is open to the charge of being simplistic. The hermeneutical issues are clearly more complex
that the model might suggest. Yet it conveys a crucial point. The conversation is more about analogies of experience than about abstracted precision. It focuses on the common intent to identify with Christ in the ekklesia and the world. It is anchored in the histories of Israel, Christ, Paul, his peers, and evangelicals. It serves relationships with God, Christ, the Spirit, the ekklesia, and the world. It is personal; it provokes decision, not simply reflection. Finally, genuine conversation with Paul is confrontational: evangelicals must candidly expose their own systems and cultures and refuse to wall themselves with rectitude.

This last point—the propensity to hide in rectitude—beckons our conversation towards one last exchange. So far, Paul and our evangelicals have spoken alongside each other, but not with each other. We have made only passing reference to how evangelicals hear Paul. And we have not asked what it might mean for Paul to say again, “I hear that when you come together...” (1 Cor 11:18). These are our final tasks.

7.2 EVANGELICAL RECTITUDE AND THE EPITHETS ‘BIBLICAL’ AND ‘UNBIBLICAL’

7.2.1 Scripture, authority, and group boundaries

Evangelicalism is not immune from contemporary world views. Hunter argues that modern and postmodern emphases have undermined some aspects of evangelical commitment and confidence (1987, 157-241). Yet this openness to the worlds it inhabits has also been an asset. Bebbington (1989) argues that the ability to absorb contemporary intellectual and social emphases without losing its own distinctives has historically been a strength of evangelicalism. Evangelical exegesis, theology, and leadership has repeatedly found constructive and faithful new directions amidst the storms of modernism and alternative theologies (Conn, 1988; Silva 1988).

Our portrait does not challenge this assessment of evangelicalism. But it does suggest another perspective. Alongside and within the formidable strengths of

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1 As I mentioned in the Introduction, scholarly debate on hermeneutics focuses on those epistemological, sociological, and psychological complexities which enlarge the impression of distance between the text and the reader. For a comprehensive survey of modern approaches to these issues, see Thistleton (1980, 1992). On conversation as an apt metaphor for the exchanges between a ‘classic’ text and a modern reader, see Tracy (1987). My description of the interpretative process as a conversation or dialogue does not imply my acceptance of the approach(es) of any particular hermeneutical school(s). Nor do I wish to minimise the normative character of Paul’s writings for evangelicals. I use these metaphors for the tone they convey of an open reading in which (1) the readers are candid about their own contexts, as (2) they seek to handle the texts with respect and integrity. That is the primary point of the model.

2 See also the articles on modernity and evangelicalism by Guinness, Storkey, Wells, and See in World Evangelization (vol. 18, no. 65, December 1993), the magazine of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization.
evangelical academies, pulpits, and congregations, we have observed the pervasive influence of abstractionism, idealism, and professionalism. Clearly, this should temper the oft-made claims that evangelicals simply believe the Bible with open-faced objectivity. Thus I argued that a student deepens his commitment to evangelical systems at the same time as he learns new theological propositions and frameworks which might seem to undermine those very same traditions. In this sense, evangelical theology and culture can blind the student as he reads the letters of Paul. This palpable experience should perhaps temper the zeal of those concerned to draw ever more precise boundaries between those who are truly evangelical and those who are not. However, this does not always seem to be the case.

Groups expend considerable energy establishing boundaries for behaviour and identity. This is no less the case for evangelicals. Moreover, the high regard in which evangelicals hold the Bible forms a watershed for conformity. Evangelicals sense a deep inter-connectedness between word, authority, truth, and faithfulness. Indeed, it is axiomatic among evangelicals to assert that ‘the Bible is the final rule of faith and practice’. Thus evangelicals routinely scrutinise each others’ exegesis, theology, church practice, and experience by a single question: ‘Is this biblical or unbiblical?’

This question plays a frequent and critical role in evangelicalism. Indeed, we might think of it as a key driver of evangelical systems. This is a critical point to grasp. The question no doubt encapsulates a sincere desire for the Bible to bring to bear its truth on the issue at hand. The enquirer seeks an objective, unbiased truth to escape being bound merely to a fad or to opinion. Yet our earlier comments about the embeddedness of exegesis and theology within social and personal experience also hold true of this inquiry. This is not to say that evangelicals are locked into a hopelessly circular subjectivism. However, it is to say that the epithets ‘biblical’ and ‘unbiblical’ guide more than the quest for integrity. They also delimit a believer’s acceptability. Moreover, if these epithets reinforce the rectitude of evangelical culture and systems, then inevitably they also lead

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4 For summary discussions of these issues, see the collected essays edited by Carson and Woodbridge (1988, 1986), and Conn (1988c).

5 Several scholars have challenged the traditional understandings and value judgements about what is objective or subjective. For a general discussion, see Bernstein (1983). Guenler (1991) provides an evangelical perspective on the broader epistemological issues. Poythress (1992) is particularly original and helpful. He argues that the character of God as revealed in the gospel provides a vantage point at one and the same time in touch with, and distinct from, the broader theological and philosophical debates. In Poythress’ schema, both objectivism and subjectivism emerge as both helpful and idolatrous. Though relatively helpful, Poythress argues, both positions implode on their common presupposition of the autonomy of the individual.
the reader to distort Paul’s texts and to lose touch with the rhythm of his conversation. Such is my assertion.

Two recent, somewhat inter-related debates seem to illustrate the point: first, calls for reform in the observance of the Lord’s Supper; and, second, calls to exclude women not only from ordination, but also from teaching men. In both cases, the sources display high confidence of being in step with both the texts and the spirit of Paul. 6

7.2.2 The sacrament, the service, and the priesthood of all believers

Generally speaking, evangelicals have been quick to criticise and slow to defend sacramentalism. Yet sacramental language and conventions arguably still pervade evangelical literature and church life. This tension focuses not so much on the existence of sacraments as such, but on the aptitude and systems which turn an event into a sacramental act and culture:

The trouble is that whilst claiming to be evangelical in theory, our denomination is still sacramental in its practice. Under the current rules, priests are the only people in our church who can preside at Communion. On the other hand, the same rules allow laymen into our pulpits to preach the Word of God (and many of them do a fine job), whilst barring them from presiding at communion. Similarly with assistants for Communion: we must submit to the Archbishop the names of the lay people we wish to use for this ministry and receive formal approval to employ them. However, the same administration requires no formal checks whatsoever for those whom we invite to lead our Bible Study groups!

The impression this creates is that only priests and specially approved people can get anywhere near the bread and wine, whilst almost anybody can teach the Word of God. Whilst claiming to be evangelicals and putting the Word first, we give greater status to the bread and wine and so are, in practice,

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6 Both case studies centre on evangelical Anglicans in Sydney largely as seen through articles and reviews of Synod decisions in The Briefing. Once again, it is important to note the congruency of my intent and approach. While this thesis has interacted extensively with the disciplines of history and theology, its approach is characterised by the broader interdisciplinary interests of a faculty of humanities, and particularly of a school of social ecology. My intent is to understand and to create real conversation. This requires me to choose sources which indicate something of the tensions and emergent meanings of an actual community. I chose the community of interest which The Briefing represents not so much because of the extent of its influence—though it is gaining influence not only in Sydney, but across Australia, and more recently in the UK and USA—but because it forms a clear archetype of the systemic and cultural issues with which I am concerned. My intention is not thereby to either endorse or lampoon this community, nor any individual within it. Readers from further afield in Australia and internationally should see numerous analogies to evangelical communities and systems with which they are familiar. Back copies of The Briefing are available from the Editor, PO Box 225, Kingsford NSW 2032 Australia.
sacramentarians. What we say about ourselves is not actually supported by what we do in church. We have inverted the order of importance of Word and sacrament. (Kelly, 1993, 7)

In the same edition of the magazine in which Kelly’s article appeared, Woodhouse began a two part article challenging common evangelical assumptions of the Lord’s Supper as a sacramental meal. His first instalment argued against the understanding that Jesus had instituted a sacramental meal at the occasion of his final Passover and supper:

We want to bring our thinking and our practice to the bar of Scripture, and ultimately of Scripture alone...Our first surprise when we attempt to do so is that nowhere at all in the New Testament do we find the word ‘sacrament’. This obvious point is often overlooked...Our second surprise is to find that not only is the word ‘sacrament’ absent from the New Testament, but the idea of a ‘sacrament’ of the Lord’s Supper is not easy to find...it seems unlikely that ‘Do this in remembrance of me’ was intended by Jesus (or by Luke) to be understood as the ‘institution’ of an on-going practice...The tendency to read the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper as ‘the institution of the Lord’s Supper’ does not arise out of the texts themselves, but is read back into them on the assumption that the early Christians practised the ‘Lord’s Supper’. So far we have found no evidence for this assumption within the New Testament. (1993a, 2, 5, emphases his)

Woodhouse then argued similarly that Paul had not taken Jesus’ words as instituting a sacramental meal, but had used the traditions of Israel’s Passover and Jesus’ last supper with his disciples to confront self-interested behaviours manifest at the meals of the Corinthian ekklésiai:

A feature of the Corinthian letters is that Paul is responding to errors in Corinth which were better understood by him and by his first readers than by us...(quoting 1 Cor 10-14-17) The question is whether Paul is now referring to a Christian sacramental meal...We cannot deduce from this passage that the Corinthians thought of their meals as re-enactments of the Last Supper, nor that they necessarily gave symbolic significance to the physical bread and cup... (quoting 1 Cor 11:17-22) Now Paul corrects this (selfish) behaviour by reminding them of the most memorable of all the meals that the Lord Jesus shared with his disciples...(quoting 1 Cor 11:23-26) Here is the one account of the Last Supper in the New Testament that does look like the institution of a practice that is to be ongoing. However...we should notice the following points. Firstly...Paul quotes this tradition in order to teach the Corinthians not to be
selfish and greedy at their meals...Secondly...(there) are good reasons not to jump to the conclusion that Jesus was here instituting a sacramental meal...(Rather, Paul meant that) 'whenever you eat bread and drink from the cup together (i.e. as often as Christians share a meal together) you are to remember the basis of your fellowship, Jesus death, and act accordingly, and thus demonstrate the power of his death until he comes again'. It seems reasonable to conclude that, in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul is not referring to a special meal to be distinguished from other Christian meals and to be regarded as something instituted by Jesus at the Last Supper. (1993b, 2-4)

In the words of the editor, Woodhouse's studies were "by far the most mail-provoking articles of '93". Some of these letters appreciated that Woodhouse had challenged a too easy assumption of later church traditions, and that he had urged a recovery of meals as a focus of fellowship. Yet most remained convinced that either Jesus or Paul had instituted a sacramental meal. In response, Woodhouse repeated the assurances of his articles that he did not intend to challenge the understanding or practice of the Anglican Communion service, only to address some imbalances he perceived in common attitudes to this service. Thus Woodhouse concluded his article with the following applications:

The pressing question for today's Christians is, if it is not certain that Jesus instituted a sacramental meal, what attitude should modern Christians adopt to the well established church practice?...1. It would be wrong to make the sacrament the centre of church life, or to elevate it above other gatherings of God's household...2. However, an over-reaction would also be wrong...3. We must beware of ritualism...(and) 4. It would be an imbalance to devote ourselves to the sacramental meal but neglect real meals together. (1993b, 5)

In reply to his respondents, Woodhouse again affirmed that:

I am not suggesting that Christians should stop having the sacrament of the Lord's Supper...The Last Supper (like the Passover) was a sacramental meal...The practice is so ancient and so widespread among Christian people that I can see little point in opposing something that can and does bring the blessing of the gospel to so many. But do we have to say that all Christians must share in this sacrament? If it is a command of Jesus, of course we must—

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7 This comment and the extracts of letters quoted below come from an extended letters to the editor section ("About that meal", The Briefing 128, February 7, 1994, pages 5-9). One letter also strongly criticised Kelly's article (see above).
and it will be for our good. If it is not a clear command of Jesus, however, we must be careful that we do not impose the traditions of men on the consciences of anyone. (emphasis his)

These final remarks raise significant questions about the intent of the whole debate. First, Woodhouse’s question (“But do we have to say that all Christians must share in this sacrament?”) is almost entirely rhetorical and hypothetical. Few evangelicals of Anglican persuasion or otherwise seriously argue for such a requirement. Moreover, no lay Anglican is ever actually required to take communion. Second, then, the claim that “a fundamental principle of evangelical Christianity is a willingness to bring all of our beliefs about Christian faith and conduct to the bar of Scripture” appears to apply only to reappraisals of evangelical thought, not to its practice (Woodhouse, 1993a, 1). While Kelly might be read as implying a need for a reform of canon law, neither Woodhouse nor the respondents urged any change to the current practice of the Communion service. Indeed, they assiduously avoided any such conclusion. The point was not lost on one couple who had responded to Woodhouse’s articles:

We have always had a problem with the overt solemnity and ritual of even ‘evangelical’ communion services: John’s articles helped us see why. However, we still want to ask—why did you wimp out on the implications for church practice? If, as you state, we should bring all aspects of our Christian life under the scrutiny of the Scripture, why are you letting the ‘normal evangelical’ practice of Holy Communion off the hook? As we read it, the implications for such a reading of the NT for church practice are enormous...As for remembering Jesus death, maybe we should remember it in all the different Christian ‘congregations’ we belong to: family, home, Bible study/fellowship group and church. Or are we afraid as Bible-believing evangelicals to divide from mainstream Protestantism on another issue that is so widely accepted as ‘Christian’?

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8 The only exception to this might be a candidate for ordination who must satisfy the denomination that he has received each mark of the church; namely, baptism, confirmation, and communion. Interestingly, a candidate who acknowledges that he received these marks while an unbeliever and/or a non-evangelical is in no way disadvantaged, whereas an unbaptised or unconfirmed candidate usually cannot proceed further toward ordination.

9 Woodhouse continues, “The test of that willingness comes not when the Scriptures endorse our cherished ideas, but when one of those cherished ideas is called into question by the study of the Bible” (1993a, 1). The call to rise to this test is echoed throughout most of these articles and letters. Likewise, it appears in those pertaining to the Synod decision discussed below.

10 “Under the current rules, priests are the only people in our church who can preside at Communion” (Kelly, 1993, 7, emphasis mine).
However, moves for change were afoot. Indeed, the articles fitted within a longer history of arguments by evangelical Anglicans in Sydney against the exclusive prerogative of ordained priests to preside at the Holy Communion and to say the words of institution over the bread and wine. Those arguments culminated in an historic decision by the Synod of the Anglican diocese of Sydney to allow lay-readers to also preside at Holy Communion.\(^\text{11}\) Seventeen years in the making, the change was heralded as the harbinger of a new Reformation:

People are getting excited over the concept of lay administration of the Lord’s Supper because it takes us back to the cut-and-thrust of the Reformation. It takes us back to the issues of Calvin’s Geneva and Luther’s Germany and Cranmer’s England; issues which defined the Protestant faith. Indeed the English Reformers—Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer and others—were martyred not for their views on justification by faith, or the authority of Scripture, but for their understanding of the Lord’s Supper...The ‘yes’ vote represents a momentous and world-first decision for Anglicans, one which has the potential, in the long term, to further reform church life...Robert Doyle, lecturer in Church History and Theology at Moore Theological College, called the decision ‘the most significant thing the official Church has done since the Reformation in defining the nature of evangelical ministry’. (Clarke, 1994, 2)

Like Kelly, Clarke points out the inconsistencies of ecclesiastical law and practice which had allowed an authorised layman to preach but not to preside at the Holy Communion. Moreover, he argues that the change clears up three nagging issues for evangelical Anglicans: the priesthood of all believers; the priority of word over sacrament; and the impression of sacramental superstition created in the minds of unbelievers by the rule of ‘priests only’ (1994, 2-4). The decision thus appears to stamp the practice of evangelical Anglicans as unquestionably gospel and Word centred:

The decision...makes it much clearer that there is no difference in spiritual status between those administering the sacrament and those receiving it...the activity of celebrating the Lord’s Supper (has been made) more meaningful and less superstitious...While it is “a responsible, cautious, conservative, non-confrontational and thoroughly orderly step forward”...(it is) nonetheless...a radical decision...the Sydney Synod has broken the superstition that the Lord’s Supper is only celebrated properly if a priest says the words of institution over

\(^{11}\) This ‘decision’ relates only to the second reading of the bill. The third reading has been delayed until 1996.
the bread and wine. It has also corrected the false notion that ordination to the priesthood has more to do with administering the sacrament than preaching the Word..."we hope this step will embolden others to be brave in making changes to enable gospel ministry and to remove obstacles to people understanding the gospel"...We can be seen not to believe in levels of spiritual status, which this prohibition has come, albeit largely unintentionally, to suggest. (Clarke, 1994, 2-4, emphases his)\textsuperscript{12}

Once again, however, the suspicion may linger of a change more rhetorical than substantial. Whatever ecclesiastical merits and consequences the decision may hold, it may not represent quite the reform it is touted to be.

First, the sacramentalism of the prayers of institution and absolution in the Holy Communion service have long embarrassed many evangelical Anglicans who have declared these as ‘unbiblical’ practices. Yet the Lord’s Supper remains tied to these forms.

Second, the decision does not challenge the practice of having an authorised person preside at the table. It simply widens the group to include lay-readers. Only those within this wider group may claim the special prerogative to officiate. In other words, if the current practice places a fence between priest and congregation, then the change simply allows a few more individuals to cross to the side of those authorised to officiate. This is a critical point. The decision does not change the paradigm of priestly presidency; it merely extends its terms of reference.

Third, those who laud the decision as breaking the impression of superstition may have missed a significant aspect of the personal and social experience of Holy Communion. They presume the impression of superstition arises from having the priest perform the ceremony, rather than from the ceremony itself. But if parishioners do regard the rite superstitiously, what creates that impression: is it the phenomena which demarcate the event from the rest of church life (prayers of institution and absolution, railing, consecrated vessels, kneeling, officiant’s words of grace); is it the palpable separation of the officiants (both ordained and lay) from the congregation; or is it that the rite has been performed by a rector?

Given these caveats, one might wonder why evangelical Anglicans have not expressed dismay rather than hope at what the decision still implies. Yet apparently none of those who are otherwise quick to expose and condemn ‘unbiblical’ practices have seen

\textsuperscript{12} Clarke’s first quote is from a Synod speech by Woodhouse; the second is from P. D. Jensen (I presume this quote is either a personal communication or a statement made in Synod).
this preservation of the status quo as itself a further entrenchment of *unbiblical* paradigms and conventions. On their own principles, however, it is hard to see this decision as a move towards Paul or the rest of Scripture. Rather, it appears that the excitement remains more about “the concept of lay administration”, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, and the idea of further reforms, rather than about any actual devolution of status or control (Clarke, 1994, 2, emphasis mine). Indeed, the oft-stated concern over the discrepancy between lay preaching and lay presidency may turn out to be directed more towards balancing the *propositions* of doctrine and canon law, rather than to any change of paradigm or convention. The impression looms that being ‘biblical’ is a state of mind and social propriety.

7.2.3 Ordination, women, and calls for ecclesiastical reform

A tone similar to that of the articles, correspondence, and synodical decision about the Lord’s Supper, seems also to characterise the debates over the ordination of women among the same evangelical fraternity. A few evangelicals have noted how ordination itself is the unspoken presupposition of the debate. Indeed, some recognise that the whole debate could be radically repositioned by a fresh examination of the biblical and ecclesiastical merits or otherwise of ordination:

> Perhaps there is a more deep-seated reason for our division. *Perhaps we need to question the whole nature of ordination*, rather than the gender of the ordinand.

> Many people have made this point, but it has not greatly affected the debate. Evangelicals have not sorted out what they mean by ‘ordination’ and have not questioned our existing structures from a Biblical perspective. We find ourselves arguing bitterly about a power structure that has little or no New Testament warrant. Our failure may not lie in our attitude to the Bible, so much as in our compromise and double-mindedness over the whole subject of ordination. Before we engage in the next round of synodical argument, counter-argument, lobbying, voting and legal challenge, are we ready to face this issue? (Payne, 1988a, 2, emphasis his)

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13 In his 1988 editorial article on the ordination of women, Payne challenged the easy assumption of the paradigms and conventions of ordination. Charging that ordination was part of an “ungodly authoritarianism”, he finished his challenge by linking the issues of ordination, women’s ministries, and lay presidency: “The real challenge for Evangelicals is to break away from ministerial power. We should not be fighting each other over whether women can celebrate the Lord’s Supper, but fighting in unity that godly laymen (whether male or female) should be encouraged to celebrate the Lord’s Supper” (1988a, 4).

14 Numerous articles in the early years of *The Briefing* were drafted by the editor, Tony Payne, from talks given by the publisher, Phillip Jensen. Wherever authorship is unstated, I have attributed the article to the incumbent editor. That is the case with the article cited above.
In a 1992 editorial, Payne extended this agenda to encompass broader questions of authority: "We need to focus our attention on two key areas: the nature and extent of biblical authority (and) the way we organize and run our churches" (1992a, 2). Twice in the next four issues, the journal majored on the debate. In these articles, the emphasis on authority shifted from the nature of leadership to the nature of the Bible. The articles seemed to imply that any move in favour of the ordination of women was a move towards liberal theology (cf. Payne, 1992b,c; Jensen, 1992a; Payne and Jensen, 1992). A few issues later, the question of ministerial practice returned to the agenda:

This is an uncomfortable thought, but could it be that God is not terribly impressed by such ‘capital intensive’ forms of religion?...We’re very good at making exactly the same mistakes as those made by the teachers of the law, right down to the ‘flowing robes’ that some ministers like to wear on a Sunday. ‘It marks us out as teachers,’ they say. But it goes much further. We’ve painted ourselves into a corner...Maybe it’s time to think a bit more creatively about church and ministry...we might loosen up our legislation.

We’re tied down by all sorts of regulations—clergy, for example, can’t engage in other employment. If the church can’t afford to pay you, leave. There would have been no place for the apostle Paul in the modern day Presbyterian church...Paul worked for a living, making tents. A waste of a minister’s time? Unprofessional? Undignified? It didn’t seem to worry Paul. In fact, he insisted on it, because it gave him the freedom to preach the gospel freely, to give without taking. And the church met in local houses—no property assets required. Sure he asked people to give—but it was always to help others who were in need. (Campbell, 1992, 8)\(^\text{15}\)

In the same issue, several letters to the editor responding to the earlier articles on the ordination of women echoed Campbell’s points: “I would appreciate it if you would publish an article explaining to a non-Anglican like myself the biblical basis for ‘ordaining’ anyone, male or female”.\(^\text{16}\) Likewise, “my problem is that I don’t find too much evidence for ‘ordaining’ men either...(yet) we ‘ordain’ men, give them an exalted title, dress them up in funny clothes and they think they have authority”.

\(^\text{15}\) Campbell is a Presbyterian, not an Anglican. However, the two groups are strongly linked in the conservative evangelical community in Sydney. Both parties use the Anglican theological college, and the speakers at Bible conferences for tertiary students and the wider evangelical public usually come from this fraternity. Moreover, both groups have been embroiled in similar theological and ecclesiastical disputes over the ordination of women.

\(^\text{16}\) This quote and those which follow are from the letters to the editor, The Briefing, November 17, 1992, pages 9-10.
Other responses, however, sought clarification of another kind. Some readers had sensed that the previous articles had implied that to be in favour of ordaining women was to be liberal in theology: “I am somewhat saddened, even angered, to be told that to support the ordination of women to the ministry of the word is to deny the authority of God and Scripture, and that I have another gospel”. Another respondent strongly affirmed his evangelical convictions before expressing his dismay: “Although it hasn’t been stated explicitly, it seems that The Briefing is making the equation that ‘if you believe in women’s ordination, you must be a liberal’!”. The editor responded that this was not his intention. Rather, he merely wished to assert “that the exegetical twists and turns required to hold this middle position (i.e. an evangelical in favour of ordaining women) make it ultimately untenable...(since) the biblical texts do teach some form of subordination within...church relationships”. Once again, he outlined the need to question the ecclesiastical structures which support ordination:

What is the biblical basis for the Anglican structure? Could we devise a better structure? (Yes.) Is that unthinkable? (Only for some.) Would many of the problems be solved if we did not have such a hierarchical model of ministry? (Yes.) Do we need to do a great deal more to reform our structures and work out how men and women can minister together in harmony? (Yes!).

A short time later, the issues of ecclesiastical authority and structures again rose to the surface in an article on the trinity and the nature of ‘the true being of the church’:

If we ask for a justification from the New Testament for the hierarchical structure of sub-deacons, deacons, priests, bishops, cardinals and the like, where is it? None can be found, of course...

It is to the credit of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney that, against contemporary pressure, its doctrine commission rejected the idea that the threefold order of bishops-priests-deacons is of the true being of the Church. Instead, the doctrine commission re-affirmed the position of the 16th century Reformers and their leading theologians that such a hierarchy is merely pragmatic.

However, it is a matter of great sadness that in the same period the Synod...under the direction of its president, legislated that the usual congregational practice in matters of dress be set aside when a bishop is present (that is, that full robes be worn, even if that is not the normal practice).

This, and the manner in which the wearing of collars and robes in the presence of senior ecclesiastics has sometimes been enforced, is another reversion to the
pre-Reformation doctrine of the Church as essentially constituted by its hierarchy. (Doyle, 1993a, 3, 5)

These issues, and the issue of the ordination of women, subsequently went onto the backburner for the next two and a half years. Then in mid-1995, a double issue was devoted entirely to the question of whether or not women should hold the ‘office’ or role of teacher. However, none of the commissioned articles or editorial glosses recalled the editor’s pleas for “a commission that will honestly examine from a Biblical perspective the whole subject of ordination” (Payne, 1988a, 4). Instead, the agenda was now to take “a serious look at the Bible and (do) some exegesis...and foster women’s ministry” (1995c, 2-3). To be fair, the aim of the issue was clearly not to address the issues of ordination and ecclesiastical structures (ibid).

Yet it can be argued that the articles fulfilled that aim only by alternatively presupposing, ignoring, or making a caricature of the traditional clerical role as it suited the argument at hand. In particular, several authors made much of the assertion that ministry “(is) too often...limited to what occurs out front in ‘church’”, or to what is done by those ordained, all the while presuming that the context of 1 Tim 2:11-12 corresponds to the current models of the “out front” teaching and authority of an ordained pastor (Nelson, 1995, 7; Thompson, 1995c, 9). Likewise, Nelson seems to presume that the Sunday service is more truly “‘church’”—and thus that the sermon given on that occasion carries more authority than any other exposition of Scripture—so that he might reject the position of women being appointed to an assistant pastoral role under the authority of an ordained man (contra Barnett, 1989, 1995a; Packer, 1991, 7):

(Women) are not to take on the role of authoritative teaching in mixed congregations. This role is for men. When we gather for ‘church’, it is to be men that teach the congregation, not women. Some people, while agreeing in broad terms about what the passage is saying, then suggest that Paul is dealing with the role of the ‘head teacher’. This could then allow women to preach (occasionally or regularly) under the headship of a male leader...Suffice to say, the category of ‘head teacher’ doesn’t arise naturally out of the passage. Further, given that the notion of teaching has authority attached to it (v.12), it

17 The Briefing 159/60, June 20, 1995.
18 For example, certain terms, phrases, and propositions are stated as though modern practices are transparently synonymous with the language and conventions of Paul and his ekklēsiai: "the authoritative teachers in the congregation"; "a God-given principle of headship that applies in the family and in the church"; "church" (Nelson, 1995, 7); a "congregational setting" (Thompson, 1995c, 13); "male headship in the Christian gathering", "binding doctrinal instruction, governance and discipline of the assembly" (Smith, 1995, 16); and, the "authorized teacher" (Boit, 1995, 25).
doesn’t seem to be a valid conclusion... (Yet) I suggest that when Bible study
groups have a joint membership of men and women, the principle ought to be
to have a man as the leader (though that doesn’t exclude a husband and wife
team leading the group, or a man as leader with a woman as an assistant
leader). (Nelson, 1995, 7)\textsuperscript{19}

At times these discussions beg exegetical issues and give a misleading impression of
methodological precision.\textsuperscript{20} More disturbingly, a patent double-standard runs throughout
the discussions. Ironically, Payne had made the same point in his original editorial article
(1988a). Yet the articles which followed seem inadvertently to have accepted this duplicity
and thus to have vacillated between challenging the status quo or acquiescing in it.

Payne acknowledges the tension once more in his reply to one of several
respondents to the double issue. Dismissing another variation of the “‘occasional
preaching’ position”, he does so not on the grounds that it takes too little account of the
Pauline texts, but that the character of the modern sermon will not allow for it. In other
words, the modern convention of the sermon becomes the bar at which the new
suggestion must plead its case:

The only problem with (the suggestion) is that our modern sermon, by its very
character, almost inescapably sets up an authoritative relationship. Only
certain people are allowed to do it, and they are usually issued with some sort
of licence, or even specially ordained, to do so. Those who undertake this
ministry of public preaching invariably enter into a teaching relationship with

\textsuperscript{19} This same fraternity of evangelicals often suggest that ‘biblically’ such distinctions are
meaningless since all gatherings of believers are ‘church’. Indeed, this assertion is frequently taken
as an important implication of the widely accepted and championed view of the church first argued
in Sydney by the late principal of Moore Theological College, D. B. Knox (cf. 1987, 1988, 1989), and
the former archbishop of Sydney, D. W. B. Robinson (cf. 1989). See also Cole (1987b) and Lawton

\textsuperscript{20} Paul’s presumption that women will pray and prophesy among the believers (1 Cor 11:5)
might infer that he did endorse a ‘teaching’ ministry of some kind by women. However, Thompson
argues that this is irrelevant on the grounds that (1) we do not know what NT prophecy was like,
and (2) that “the same kind of prohibition which is found in 1 Timothy with regard to teaching and
authority, is found in 1 Corinthians 14 with regard to the evaluation of prophecy” (1995c, 14). But
given that (i) the latter prohibition only addresses the evaluation of prophecy, not the act of
prophesying, and that (ii) we do see prophecy throughout Acts and Paul’s letters as a public, verbal
activity regarded as conveying some authority and commanding respect (cf. Acts 11:27, 13:1-3, 1 Cor
14:22-33, Eph 2:20), and that (iii) Paul himself might be seen as inferring a greater authority for
prophecy than teaching (1 Cor 12:28; contra Grudem, 1987), we might wonder why Thompson
simply chose to discard the matter as irrelevant. In this regard, Payne’s assertion presumes too
much: “‘teaching’, in the apostolic writings, was a much more authoritative, restricted and regulated
activity (than prophecy), to be undertaken by a much smaller number of selected people” (1995c, 9).
Moreover, if \textit{gyna} is translated as ‘wife’ rather than ‘woman’ in 1 Cor 14 and 1 Tim 2, then Paul was
not addressing women \textit{per se}, but requiring married partners to conduct themselves with due
decorum in the gathering (see Ellis, 1989, 65-78; Barnett, 1995a; cf. Payne, 1995b, 7-8). As Carson
(1995) noted in a recent address to Sydney evangelical Anglicans, the meaning of headship is always
“bound up in the first instance with the marriage relationship”.
the congregation, whether they are formally designated ‘elders’, ‘ overseers’, or whatever.\textsuperscript{21}

Yet he is not unaware of the tension. Nor does he wish to remain bound to it.\textsuperscript{22} Indeed, a few paragraphs later, he again seeks to loosen the hold of evangelical paradigms and conventions over the forms of ministry and church:

We need to be radicals...in our willingness to let our own situations come under the critique of the Bible, and be shaped by the Bible. In terms of the sermon, for example, it is a structure that has evolved for all sorts of good reasons, and expresses important principles. But is it to be the only structure? 1 Corinthians 14 suggests a model of extensive congregational participation (note v.26). Just as our discussion of women’s ministry has long been hampered by an uncritical acceptance of current structures of ‘priesthood’ and ‘ordination’, could it be that we also need to rethink the way we run our gatherings so that the authoritative, teaching ‘sermon’ is not the only avenue for a word of encouragement\textsuperscript{23}

One senses that the discussion has come full circle. Moreover, one might also sense little prospect of the Lord’s Supper and the ministry of the whole body (not only of women) breaking beyond the control of the triumvirate of ordination, the church service, and the marriage of authority to rhetoric.

\textbf{7.2.4 Order, control, and the sanctity of the system}

Our survey of the two debates—the Lord’s supper, and the ministry of women in relation to ordination and teaching—suggests that evangelicals face a double bind over both issues. In either case it is equally unpalatable to pursue or to ignore an exegetical critique of the status quo. It is equally uncomfortable to abandon or to defend that status quo. On the one hand, discrepancies between text and convention may trouble evangelicals; on the other hand, they may fail to see any discrepancies at all.

On any account, evangelicals who pursue these debates are likely to lock themselves into a double-standard. If one acknowledges, for example, that ordination is itself open to the charge of being an ‘unbiblical’ notion and practice, then what integrity is there in arguing ‘biblically’ to protect its historical and current expression against those who seek

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{21} The letters and editor’s responses are from \textit{The Briefing} 164, 5 September, 1995, pages 11-14. Payne’s comments are taken from page 13.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} However, a few issues later, in response to Barnett (1995a), Payne argues in favour of the modern sermon: “The regular expository ‘sermon’, which is undertaken by a small number of licensed people, would seem as close as we are ever likely to get to the authoritative teaching ministry that is on view in 1 Timothy 2” (1995b, 10).
  \item \textsuperscript{23} \textit{The Briefing} 164, 5 September, 1995, page 14.
\end{itemize}
to bring ‘unbiblical’ changes to the practice? However, this double-standard does not appear to have dulled the agendas of those who delineate ‘biblical’ evangelicals from the ‘unbiblical’. There appears to be more at stake here than correct exegesis.

The issues surrounding the debates over the Lord’s Supper and women’s ordination are neither simply about believing or disbelieving the Bible, nor only about theological disputes over sacramentalism or clericalism. Both debates inevitably highlight the sacrosanct character of ecclesiastical systems and conventions. More particularly, they highlight that professional ministry is basic to evangelical life and thought. In an important sense, mainstream evangelical systems depend on the inviolability of the professional, ordained ministry.

As we noted in our previous portrait of evangelical life, the academy, the denomination, and the pulpit form a self-referential loop of influence centred on the unquestionable conventions and values of ordination and the clerical career. It is a closed loop, admitting no breach, and shaping most aspects of evangelical life. From this circle derives the literature, the conferences, the liturgy, the publishing agendas, the orders of service, the Bible study aids, the translations, the building programmes, the shape of the gathering, the synodical debates, the music, the guest speakers, the tacit permission for lay ministries, the weekend retreats, the educational programmes, the reforms, and much more of evangelical life. It also exercises a direct influence on most so-called parachurch agencies. It even facilitates the ‘liberation’ of the laity (Stevens, 1985; Kaye, 1993; Preece, 1995). As Conn notes, ministers are the “indispensable professional(s)” of evangelicalism (1979, 330).24 Thus, arguments and decisions over women’s ministry and the Lord’s supper may allow evangelicals to rethink their scruples about authoritarianism, clericalism, and sacramentalism—but they are unlikely to act upon them.

The professional, ordained ministry is critical to evangelical order in virtually all denominational types. The paradigm crosses denominational, regional, cultural, and historical boundaries. It also survives theological eras. Doyle argues that “a radical change (has taken place) in the theological evaluation of ordination” (1994b, 23). Under the influence of D. B. Knox, “a generation of clergy...do not regard themselves as ‘clerical’ in any sense of the word, but as lay people who have the enormous privilege of being paid

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24 Note this response by one clergyman to a point made in a forum based on the paper by Goodew (1991): “What struck me about taking over this parish was that effectively, when you arrive, the existing lay leadership is finished, but it takes them a long time to realise that. I’m not one to be brutal, but that is actually what is happening. And so you’re building up a good group of lay people whose confidence is in your ministry—you believe it is in the Lord, but it is in your ministry. I was very interested in what you said that that is the way that God works, that is the model He seems to want to use” (pages 9-10).
so that they may teach the Bible full-time" (ibid, emphasis his). Yet our survey suggests that the newer generation may be as likely as the earlier to centralise its ministries within the pastoral role. A pastor's ability to maintain congregational propriety still confirms his ministry as 'biblical'. What may have shifted are the criteria of that propriety. In the past, order may have been defined along the lines of sacrament and canon law. In the present, it is more likely to bear the ideals of gospel rhetoric, entrepreneurial vision, and managerial skill. Thus, it may be argued that professionalism simply replaces clericalism without any major shifts in the underlying paradigms which link 'biblical' ministry to ecclesiastical order and control.

In the last chapter, we documented several testimonies to the impact of the control which some evangelical clergy exercise, whether willingly or otherwise, over denominational and congregational life. This impression now extends to the vigilance of those who seek to demarcate the 'biblical' from the not so. This quest for faithfulness can depersonalise and disaffect even those within the same fraternity:

Another group of women have been totally disaffected by the whole public debate, because it's very painful to sit and hear yourself spoken of as a 'something'-a ‘something’ that in some cases is seen as right and good and in some cases seems to be the worst evil that could befall the church. It's very painful, when you know that you're a Bible-believing, God-loving person who is searching out the truth as much as anyone. (Jarrett, in Payne, 1990, 8)

We noted earlier how the sermon inhabits a world alive with ideals and expectations. Moreover, I suggested how paradigms of precision, truth, authority, and rectitude can pervade the role of the preacher and shape both his self-image and his

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25 As Goodhew notes, "the stakes are higher now. The sort of (minister) who could get along thirty-five years ago, people don't want to invite them to their parishes any more. They're looking for someone who can offer more...The impressive thing about (the work of a particular minister) was that at every point where he met a significant obstacle, whether it was buildings, staff, location or services, whatever it was he was able to find some creative way of solving that difficulty. It led me to believe that the managerial side in that factor, if the church is really going to grow, is really very significant" (1991, 5).

26 A similar perspective may illumine both the decision for lay presidency and the significant increase in young evangelicals seeking training for unordained, full-time evangelistic ministries. Neither necessarily intimates a shift from the professional paradigm, only a broadening of its scope and a change in the nature of the dualism which undergirds it: "Rather than an institutional collapse through the death and defection of the clergy, a diversification of ministry may be taking place. However, it is also possible that we are continuing to see a further contraction into clericalised laity by people disillusioned with materialist society" (Lawton, 1988, 15). See my comments in chapter six on Cheng (1991).

27 On the relationship between professionalism and elitism and the ways a community converses over a classic text, Tracey notes that "the final indignity for anyone is to be forbidden one's voice or to be robbed of one's own experience" (1987, 106). In this regard, Winograd and Flores' study of the impact of technology and management styles on communities' perceptions of precision and rectitude presents a compelling analogy to the social impact of the conventions of the academy and the pulpit (1986, 152-163).
persona before the congregation. Thus, an impression emerged of the sermon and the service as forming one seamless proclamation and justification of evangelical systems and culture. Apart from the social power of preaching, the service itself conveys the control of the clergy over congregational life.28

Worship preparation is basically my responsibility as pastor. Oh, congregations are responsible too. They make an enormous difference with their prayers and enthusiasm and healthy participation. But they aren’t the leaders and can hardly be expected to provide the thrust toward more spiritual services. According to biblical warrant, that is my venue—and yours. If we (pastors) don’t prepare spiritually for worship, it’s highly unlikely that the Spirit will be felt in the service, or that the individual parts of the liturgy will rise and converge into an exciting whole. (Killinger, in Hayford, Killinger, and Stevenson, 1990, 19, emphases his)

Lay participation in the Church services needs to be encouraged, after adequate preparation through well-run training classes...Effective communication is more important than participation for its own sake. The laity’s job is not primarily to help the clergy do their job in the church, but the clergy’s responsibility is to help the laity do their job in the world. The old authoritarian clericalism is thankfully on the way out, but new problems will arise if it is replaced by an aggressive layism. (Shilton, 1993, 6)

These themes converge into a disturbing impression. What the minister may expect and insist upon as his rightful and ‘biblical’ role may in fact be little more than a noble sentiment overlaid with elitism and insecurity. Some evangelical clergy sense a deep dissonance between the elitism inherent in their position and the evangelical catch-cry of impartial grace:

This is an uncomfortable thought, but could it be that God is not terribly impressed by such ‘capital intensive’ forms of religion?...We’re very good at making exactly the same mistakes as those made by the teachers of the law, right down to the ‘flowing robes’ that some ministers like to wear on a Sunday.

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28 This might seem to apply particularly or even exclusively to the more formal and liturgical evangelical traditions, such as Anglicanism and Presbyterianism. I would argue that the minister’s control is just as evident in less formal contexts such as among Baptists, Congregationalists, and the Church of Christ. Moreover, clerical control is perhaps strongest where we might least expect it—among Pentecostal and Charismatic congregations.
'It marks us out as teachers,' they say. But it goes much further. We've painted ourselves into a corner... (Campbell, 1992, 8)\textsuperscript{29}

Some wish for the system to be other than it is:

Though many clergy long for a less mono-ministerial situation, they are still the centre of too many expectations and the fulfillers of too many functions. Some of these rightfully belong to other members of the congregation or to the local church as a whole. And for all their desire to strengthen congregational life, denominational structures still fetter rather than free their member churches, keeping them in tutelage rather than helping them attain their majority. Only when ministers and denominations are able to hand over some of their responsibilities, and only when Christian people are willing to take them upon themselves, will the full resources of Christ in our local churches...become available. (R. and J. Banks, 1986, 47)

Yet, apart from the major upheavals such rearrangements cause to the systems and culture of evangelicalism, these changes would require profound personal shifts. The paradigms of ministerial rank and control are loaded with the theological and cultural weight of truth, authority, godliness, and a man's personal calling to a life of ministry. Thus any challenge to the model may appear as an encroaching liberalism or subjectivism, a personal attack against the minister, and/or an act of rebellion against God. As we have noted frequently, the systems and culture of evangelicalism may blind the preacher to his living contradictions of his own preaching. He may preach the impartiality of grace and the priesthood of all believers—then close down Bible studies which he or another authorised leader cannot attend; or place so many fences around public ministries that all are discouraged except a preselected few; or subtly white-ant those who may be more effective in pastoral ministry than himself; or insist on centralising all preaching and pastoral ministry even in the face of palpable evidence of his own ineptitude or inexperience. And he is likely to cite Paul in support of each decision: "Command and teach these things. Don’t let anyone look down on you...Do not neglect your gift...Be diligent in these matters...because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers".

\textsuperscript{29} In keeping with Campbell's remark about "flowing robes", note the connections Sproul draws between rank, leadership, and the persona of authority: "A minister is called to be a leader. His is a position of leadership and authority, as well as one of servanthood. His is a holy office, an office of great but quiet dignity...There is a uniform of leadership in our society. Few clergymen are aware of its dimensions. The leadership uniform of our culture is dignified, quiet, versatile, and economic. It is easy to learn and provides a basis for a planned wardrobe that is economically sound. Those who are aware of it recognize it instantly in others. Those not consciously aware of it respond to it instantly by intuition" (1986, 110).
(1 Tim 4:11-16). Thus the minister's actions will not appear immature or insecure to him. Rather, they may seem the epitome of his drive to be found 'biblical' in all things.

Abstraction, idealism, elitism, and professionalism may seem a long way from pride and fear for the one who seeks to be 'biblical'. It is easy enough to bolster insecurity with manipulation and control in the name of 'biblical' leadership and authority. Love can seem like lack of conviction; peaceableness like an admission of being 'unbiblical'. Expressions of immediacy and intimacy towards God may seem like 'unbiblical' subjectivism or sloppy sentimentalism. Yet the drive to be radically 'biblical', 'Reformed', and evangelical may become a game to escape dissonance and hypocrisy. What drives a culture where peers and friends have the power to make or break one another with a single word?

In a recent address to Sydney evangelical Anglicans, the noted Canadian evangelical scholar and preacher, Don Carson, had been invited to outline his understanding of the current state of play in the debates over the ministry of women. In closing, Carson put aside erudition and spoke passionately against what he discerned as the myopic preoccupation of many Sydney evangelicals. His theme echoes our impressions of the social force of the epithets 'biblical' and 'unbiblical':

This is one scrappy diocese...You agree on...the deity of Christ, the authority of Scripture, the atonement...the bodily resurrection of Christ...and justification by grace through faith...By and large you do believe that there are some distinctions between men and women in Scripture. Now are you going to split the church on whether or not women preach once in a while under the authority of somebody else?

Are you going to conduct the debate in a manner in which the whole watching world says, 'My—those Christians love one another'? Or, in your passion to defend your view of the Word of God, will you—God help us—deny that very Word's injunction to love the brothers, to love the sisters?

I have heard already...that there are some of you on both sides of this issue who find it difficult even to be civil to the other side because you disagree on this issue. Isn't that sin? There is a want of godliness in this discussion.

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30 His comments appeared to make veiled reference to the articles, editorials, and letters to the editor in the then most recent issues of The Briefing (vols. 159/160 and 164). These are the same articles with which I interacted above.
Do not partition yourself off into holier-than-thou huddles which communicate with the other side only in the printed word but never over a cup of coffee with an open Greek text in front of you...

You have so many strengths. Do not sacrifice them on this loss (of fellowship).

(1995, tape 2, side A)

7.3 PAUL AND EVANGELICALISM

7.3.1 A collage of voices and an unfolding analogy

As our conversation draws to a close, a final juxtaposition of voices will clarify our impressions. Our focus has remained on the ways people have made sense of their lives and have acted in the light of the paradigms and conventions which shaped and expressed the popular intellectualism and culture of the day. Beginning in the classical and Hellenistic periods, we noted the propensity to defer to some kind of reality other than the everyday. This deference both shaped and reflected the ideals of knowledge and of society. In the first place, since the truest reality lay beyond the everyday, the surest knowledge of it could only be only gained by abstraction:

The real lover of knowledge will strive for true being; he will not devote his attention to particular instances, but will pursue things until he comes into contact with this essence. Through ‘mingling with genius reality, he would beget intelligence and truth’. (Plato, Republic 490B, trans. Lee)

(God is) incorporeal, one, immeasurable, begetter of everything...blessed and beneficent, the best, in lack of nothing, himself bearing all things, celestial, ineffable, unnameable, and as (Plato) himself says, ‘invisible, unconquerable—whose nature is difficult to find and if found cannot be expressed among the many’. (Plato, Timaeus 28E, in Apuleius, On the Teaching of Plato, 15, trans. Grant)

Idealism was always only a short step from abstraction. In a sense, idealism bridged the gap between the metaphysical and the social: the worlds beyond reduced to the ambitions of those who inhabited the everyday. To a student of philosophy, an ideal looked like an ideal. To those weighing up social commitments, an ideal blended into the fabric of everyday life:

Know, therefore, Serenus, that this perfect man, full of virtues human and divine, can lose nothing...The walls which guard the wise man are safe both from flame and assault, they provide no means of entrance—are lofty,
impregnable, godlike. (Seneca, On the Firmness of the Wise Man 6.3-8, trans. Basore)

Whereas (Menas son of Menes) from his earliest youth considered useful service to his home city the finest way to spend his life, and spares himself no expense or public service...as he gives priority to genuine and warm concern for his home town...(and) when he was appointed gymasiarch he gave careful thought to training of the ephboi and the neoi, rendered admirable and generous assistance in all other gymnastic accultur...and thus through his own love for glory stimulated young men to discipline and tolerance of hardship...

(Yet though) hard-pressed, (Menas ignored) his own situation and secure in his awareness that the people were appreciative and knew how to honour good men, he surpassed himself in his contributions and in all other philanthropic enterprise...(and) he impressed on the young men the importance of cultivating discipline and tolerance of hardship, with the result that, being thus engaged in competition for manliness, the personalities of the younger men are directed in the development of their character toward the goal of arete ...

Therefore, in order that all might know that Stetos is hospitable to men of exceptional character and ability...and that the People might not appear remiss in their gratitude, and that also all others, as they see the People bestowing honours on exceptional men, might emulate the noblest qualities and be moved to arete, to the end that the common good might be advanced as all aim ever to win reputation for doing something beneficial for our home city...The People crown Menas son of Menes for the arete and the goodwill he has displayed toward the people... (Second century AD inscription, OGIS 339, trans. Danker)

The inscription encapsulated the ethos of Graeco-Roman reciprocity. Stetos, the home town of Menas, depended on its benefactor’s generosity; he coveted their praise. Thus each provided what the other needed. And each made sure to cultivate the next generation of benefactors and their clients. This ethos touched every aspect of a person’s life: it locked a man into the lot of his rank and status; it could bring shame upon him; or it could hold the prospect of progress and honour.

This was Paul’s world. Yet he chose another direction. His thought was anchored in the histories of Israel and of Jesus the Christ. Moreover, the death and resurrection of Jesus opened up for Paul an entirely different personal and social order.
If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:1-11)

Humiliation was neither an abstraction nor an ideal to Paul. It was his on-going personal and social experience as he refused those marks and rewards of status and patronage open to him:

If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. (Phil 3:3-7)

But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast. Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it. Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible...I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. (1 Cor 9:15-22)

While some Graeco-Roman writers criticised rhetoric and held up hardship as the mark of the ideal sage, patrons expected eloquence and an impressive persona of their
client orators. Lack of rhetorical show and the marks of suffering and labour were an embarrassment. Yet Paul chose the latter:

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. (2 Cor 4:7-10)

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power. (1 Cor 2:1-5)

We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. (1 Thess 2:6-9)

Within the Graeco-Roman ethos of reciprocity, any refusal of a patron, or would-be patron, could bring reproach and acrimony upon the lesser man. Paul’s behaviour at Corinth and Thessalonica ran the risk of turning his would-be patrons against him. At Corinth, it did:

We put no stumbling-block in anyone’s path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonour, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing
everything. We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also. (2 Cor 6:3-13)

Evangelicalism holds affinities to both views of the world. At its best, it trumpets Paul’s message of free justification by the merits of Christ and the grace of God. At its worst, a rationalistic and myopic mindset chokes out that same freedom. Yet the best and the worst do not lie poles apart in the social experience of evangelicalism. Both shape the everyday world of the sermon and the service. In this sense, the paradigms and conventions of the Graeco-Roman world are still close at hand. Abstraction, for example, shapes much of evangelical exegesis and theology:

...the essential substance (of a passage is)...the permanent, abiding, and doctrinal part of the passage. (Kaiser, 1981, 161).

...the biblical text has a manifold significance that is squarely based upon the meaning of the text and can be formulated by means of universal principles and patterns to be gleaned from it with a view to any public... (Krabben, 1986, 213, 245, emphasis his)

...to the extent that our interpretation of Scripture (i.e. the system of doctrine) corresponds to God’s revelation in nature and Scripture it provides a metaphysically ultimate and true analysis of the world. (Karlberg, 1990, 104)

...systematic theology...is final and normative in a way that its sister disciplines are not...It regards its own conclusions as representing not what a particular biblical author thought or what certain theologians believe or what it may be inspiring for the church to accept, but the truth...First (this) system of truth elucidates each text...Second, the system of doctrine exercises control over the exposition of a particular passage. Precisely because there is a system, and because truth is one, dogmatics lays down parameters that exegesis must never trespass. (Macleod, 1986, 248-249, emphasis his)

Like their Graeco-Roman forbears, idealism follows close at hand, setting expectations and rationalising pretence:

When we reflect deeply on how life is, both inside our soul and outside in our world, a quiet terror threatens to overwhelm us...(then) retreat into denial does not seem cowardly, it seems necessary and smart. Just keep going, get your act together, stop feeling sorry for yourself, renew your commitment to trust God, get more serious about obedience. Things really aren’t as bad as you intuitively
sense they are. You’ve simply lost your perspective and must regain it through more time in the Word and increased moral effort. (Crabb, 1988, 15)

In turn, idealism may fuel elitism:

...the preacher is a Christian like every other Christian...But he is something more than that, there is something further...he becomes conscious of a ‘call’. (Lloyd-Jones, 1971, 103-104)

The power of the spoken word surges into the world now from a pulpit as well as a podium; moral as well as political behaviour comes under the sway of eloquence, requiring no less rhetorical training than commanded by the classic treatises. (De Koster, 1986, 319)

...we have come to accept that it is right for a clergyman to have authority and power with all its accompanying symbols. (Payne, 1988a, 3-4)

Idealism and elitism together produce control, manipulation, and abuse:

...the preacher learns from Cicero that the genuine orator has a goal, persuasion; he has a means, language; and he has a technique, delivery. The measure of his expertise is how well he molds an audience to his purpose... (De Koster, 1986, 310)

...far from being controlled by the congregation the preacher is in charge and in control of the congregation. (Lloyd-Jones, 1971, 83)

Our pastor was the most inspirational preacher you’d ever hear...The catch was that you had to agree with his vision. (Survey respondent, in Kaldor, et al, 1994, 32)

A week later (the pastor) came to visit our home...As he left he spoke in hushed tones to my parents. To my horror I heard them all agree that there had been a great change in me. The complicity was complete. (Perron, 1994, 58-59)

There is an awful assumption in evangelical circles that if we can just get the Word of God into people’s heads, then the Spirit of God will apply it to their hearts. That assumption is awful, not because the Spirit never does what the assumption supposes, but because it has excused pastors and leaders from the responsibility to tangle with people’s lives. Many remain safely hidden behind pulpits, hopelessly out of touch with the struggles of their congregations, proclaiming the Scriptures with a pompous accuracy that touches no one. (Crabb, 1988, 160)
'All three pastors said a man was "head of the family" and I must endure whatever he did,' one woman wrote. 'My current pastor, after observing my husband's violence and anger, advised divorce, but gave no more counseling or emotional support. He does not want to be perceived as an advocate of divorce.' Since filing for divorce, that woman added, only two older women in her church talk to her. 'I'm an outcast, being a victim of "church discipline" for divorce, although my husband's behaviour is well known.' (Alsdurf, 1990, 19-20)

People become discounted in the name of truth and order:

People placed more importance on keeping the family together than excising the cancer...Rather than believing my daughter and the inescapable evidence, rather than safeguarding the other children, I was expected to sacrifice the lot for the sake of 'family' and 'marriage'. (Client's story, in McClelland, no date, 103).

...it's very painful to sit and hear yourself spoken of as a 'something'—a 'something' that in some cases is seen as right and good and in some cases seems to be the worst evil that could befall the church. It's very painful, when you know that you're a Bible-believing, God-loving person who is searching out the truth as much as anyone. (Jarrett, in Payne, 1990, 8)

...there can be such an obsession with doctrinal truth that we can't be touched by God unless everything is 100% correct...I find in myself and others almost a cynicism to anything emotional and experiential. I don't like it....The main impact for me...was the experience of real, open communication—people being real with one another. That's truth too. We can...have everything doctrinally correct but little depth of relating. (author's emphasis)31

It is easy—and common—enough to articulate another way. Scholarly and popular writers have made an industry of reformation and renewal. Paul, however, sought to close the door to such paths: "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (1 Cor 8:1).

7.3.2 Boasting, love, and stepping down in the world

Our conversation around the Graeco-Roman paradigms of philosophy, theology, religion, and morality turned on the distinctions in popular intellectualism between what I called primary reality and everyday reality. More specifically, we noted how assumptions of

31 Letter to the editor (The Briefing, issue 146, November 8, 1994, page 5).
some kind of metaphysical hierarchy intersected with the structures and expectations of the social hierarchy. We came to characterise these assumptions and experiences in terms of abstractionism and elitism. Furthermore, we saw how idealism provided a nexus between the two realities. In this sense, we may speak of these three perspectives—abstractionism, idealism, and elitism—as deeply pervasive and influential in the world of Paul. Ostensibly, evangelicals share Paul’s aversion to these ways of being in the world. Yet similar factors pervade evangelical life and thought. It is as though evangelicals have rebuilt what Paul tried to tear down.

Intellectually, evangelical thought bears many of the hallmarks of its ancient counterparts—philosophy and theology—including their categories and methods. In particular, evangelical exegetical and theological procedures appear wedded to absolutism and objectivism. Perhaps wary of the silent end of its ancient journey, the evangelical logos remains a reified principle of the more rationalist kind (cf. Mortley, 1986b). The ‘word’, the truth, ultimately lies above its historical and cultural incarnations. Thus Paul’s letters, despite protestations to the contrary, remain a data base for the system of evangelical theology, not narratives rich with analogy and provocation for those who wrestle to die and rise with Christ in a modern milieu.

Such abstraction was integral to the intellectual agendas of pride which Paul sought to tear apart. At Corinth, that pride fueled the stand-off between the strong and the weak. Each was convinced of the reasonableness and superiority of their respective views. Indeed, it is not too much of an imposition to put our terms—‘biblical’ and ‘unbiblical’—into their mouths. Certainly each carried themselves with a similar confidence of being demonstrably right. Yet Paul did not so much adjudicate as urge a new mindset divested of false options and canons. He affirmed the position of each group; reversed their positions; and redirected the factions toward a third way. Moreover, he modelled this new mindset in his own refusal of rights and status. Unlike much evangelical debate, Paul did not urge them towards a single, correct position. Rather, he called for the death of intellectual and social self-interest: “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up” (1 Cor 8:1). Carson’s plea (quoted earlier) suggests that evangelical scholarship and debate needs the same counsel.

The heart of Paul’s ‘third way’ was his preoccupation with Christ. We have noted how Christ brought coherence to each of Paul’s conversations. This, too, is a great strength of evangelicalism. It may also lie at the heart of its double-mindedness. Where evangelical scholars and preachers have insisted on seeing the person and work of Christ as central to the Scriptures, to theological enterprise, and to pastoral ministry, they have successfully cut through ideological arrogance and methodological faddishness. Yet, as
Barnett has signalled, ‘the gospel’ can too easily become another abstraction: “Do we have as much to say about ‘the Lord Jesus Christ’ and his ‘love’ as we do about ‘the gospel’?” (1995b, 13). In Paul’s thought, neither Christ, nor his dying and rising, nor even his gospel was an ontological or hermeneutical category removed from the immediacy of relationship. As we have often remarked, Paul knew and wanted to know Christ, not ideas or processes abstracted from him.

Thus Paul offered no formulaic means of identifying with Christ. He did not blunt the immediate challenge of choosing to die with Christ in order to rise with him as Christ saw fit. Thus Paul’s couplets—weakness-strength, poor-rich, slave-free, dishonourable-honourable, suffering-joy—articulated the challenge of love and obedience, but they did not settle the shape of those choices in advance. Indeed, we saw Paul at pains to lift his converts’ vision away from legal and moral codes, and to ensure that they did not turn their new freedom into a further code. Evangelicals generally take this to heart. Thus they challenge those who would create new norms out of cultural, ecclesiastical, and pietistic behaviour. Yet, despite these critiques, our earlier portrait suggests a pervasive confusion lingerings about grace.

This confusion is more tacit than explicit. In this sense, evangelicals live within the walls of their own self-assurances that they are neither worldly, nor legalistic, nor ‘unbiblical’. The system reduces contentious issues and options to authorised and manageable proportions. Hard issues are debated voraciously, but not always with a view to any actual change of behaviour. Paul, however, refused to build such fortresses for his ekklesiai. Nor would he allow them to wall themselves. He would not allow any human system or convention to hedge the communities against the risks of working out what it meant to live by the dying and rising of Christ. Such ‘security’ would only throw the community back on their own resources and reinforce individual and communal boasting. He desired the communities to rely on God alone. Only so would they realise for themselves the depth of new understanding and joy in dying and rising with Christ.

The openness of Paul’s life and thought at this point contrasts sharply with the insularity of evangelicalism. Where Paul urged the believers to remain in the world both for the sake of the gospel and the world, evangelicals have frequently retreated into institutional and privatised ghettos. There is a certain irony in this. While evangelicals generally do not warm to the concept of a state church, they have erected what is in effect an alternate Christendom, complete with large ecclesiastical structures vying for public influence, educational institutions spanning kindergarten to university, and a vast de facto network of bureaucrats, businesses, tradespeople, and professionals. In a further irony, this imitation of ‘secular’ structures has not brought the everyday world within the scope
of theology and the gathering. Indeed, it may have deepened the sacred-secular divide and further entrenched the character of Sunday as the ‘sacred’ hour.\textsuperscript{32}

Paul’s gatherings, however, were driven by the everyday. In other words, those who met to build up one another did so in the face of the decisions and options which faced them beyond the gathering. The gathering did not convene for religious worship. Worship was the transformation of everyday experience by one who valued Christ above all others. Thus they did not gather over a rite. Nor do the sources suggest a meeting structured around the reading and exposition of Scripture following the model of the synagogue. Paul’s \textit{ekklesia} met to fellowship around their common relationship to one another on account of Christ. Most evangelicals agree that a rite is not central to church. Instead, most would argue for the centrality of the Word and feel significant unease about any shift of the emphasis away from preaching. However, both emphases—rite and word—share common ground. Both are cleric-centred. This recalls our impressions of clerical authority and control. Several of our sources clearly stated that the gathering is the minister’s “job” and prerogative. Perhaps, then, evangelicals find it hard to picture the gathering as fellowship-centred rather than word-centred, not only because of a fear of subjectivism or heresy, but because of a fear of losing control and prestige.

Features of professionalism, even elitism, mark the sermon and the service and demarcate the minister from the congregation. Paul faced something similar at Corinth. The strong had transferred to themselves certain social and religious marks of rank and status—education, eloquence, a leader’s persona, even clothing. They had also taken their possession of the fruits of Christ’s work—the Spirit and the evidences of his presence—as further marks of status, even ‘spiritual’ status. Paul would not tolerate this creation of new rank within the assembly. Rather, he urged the Corinthians to see that whatever they had was a \textit{gift} of grace. Moreover, they must honour the least honourable. There were to be clear, tangible expressions of the impartiality of grace.

Little in modern evangelical experience matches this. Academic, congregational, and denominational life functions along clearly demarcated lines of rank, status, and honour. This is not to say that evangelical preaching ignores the social implications of the

\textsuperscript{32} The collaboration of Reformed scholarship and the parent-controlled Christian school movement might seem the exception to this rule. The movement espouses an integrated world view free from sacred-secular dualisms (Walsh and Middleton, 1984; Willis, 1993). My own experience with the movement as a parent, conference speaker, and consultant has suggested otherwise. In particular, the rhetoric of integration does not appear to alter traditional sacred-secular distinctions pertaining to the gathering or ministry. Moreover, the adverbial and adjectival use of ‘Christian’ creates an artificial ethos of integration: (eg. ‘Christian...school, education, curriculum’; ‘Christian view of...discipline, rewards, assessments, sport, accounting, drama’; and ‘teaching, managing, farming, shopping...Christianly’).
end of elitism in the gospel. But its own systems rarely allow those implications to extend beyond being provocative ideas. Paul, however, actually stepped down in the world. His inversions of status were social realities, not intellectualised reforms. On the other hand, those who preside at the Lord’s supper in evangelical gatherings unavoidably invert Paul’s intention.

Paul urged leaders to imitate the inversion and repudiation of status which he embodied personally. In his own case, Paul was at pains to dissociate himself from the sophists. Though undoubtedly educated and skilled, he eschewed the sophists’ rhetoric and persona. In so doing, Paul set himself on a collision course with the contemporary paradigms of personal honour. And with his potential patrons. He refused to show favouritism towards individuals or ekklesiarchs. The gospel offered him rights, but he refused them. Christ was not a means to a career. Yet the agendas and processes of maintaining and reforming evangelical life and thought remain the domain of professional scholars and clergy. Their ministry is their career.

The dying and rising of Christ was a hollow ideal for Paul unless it provoked the inversion of social conventions and the concomitant personal experience of strength-in-weakness. Dying and rising with Christ meant status reversal. In Paul’s case, he deliberately stepped down in the world. We ought not romanticise this choice. He felt the shame of it amongst his peers and potential patrons, yet held it as the mark of his sincerity. Moreover, it played a critical role in the interplay of his life and thought. Tentmaking was critical, even “central”, to his life and message (Hock, 1980, 67). His labour and ministry were mutually explanatory. Yet, for evangelicals, ‘tent-making’ belongs in the realms of missionary journals and far-flung shores. As a model of ministry for the urban middle-class, it remains as unseemly to evangelicals as it did to the Corinthians:

There would have been no place for the apostle Paul in the modern day Presbyterian church...Paul worked for a living, making tents. A waste of a minister’s time? Unprofessional? Undignified? It didn’t seem to worry Paul. In fact, he insisted on it, because it gave him the freedom to preach the gospel freely, to give without taking. (Campbell, 1992, 8)

If Paul is a guide, then evangelicalism will not shake its abstraction, idealism, and elitism until its scholars and churchmen are prepared to step down in their worlds. Some may argue that since the world shows contempt for the pastoral role, then professional ministry is a step back. But that is to ignore the more pertinent set of social realities. Evangelicalism is a vast system and culture with its own ranks, careers, financial security,
marks of prestige, and rewards. Within *that* world, professional ministry *is* rank and status.

Professionalism feeds the pride which separates the academy and the pulpit from the congregation. It renders Paul abstract. Theological enterprise becomes self-serving. It entombs its service to the body in inaccessible journals, jargon, and symposia. It impoverishes the reflections of the congregation both by withholding its own contributions from them, and by reinforcing the unspoken verdict that 'lay' theology can only ever be second rate (Banks, 1989). Indeed, the term 'lay' itself patronises and disaffects. Paul's letters welled out of a profound love and desire for God and his Christ, and for their *ekklēsiai*. Exegesis, theology, and preaching from any other source must succumb to boasting. In this sense, evangelical conversation with Paul can only be brought to life by the grace of Christ, not by more hermeneutical sophistication:

Pride ruins scholarly endeavour...In Western tradition, this pride goes back especially to Greek philosophy...The Enlightenment exacerbated the problem by bringing in pride at its very core...And now we see almost the whole of the scholarly world conquered by the Enlightenment...It is wiser to admit the truth: the Enlightenment and its fruits have been a vast disaster...We who are evangelicals like to hear such things. But we have troubles of our own...We take pride in our orthodoxy, our championing of the Bible, our spiritual enlightenment...(our) scholarship...even in the supposed spirituality of an antiintellectual fuzziness...We need more than merely technical aids in order to produce right understanding of the Bible. We need the knowledge of God. (Poythress, 1992, 52-57)

### 7.3.3 Conversation gained and lost

Since evangelicalism has inherited the concerns of both Paul and his milieu, it unavoidably bears numerous resemblances to the paradigms and conventions of Graeco-Roman life. These analogies offer entry points into new conversation over the paradigms and conventions of evangelicalism insofar as they are allowed to challenge the easy assumptions of evangelicals to be demonstrably 'biblical' and 'Pauline'. Such enquiries may even suggest a new vantage point on what it meant and means to gather in community to converse, both in Paul's *ekklēsiai* and in evangelical churches.

Our enquiry has been both a conversation, and been about conversation. We have brought people and cultures to the place of dialogue, and we have talked about that dialogue. Time and again we have characterised Paul's life and thought not only as being
directed towards conversation, but as being itself a conversation. This theme offers a final way of drawing together the enquiry and of conveying is potential to provoke.

The juxtaposition of Paul and his milieu clarifies his distinctiveness here again. While we noted that the forms and vocabulary of his speech invited comparison to his contemporaries, he nonetheless steered clear of the hallmarks of their paradigms. His conversation about God and the affairs of his people did not depend on abstraction or idealism. He did not arbitrate for his ekklesiai over some canon of rationality, nor bend his own thoughts towards any criteria of absolute, timeless truths. Every shred of Paul’s conversation remained anchored in his wonder at Christ and in the vicissitudes of the everyday. This is not to say that conversation was lost among Paul’s Graeco-Roman contemporaries, as though Paul (re)discovered the art and joy of conversing about the everyday. But it is to recall a conclusion of the first chapter: ironically, the dualism of the classical, Hellenistic, and Graeco-Roman milieu somewhat unavoidably devalued and relegated the very same experiences of everyday life which the theorists had sought to understand. Something other than the everyday all too easily assumed greater importance. It is in this sense that Paul’s conversations took on much of their distinctiveness.

Paul lived to converse. He talked with Christ and about him. He talked with his ekklesiai and about them. He taught his ekklesiai to talk with Christ and about him—together. Paul’s conversations were profoundly centred in Christ. Indeed, his conversations seemed to summon up the full extent of the desire and freedom which he found in Christ. Every new context, issue, or text entailed a challenge to discover and articulate Christ in fresh conversation. All of this Paul passed on so that the ekklesiai might not lose their new conversation in the paradigms of the day.

Paul’s conversations were rich in stories. These stories characterised the gathering. The believers came together around Christ and his story. They also came with their own. They came to (re)connect their own stories to his, and to each others’. That was the gathering. They taught, prophesied, shared, ate, sang, and prayed their stories—their lives—together around Christ. The Spirit made the conversation possible. All the people shared the Spirit through whom they met God and one another face-to-face in the certain “light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). Paul’s conversations with both the Corinthians and the Galatians highlighted his desire to see them grow up into the full measure of the freedom and dignity of their new conversation as he sought to reground them in the integrity of love which overflowed from Christ and the Spirit.
Recent evangelical emphases on community are most welcome and helpful (eg. Grenz, 1993). But these may simply lead to more talk about conversing, not to any living experience of the conversation Paul modelled. They do not appear to grapple with how evangelical paradigms and conventions systemically and pervasively, perhaps even deliberately, gag conversation. Our sources suggest that the sermon and the service have hijacked evangelical conversation. Likewise, the quest to delineate the ‘biblical’ from the ‘unbiblical’ is a poor substitute for engagement with Paul, with his Christ, and with each other. There are conventions for talking and listening, but next to none for conversing. Preaching does not allow it. Worship services do not allow it. Theological debate does not allow it. Each has its semblances of conversation. But the rules of each game militate against an open-ended meeting of hearts and minds free from the controlling agendas of evangelical systems. Where such conversation occurs, and naturally it does, it falls short of the imprimatur of true preaching, worship, or debate. Evangelicalism has re instituted the very conversation-killers which Paul discredited—abstractionism, idealism, perfectionism, legalism, moralism, elitism—and lost the conversation.

7.4 CONCLUSION

In the last chapter, I expressed my appreciation for evangelicalism and the desire that I not be read as seeking to dismiss evangelicals, their lives, or their thought. This needs to be stated again as I conclude, not only as a personal disclaimer, but as a reaffirmation that evangelicalism holds analogies to both Paul and his Graeco-Roman world. At its best, evangelicalism faithfully portrays the cutting edge of Paul’s remarkable gospel. I regard this to be the case even of many of the sources which I have quoted above in a somewhat critical light. Moreover, the quests of evangelicals for ‘biblical’ understanding and behaviour are entirely appropriate.

My concern, however, was to open up to conversation those ways in which social experience shapes and distorts these quests. In this sense, we have seen that to be ‘biblical’ or ‘unbiblical’ is not only a statement of proximity to the biblical text, but also of personal acceptability or otherwise within the evangelical world. Insofar as this is the case, it is impossible and inappropriate to marginalise ‘matters of the heart’ from the conversation. Wherever a human system incorporates concepts and expectations of authority, order, and rectitude, there will inevitably arise conventions of status and control. Likewise, pride, insecurity, and fear will be close at hand. It might seem that I have overstated the impact of these dispositional factors on evangelical readings of Paul. I would argue the reverse. In any case, these factors are palpably present in the systems and culture of evangelicalism.
Scholarship does not normally take 'matters of the heart' into account. Indeed, there are good reasons to keep a rigorous arm's length from subjectivism and unsubstantiated impressions. Yet dispositional factors are part of the phenomena of evangelical readings of Paul; to deny this is to perpetuate the mythologies of objectivism which undergird academic elitism. Scholars' avoidance of these matters may be more a testimony to their personal agendas than to their rigour and precision.

Conversing with Paul must include a genuine listening to his voice. It means coming to him on his terms. We have seen that Paul was well aware of the intellectual games of his contemporaries. He understood how people employ philosophical, theological, religious, and moral 'arguments' to gain and reinforce status, and to boast of it. On at least one memorable occasion, he set aside hermeneutical and theological accuracy in preference for mutual love and respect born of wonder at the impartiality of God's grace in Christ (1 Cor 8-10). Those who converse with Paul must reckon with this adjudication, not only as part of the witness of the ancient sources, but as an enduring stimulus to an integrity of heart and mind.
CONCLUSION TO PART THREE

Our portrait of evangelicalism is now clear enough both to invite further conversation about the modern era, and to open up new analogies with Paul and his milieu. The two chapters have moved from the social experience of the sermon and the service to the broader systemic and cultural aspects of evangelical life. Alongside a clear concern to be true to Paul and to the rest of the Scriptures, evangelicals nonetheless continue partly to shape their worlds in terms of abstractionism, idealism, and elitism. Thus evangelicalism holds analogies both with Paul and with Graeco-Roman popular intellectualism.

There is much more to say about evangelicalism. I did not pretend to offer an exhaustive or dispassionately objective reading of the movement. There was no need to. Conversations among evangelicals, both about themselves and about Paul, are not helped by denying that the movement has a social as well as a theological face. Such conversations need more than denial or unsubstantiated anecdotes. Yet the steriley objective analyses of sociologists are little better—their claims to freedom from subjective distortion themselves distort such studies. My approach was unashamedly impressionistic, urged by the need and possibilities of living conversation. As I stated earlier, evangelical conversations with Paul do not need more ‘objective’, scholarly abstractions of his life and thought. The conversation requires portraits of a flesh-and-blood Paul engaged with his Christ and with the cut-and-thrust of his social milieu. Likewise, it needs to convey the voices of evangelicals struggling with the dilemmas of their two-fold heritage of Paul and his milieu. Such portraits might invite engagement, not armchair reflection.

Thus I invite criticism of my own portraits. I cannot wall my own contributions from the dialogue. But that scrutiny must not only come from the academies and pulpits: it must come from those who converse at the coalface. Both will take exception to my sources and glosses. They will tell me I have said too much—or not near enough. They will add their own stories. They will draw Paul into the conversation at the points where they sense a meeting of minds with him—and where they find him obtuse, difficult, and maligned. They will go again to the ancient texts with new questions and perhaps new willingness to listen. This is the living conversation of those who seek to imitate Paul as he imitated Christ. Whether or not I have understood or added constructively to the conversation, only the conversing will tell.
Conclusion

This thesis aimed to bring two worlds together in dialogue: the life and thought of the apostle Paul and of modern evangelicalism. This conversation has been long and broad in the making.

I began with three presuppositions about Paul, his *ekklesiai*, and the Graeco-Roman milieu. First, Paul did not represent any school of philosophical or moral teaching, yet neither was he isolated from them. Second, both Paul and his *ekklesiai* were socially placed to share in the “fluid and active field of thought convention which belongs to every intelligent man” (Judge, 1973b, 110). Third, then, a portrait of the popular intellectualism of Paul’s day would fill out our understanding of the interchanges between Paul and his converts as each sought to make sense of their worlds and his message.

The first chapter sketched one image of this portrait. I pursued the thesis that the life and thought of Paul’s day had inherited a marked presumption of, and deference to, a greater reality beyond the stuff of everyday life. This greater or primary reality could take philosophical, religious, or moral shape. The abstracted and idealised images of this primary reality, however, did not erase the lived priority of the everyday. The two realities propped up one another even while each was problematic to the other. Moreover, the gulf between the two worlds mirrored the living experience of the pyramid of Graeco-Roman society.

Chapter two sketched the other image of the portrait. For the most part, Paul’s Jewish heritage directed his life and thought along a very different path to his contemporaries. In place of abstraction and idealism, Paul’s thought was an interplay of historical, social, and personal perspectives centred on the person of Jesus Christ and the narrative and significance of his crucifixion and resurrection from the dead. Paul found in Christ the fulfilment of Israel’s Scriptures and hopes, the shape of human history, a radical restructuring of human relationships, and an entirely new sense and experience of his own identity and purpose.

The third chapter overlaid these two images and gave colour and definition to each. I worked from four Graeco-Roman perspectives: philosophy, theology, religion, and morality. Paul was aware of these traditions. He showed some affinity to each and freely adopted and adapted them in line with his own goals. Moreover, his audiences and *ekklesiai* were likely to hear him through the terms of reference provided by these
paradigms. Nevertheless, these paradigms could not account for Paul’s innovations. No matter how far he conformed to the expectations and conventions of Graeco-Roman life and thought—and he did—his innovations set him on the course of a deep confrontation with that world.

This juxtaposition of the images of Paul and his world suggested that something new was taking shape in Paul regarding the meaning and shape of relationships and personal experience. I pursued this in chapter four in terms of Paul’s identification with the dying and rising of Jesus and the ways this coloured his engagements with the world, the *ekklesia*, and God. These engagements filled out the picture of Paul’s own experience of desire and freedom as the outworking of his sense of new identity and purpose because of Christ. He had deliberately stepped down in the world, and consequently in the esteem of some in his own *ekklesia*, in order know Christ and to make him known. Paul had left himself no place for boasting.

Chapter five gave texture to the emerging sense of what Paul was doing in his *ekklesia*. The images to this point suggested that Paul’s personal candour and engagement with others had left no room for any detached, abstracted, static, or idealised ways of seeing and living out relationships with Christ and within the *ekklesia*. Rather, Paul’s conversations moved creatively between the coherence he found in Christ and the challenges he saw in each new contingency. In a sense, Paul was improvising more than playing a set piece. He neither offered nor modelled a pro forma for how he or his *ekklesia* could read Scripture, or unpack the meaning of the dying and rising of Christ, or express their new identities and relationships. Thus he portrayed identification with Christ as an open-ended imitation, not a slavish conformity. This was no licence for self-interest or individualism. Rather, Paul simply affirmed the inability of law or moral codes to convey the life now lived by the Spirit.

At the outset I flagged my intention to bring these ancient scenes into dialogue with those of modern evangelicalism. Until this point, however, I had not done so. Nevertheless, those with any awareness of evangelical life and thought may have already begun to see analogies. This sense of analogy may have grown throughout chapter six even though I concentrated there on portraying evangelical life without reference to Paul or his world. My focus was the sermon and, to a lesser degree, the service as bridges between the worlds of the academy, the pulpit, and the congregation. A clear impression emerged of a pervasive dissonance between the ideals which outline what truth and life should be, and the actual personal and social experience of evangelicals as they try to live out these ideals. I cited poignant images of the breakdown of these ideals. Moreover, these breakdowns appeared on each side of the pulpit. The abstractions and ideals of the
academy and the pulpit seem ineluctably to foster the very elitism, clericalism, and perfectionism which evangelical scholars and preachers eschew. At the same time, some among the congregations struggle with disaffection and loss of meaning even as they try to hang on to evangelical paradigms and conventions. For others, the dissonance is too deep for them to remain within the culture. All of this filled out the impression of evangelicalism as a human system and a culture rather than as a purely theological or ideological phenomenon.

In chapter seven, I returned to Paul and his world. Or, perhaps more accurately, I viewed evangelicalism in terms of two dialogues and debates—over lay presidency at the Lord’s supper, and the ordination and teaching of women—which I held to be representative of how evangelicals seek to establish and enforce conformity to Paul and to the rest of the Scriptures. I focused on the dispositions and processes which attach the epithets ‘biblical’ and ‘unbiblical’ to evangelical people, positions, and behaviours. The impressions gained in the previous chapter pushed me to consider the cultural and systemic roles of this quest for an unsullied evangelical faith and life. I concluded that evangelicals do not use these epithets simply to mark out relative proximities to the meaning of the biblical texts. Rather, the epithets demarcate those who are acceptable within evangelical systems and culture from those who are not. Moreover, these dispositional and cultural factors could not fail to colour the ways evangelicals read Paul. This was our cue to suggest analogies with the abstractionism, idealism, and elitism of the Graeco-Roman world and with Paul’s struggles to discredit the marks of rank and status within his ekklēsiai. In this way, evangelicals emerged as the inheritors of both worlds. Finally, I suggested that conversations with Paul—and with Christ and the ekklēsia—atrophy and mutate to the degree that evangelicals maintain the myth of objectivity and refuse to face candidly the powerful influence of their own agendas to find within evangelicalism reasons for their own personal and cultural pride, and the illusions of rectitude with which they may wall themselves from facing their own insecurities and fears.

This study has been both a conversation with Paul, and a conversation about conversing with Paul. It drew together content and process. Moreover, there are yet further hermeneutical dimensions to what I have tried to do. However, ‘meta-talk’ easily takes on the character and interest(!) of throat-clearing before a speech. No matter how clever, and avant-garde, it is to propose yet another backward step towards an infinite regress of hermeneutical subtlety, and thus all too easily becomes tedious, boring, and exceedingly abstract and unhelpful. The footnotes show that I have profited from various hermeneutical theorists, and from those evangelicals who have interacted with them. Yet I
follow Foythress when he senses that hermeneutical self-consciousness becomes yet another mythology and ideal as liable to implode on its own autonomy and pride as have the rationalist, empiricist, and existentialist agendas of the Enlightenment and its children (1992, 37-38). Recursive levels of hermeneutical introspection may only create paranoia, inertia, and the death of the text in the reading community. For these reasons and more I pursued the primary sources in the conviction that evangelical communities can see new things, even those which may challenge their own paradigms and conventions.

Although much of what I have argued connects to the work of others, nevertheless the conversation may have opened up new perspectives on Paul and evangelicalism. At times my readings may constitute a ‘new’ exegesis of the texts. Most importantly, I aimed to portray Paul more as a flesh-and-blood figure of a distinct social and cultural milieu than as the father of biblical and systematic theology. Some evangelicals have warned me that this kind of social-historical approach stands at the top of a slippery slide into relativism. I could counter that objectivist and absolutist paradigms and hermeneutics have played into the hands of scholastic and Enlightenment agendas. Moreover, there are deep affinities between evangelical notions of absolute and singular truth and the abstractions of Plato and his philosophical heirs. Likewise, evangelicals who insist on the primacy of preaching rarely acknowledge that the biblical texts do not give any warrant for preaching as they know it—the historical antecedents of the sermon lie with the rhetors Paul debunked, not with Paul himself. But such slanging matches have little profit. My portraits must stand on their intent and merits.

I worked from five convictions about reading Paul and the other ancient sources. First, traditional theological analyses leave congregations with the task of distilling directions for life from abstractions and ideals. Second, the congregation thus faces not only an historical gap, but a modern counterpart to the distance between primary reality and the everyday life of faith. Third, the more evangelicals can see Paul as ‘like them’, the more they may sense analogies which provoke, instruct, and encourage them to imitate him as he imitated Christ. Fourth, the texts (both Paul’s and his contemporaries) can engage a reader powerfully and provocatively so that it is palpably false to decide in advance that the reader will only see the texts as he wants to see them. Finally, this does not constitute a simplistic call to ‘get back to Paul’. Again, the proof of this assertion does not lie in hermeneutical debate abstracted from the reading communities. It lies in the ability of real communities to actually challenge one another over the integrity of their readings and to actually shift their understandings and patterns of relationship. Moreover, I suggest that the way in which I conducted the ancient leg of the conversation validates my concern both to read a wide selection of relevant sources, and to read them with
integrity. I would like to think that my work opens up conversations about each of the above convictions. At the same time, I would hope those conversations stay grounded in the texts and in the actual conversations of evangelical communities.

At the modern end, my primary conviction, at least in relation to the sources and communities covered above, was that evangelical paradigms, conventions, systems, and culture keep getting in the way of reading Paul. Once again, however, I grant that it is naive to assume that we can simply take an exegetical, theological, or hermeneutical broom to our biases and backgrounds. They have deep roots. Yet these roots are not some metaphysically ultimate reality. They are social constructs and matters of the will. The circularity of exegesis within the system partly derives from a deep unwillingness to ask hard questions about that system, or to allow such questions to be asked. Moreover, many who ache to ask the questions struggle to find a way how. They wrestle to find ways to question evangelical systems while remaining within the culture. They also search for ways to articulate their intuitive readings of Paul which suggest that he would allow the questions to be asked. Indeed, those who wrestle with all this may sense that Paul himself would have and did ask those very same questions.

My images of Paul aimed to open up these questions and the conversations they contain. In this sense, I hope to have disclosed both a genuine conversation with Paul, and a model of such a conversation. I have tried to imitate the spirit of Paul by not preempting the questions and conversations of others, nor their answers and directions. Those who seek to converse genuinely with Paul must engage afresh with him over their own tensions of conformity and innovation. They will not stay transfixed with the issues he faced. Nor will they ape his answers. Nor will they ignore them. They will sense the rich analogies between what he faced and what they face. They will face where the spirit of evangelicalism may blind them to the spirit of Paul. They will ache that the sermon and the service, and the quest to delineate the biblical from the unbiblical, have hijacked their conversation with and about Christ and each other. Moreover, they will refuse to wall themselves in pride, insecurity, and fear from the One who bids them to die and rise with him in the conversation. Such is the spirit of conversing across the ages.
PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning the following pages. The best possible results have been obtained.
# Bibliography

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